

Empower EU regions and cities to protect employment and social rights



Commissioner Schmit and CoR team up to support skills development and jobs at local level

The EU and its Member States must empower their cities and regions to protect employment and social rights: this is the call of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to counter the devastating social effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The assembly of EU's local and regional representatives also asks to strengthen the skills base for recovery and to support regional and local authorities in managing the green and digital transitions.

The CoR's [Regional and Local Barometer 2020](#) highlights that the Covid-19 crisis particularly affects the income of self-employed, persons hired on fixed-term contracts and part-time workers, among them many young people, migrants and other vulnerable groups. The impact on employment risks being especially negative in regions that rely heavily on tourism, where up to 40% of jobs could be at risk. The Barometer also shows that 43% of Europeans would like local and regional authorities to have more influence on the employment and social policies.

President of the European Committee of the Regions **Apostolos Tzitzikostas** said: "During the Covid-19 pandemic regions and cities across Europe have acted swiftly and decisively to help those in need. Now Europe must place the fight against poverty and unemployment, and in particular against rising youth unemployment, at the heart of its efforts. This is essential for a strong Social Europe that leaves no people and no places behind."

To support skills and jobs matching and the local economies with concrete actions, President Tzitzikostas announced that the Committee would work together with European Commission's DG Employment to launch online "Local Jobs" fairs with regions and cities.

Speaking at the CoR plenary session on 14 October, Commissioner for Social Rights and Jobs **Nicolas Schmit** said: "We need to recover from an unprecedented crisis, and for that we need the regions. Our measures for the youth and for skills development must bear fruit on the ground. The European Pillar of Social Rights has been and will be our guiding line to ensure a better future for our citizens. This is why I have announced with the CoR President that we will reinforce the cooperation between my services and the European Committee of the Regions. This cooperation provides an opportunity to show citizens that we are fully mobilised and listening to them."

This week's plenary session also saw the adoption of an opinion on [A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions](#), paving the way for an Action Plan to implement the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). Rapporteur and SEDEC Commission chair **Anne Karjalainen** (FI/PES), Member of Kerava City Council,

said: “The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need to eradicate the existing digital divide and to address its substantial impact upon social rights, since lack of access to new technologies and the information society creates new forms of social exclusion. Digital cohesion is part and parcel of just transitions and a cornerstone of territorial and social cohesion. At the same time, recovery measures must address the social dimension of the ecological and digital transitions. We need a fair labour market in the carbon-neutral economy of the future, based on decent jobs, strong social protection, and job opportunities where people live”.

Referring to the European Commission’s [communication](#) published in January, the CoR opinion points out that the [Just Transition Fund](#) – EU’s fund to support green transition in most vulnerable regions – should be in line with the EU’s social pillar. At the same time, it reiterates its call for better coordination of economic and social policies between European and national government levels in the context of the European semester, and calls to guarantee local and regional authority involvement in this coordination through shared management based on the subsidiarity principle.

The CoR also underlines the key role of social partners in the current context of ever-growing digitalisation of work patterns. To this effect it calls for an update of European rules governing working conditions and working time, including provisions to establish the right to disconnect.

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