



EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

Consultation

Your Voice on Europe 2020

Key Findings, Assessment and Policy Implications

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The EU's Assembly of Regional and Local Representatives

KEY FINDINGS, ASSESSMENT AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

CoR Survey “Your Voice on Europe 2020”

EU CITIES AND REGIONS: EUROPE 2020 MATTERS

90 European regions and cities, from 21 EU Member States participated in the Committee of the Regions' survey.

They submitted high-quality documents which illustrate their *commitment to the new Europe 2020 strategy* for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. They provided a wealth of comments and suggestions, as well as concrete examples of how they could contribute to the strategy's implementation.

The respondents appreciated the draft Europe 2020 strategy's *rebalanced approach* as reflected in its priorities and its *ambitious commitment* to EU-wide targets. They also considered the *flagship initiatives* to be concrete instruments that would bring Europe 2020 closer to EU citizens.

However, they questioned several key aspects of the draft strategy's content, pointing out that *it fails to fairly acknowledge* and tackle territorial diversities and disparities, to complement GDP with new indicators that would serve as tools for shaping policy actions, *to overcome* the present fragmentation of policy programmes and related funding channels, *to make* administrative simplification a priority, *to push* for the implementation of the partnership principle between national, regional and local authorities, *to face up to* the communication challenge of bringing the new strategy closer to the lives of ordinary citizens.

For these reasons, the *very tight roadmap for the adoption of* the new strategy leaves *most respondents worried* that some of the crucial mistakes and *shortcomings of the Lisbon Strategy* might be repeated.

They therefore provided a wide range of *concrete suggestions* on how to improve the present Europe 2020 blueprint and to ensure it is successfully implemented.

DESIGNING & IMPLEMENTING THE NEW STRATEGY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 1) Europe 2020 **does not take into account existing socio-economic disparities and the uneven distribution of opportunities between and within regions and cities.** These differences, which have increased in the past decade, not only reflect the “traditional” gap between developed regions and those lagging behind. They are also noticeable within some of the most developed areas, for example in the deprived neighbourhoods of several EU cities. By setting only EU and national targets, through a top-down procedure, Europe 2020 does not make it possible to tailor objectives, indicators and targets in order to take these local and regional differences into account.

- *By adapting its objectives, indicators and targets to different local and regional conditions, the new strategy would become more realistic and thereby relevant to the lives of ordinary citizens across the EU.*
- 2) Europe 2020 **does not promote the diffusion of indicators of sustainable development to complement GDP.**
- *Adoption of such indicators, in the context of a flexible implementation of the new strategy shared among the relevant government levels and other stakeholders, is a necessary aspect of local and regional target setting and helps shape the most suitable ways to implement the strategy at local level. Several examples of possible indicators were provided.*
- 3) Europe 2020 **policy instruments and related funding channels remain highly fragmented**, as was the case under the Lisbon Strategy, which might render them ineffective. Moreover, Europe 2020 **has not made administrative simplification a priority.**
- *Policy instruments should be coordinated and their use simplified, so as to focus on a limited number of objectives in a coherent and effective way. This would also ensure the necessary integration between different EU policies, including cohesion policy and other relevant sectoral policies.*
- 4) Ultimately, effective delivery of the Europe 2020 objectives will depend not only on what all relevant governments will do, but, crucially, on whether they will act in a coordinated and synchronised manner. When it comes to the implementation of several aspects of the seven planned flagship initiatives, local and regional authorities will be in the front line. However, in spite of a declaration of goodwill, **nothing is being done in practical terms to promote partnership between all relevant government levels in implementing the new strategy.** On the contrary, **some key decisions (target setting at EU and country levels) have been made so far in a hasty, top-down manner.**
- *If the strategy is to keep its promises, permanent coordination between all relevant government levels should be undertaken from the beginning.*
 - *In particular, in 2010, local and regional authorities, national governments and the EU level should work in partnership, first to set targets, including at regional level, and second to design and kick off the flagship initiatives and National Reform Programmes.*
 - *The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality should be carefully taken into account in this process.*
- 5) While rightly stating that cohesion policy instruments contribute to Europe 2020 objectives, the blueprint seems to **understate the extent of regional and territorial disparities in the EU and does not make clear the potential contribution of Europe 2020 to strengthening cohesion throughout the EU.** In fact, as a consequence of its lack of flexibility and top-down approach, the strategy may miss an opportunity to build on local human resources and other assets to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Therefore, like the Lisbon Strategy, it risks being perceived as irrelevant to the lives of many EU citizens.
- *Contributors unanimously stress that Europe 2020 and cohesion policy have to be seen as mutually reinforcing policy tools to stimulate sustainable growth while increasing social, economic and territorial cohesion. Due to rising concerns for territorial cohesion, even in the EU's richer regions,*

