

Metropolitan Regions: centres for countries' economic growth which contribute to the objectives of cohesion policy but face key challenges



Metropolitan regions are seen as the engines of the Member States' economies and centres of economic growth, however they are also a hub of research, innovation and creative potential. According to Eurostat, MRs are defined as NUTS3 regions or combinations of NUTS3 regions where at least half of the population lives in a functional urban area that has no fewer than 250 000 inhabitants. NUTS, Nomenclature of territorial units for statistic, is a hierarchical system of division of territory into regions. The OECD defines MRs in terms of function, whereby an urban centre with high population density and job opportunities is connected to the rest of the area by heavy daily commuting into it.

This opinion drafted by the Rapporteur Juraj Droba (SK/ECR), points out that although metropolitan regions (MRs) are seen as engines of Member States' economies as well as hubs of research and innovation, MRs have to face great and diverse challenges such as the protection of the environment and adaptation to climate change, urban poverty, social inclusion, integration of migrants, youth unemployment, criminality or economic transition. MRs play a central role in adapting to the consequences of climate change.

At the same time, MRs have to grapple with an expanding demand for quality public services, putting a huge pressure on MR budgets. This has a marked effect on the population's overall quality of life. Budget revenues in some MRs bear only the slightest relation to their economic success and high GDP, therefore the CoR recommends to go beyond the mere GDP per capita indicator and take account of social, demographic and environmental aspects.

"The aim of the opinion is to draw the EU's attention to the issue of metropolitan regions. These are regions which, in several cases, are statistically the most common; but the reality in their territory is often different. Because of increasing urbanisation, they have to face challenges such as increasing demand for quality public services and infrastructure, problems associated with housing and the environment, and social exclusion, while lacking adequate resources from their own budgets. Still, these are regions with great potential, where suitably set support could lead to the development not just of metropolitan areas, but could also contribute to a fair distribution of benefits to outlying regions and to stronger rural-urban linkages, and thereby significantly help to overcome regional disparities. This is a crucial period for preparatory work on the new cohesion policy and for deciding on the size of EU funds after 2020, and I think that this was

the right time to initiate this opinion. I am happy to have received the support of the members of the Committee and I believe this is a step in the right direction”, said Mr. Juraj Droba.

The Rapporteur points out that the ongoing process of drawing up cohesion policy post 2020 is an opportunity to take on board the need for a specific approach to MRs in the framing of future partnership agreements and the operational programmes for cohesion policy funds. The European Committee of the Regions calls for:

- The direct involvement of MRs in the framing of cohesion policy and the implementation and evaluation of operational programmes and EU projects;
- The attention of the EC to start looking into the potential added value of support to MRs as a way of reducing regional disparities;
- The establishment of conditions and support mechanisms, by the EC, for knowledge transfer, exchange of experience and best practice in the area of metropolitan governance between MRs;
- All partnerships in the new EU Urban Agenda to address the ongoing metropolitanisation of areas or for a new partnership for the metropolitan dimension of the Urban Agenda.

The increasing [urbanization](#) as a global trend creates lots of opportunities but also forces us to address new challenges, requiring the collaboration between institutions and players in the MRs. These proposals aim to guarantee a better performance of MRs and intend to meet the cohesion objectives.

Background:

Metropolitan regions currently include three fifths of the EU population – a proportion that is expected to increase in the future. These regions constitute important poles of innovation, research and economic growth, while also offering a wide variety of educational, cultural and professional opportunities to their inhabitants. For an overview of Metropolitan regions in EU cohesion policy, please read this [briefing](#) .

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