



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

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 from cohesion policy.

The European Commission prepares its legislative framework for 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 Helsinki-Uusimaa region offers the following recommendations to maximise Cohesion policy's success and impact:

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

3. We call for stronger support from the EU for more developed regions. While cohesion policy needs to be a policy for all EU regions, more targeted and adaptable support should be ensured for specific needs of the different territories. Cohesion policy should remain a policy for all EU regions. The strongest, most innovative regions create mostly the growth that the EU needs to deliver better. We agree with the Political Guidelines by the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen, that strengthened Cohesion and growth policy needs to be designed, combining the two. The regions who create the growth deliver cohesion for the citizens by so doing. Therefore, we call for a cohesion policy, which is flexible enough, to target the specific issues of these regions too.
4. Cities should have 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. Helsinki-Uusimaa Region encourages efforts to further simplify the management of cohesion policy, while guaranteeing high standards and 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 respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Necessary flexibility should be designed in the programme, and too rigid a programme format should not hinder the successful completion of projects if they need to make reasonable adjustments due to unforeseen circumstances.
6. Helsinki-Uusimaa region calls for the importance of multilevel-governance for 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 the region, as all regions have unique development needs, which need to meet better than before. More flexibility is needed in terms of 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 the regions adds significant value to cohesion policy. We therefore stress that INTERREG is a flagship of 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 existing areas and experience.

8. Cohesion policy funds should not be viewed as reserves for crises. However, if such a crisis instrument should be considered, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region calls 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's cohesion policy should continue to support regions in becoming more innovative, climate-neutral, and socially inclusive. 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. Cohesion policy can greatly boost the competitiveness and growth of Europe to innovate, uptake new technologies, upgrade the skills of the local workforce based on regional needs.