cohesion policy should keep covering all regions while fulfilling its redistributive goals.

- *Funding for the Europe 2020 strategy and cohesion policy should not be decreased, and if possible it should be increased. But even more important is that expenditure is rationalised, simplified and made more effective through improved monitoring and evaluation procedures. It would also be worth examining possible options for rewarding regions and cities that are able to spend in an effective manner, supporting those willing to improve and sanctioning those that underperform .*
- *Urban governments should be crucial players in the success of Europe 2020, because they can be engines for growth but are affected by major cohesion problems in economic and social terms. Rural areas should be supported in their effort to boost growth on a new and robust basis.*
- *More efforts to improve basic infrastructure when needed, to be envisaged in Europe 2020, would boost growth in the EU and ensure cohesion.*
- *Many contributors also stressed that coalitions of regions with policymaking responsibilities, including cross-border coalitions (such as EGTCs and macro-regions) should also be seen as partners.*

6) Communicating the European Union to citizens has always been a daunting task – **presenting Europe 2020 as it is will not be any easier.**

- *For Europe 2020 communication efforts to be successful, a message should focus on the Strategy's genuine contribution to the local/regional context for the whole population and sectoral groups, sent via modern tools and with the active involvement of local and regional authorities.*

ASSESSMENT AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The level of interest in Europe 2020 shown by the respondents is not surprising considering that:

- the new strategy is being introduced at the same time as the worst recession in decades hits Member States and their regions and cities - in an uneven manner - widening existing socio-economic differences and adversely affecting growth prospects for the EU as a whole;
- current concerns for monetary stability in the Euro area only add to the need to couple stricter fiscal discipline with improved long-term growth prospects for the EU, the aim being to render Member States' budgetary policy sustainable while avoiding a protracted recession.

This worrying economic outlook makes it all the more important to replace the Lisbon Strategy with a new, more effective strategy to increase European competitiveness and thus create room for growth.

The contributions received show that EU local and regional authorities are aware of what is at stake. They have committed themselves to relevant targets and are ready to fulfil their responsibilities in order to guarantee they are implemented successfully (see for instance the Covenant of Mayors initiative).

However, the authorities that responded to the survey doubt that the new Europe 2020 strategy, as currently outlined, will deliver on its promises.

In order to make the most of this much needed opportunity to overcome the economic crisis and to boost long-term sustainable development whilst at the same time reducing disparities and improving the quality of

EU citizens' life, the Europe 2020 Strategy should give all government levels, including local and regional authorities, the opportunity to contribute to its design and implementation as permanent partners.

In 2010, this should apply to the setting of targets as well as the drafting of flagship initiatives and National Reform Programmes.

It would therefore seem advisable for the European Commission and the European Council to reschedule the Europe 2020 roadmap for the ongoing year, in order to allow enough time for upcoming decisions to be discussed with all relevant partners.

In the meantime, **Member States** should work collectively with regions and cities making active use of existing institutional tools.

The **Committee of the Regions**, through its Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform, will continue to monitor the new EU 2020 strategy's progress on the ground and will report regularly to the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament.