

AER Experience

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How regions can use networks such as the Assembly of European Regions

- The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is the largest independent network of regions in Wider Europe, consisting of 150 regions in 30 countries
- We are a platform of best practices, advocacy/institutional relations and interregional EU projects
- One of the main goals of our organization and an integral part since its formation in 1985 is to bring the regions to the policy makers, and to ensure that the voices of our citizens are heard
- Regions and local authorities are the ones who can pass along the most benefit to its citizens
- We have seen that citizens are not always aware that the EU has co-financed projects in their local areas
- The study done was from the EU-28 now 27 and indicated that awareness of EU co-financed projects was about 40%



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How regions can use networks such as the Assembly of European Regions

- One of the general objective is to raise awareness of cohesion policy
- Citizen awareness of the use of cohesion policy funds to improve the local area varied from 37% in Spain to 68% in Croatia
- There was a 5% increase in citizens awareness between 2017 and 2019.
- How do we ensure that we are the voice of the regions and influence policy and the programming period



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Institutional Relations

- Two of core objectives include promoting regional interests in Europe and beyond as well as fostering interregional cooperation to promote the exchange of experience and development of regional policy
- We maintain regular dialogue and working relations with a number of global and regional institutions.
- AER is most closely engaged in dialogue as well as cooperation with the European Union institutions – CoR, the Council of Europe and most notably the Congress of Local & Regional Authorities, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UN
- In conducting these relations, AER intends to contribute to effective policy and programme developments that secure a positive impact in regions and their citizens, while promoting the participation of regional authorities in these policy-making and implementation processes



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Institutional Relations

- For AER, institutional relations is meant to:
 - Represent and advocate for the regional interests;
 - Enhance the recognition of regional authorities as key drivers of sustainable and inclusive growth;
 - Promote the representation and involvement of regional authorities in the Institutions' work in all areas with an impact on regions at global, regional, national and sub-national levels and at design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages;
 - Increase the opportunities for policy dialogue, capacity building, networking and knowledge and information sharing among regions and between these and institutional stakeholders
- We can really formulate this through our task forces
 - The goal of the task force is to produce a position paper that can later be used to as a discussing point with Commissioners, MEPs, the Council, etc

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Cohesion policy

- The goal of cohesion policy is to reduce regional disparities in terms of income, wealth and opportunities
- It is key EU investment policy for social, economic and territorial development in EU regions
- The contributions include but are not limited to sustainable growth, job creation, infrastructure modernisation, human capital increase and the improvement of the quality of life
- Thus reform of the EU cohesion policy can have quite far-reaching implications for EU regions and their development.

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Cohesion policy

- The recent debates, talks, and negotiations on the next programming period (2021-2027) is therefore central to regional authorities and a major opportunity for them to share their needs and enhance their role in the design and implementation of a future cohesion policy that is able to deliver on a sustainable and inclusive development for all
- Regional authorities must engage in the future cohesion policy negotiations and advocate at national and European level for a post-2020 policy and funding that responds to their interests and needs
- As part of this work, in November 2016, AER members set up a task force on Cohesion Policy post-2020 led by Mr Michiel Rijsberman, Regional Minister of Flevoland-NL. With Flevoland chairing the task force, a position paper was put forth and adopted in 2017.
- In October 2017, in the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities, the Committee of Regions and European Associations of Regions and Cities, including AER, launched the "Cohesion Alliance"
- A coalition of stakeholders for a strong and efficient cohesion policy in the future

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Task force on Cohesion Policy

- The objectives of the task force on cohesion policy are as follows:
 - Monitor key policy developments
 - Keep members informed and share intel about latest policy developments on cohesion policy and ways to get involved
 - Active participation and support of member regions for concerted and collaborative advocacy actions towards EU Institutions on the cohesion policy beyond 2020

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Task force on Cohesion Policy

- Added value:
 - Increase the effectiveness of individual member regions influencing work, by participating in AER collective advocacy
 - Platform to plan and coordinate advocacy activities, facilitating access to intel, unified advocacy voices and collective action for common objectives
 - Opportunities to connect with other European networks and stakeholders to generate even broader support for AER regions interests and proposals
 - Opportunity to directly engage with EU officials and policy-makers.

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Task force on Cohesion Policy – how do we work?

- Public debates on future cohesion policy to gather AER members views on future cohesion policy
- Support members to push for a strong cohesion policy, including sharing knowledge and information on the progress of the discussions (email updates, articles in website, using social media)
- Convene their joint influencing work at regional, national and European level by:
 - promoting the debate among AER members and relevant stakeholders. An example is the debate on REGIONerating Europe during the EWRC;
 - AER also offered a series of weekly tips to members on how to approach and create a dialogue with regional, national and European policy-makers (work together with other regions at national level and reach out to Government and Permanent Representations to the EU and their respective representatives responsible MFF and Cohesion Policy; Contact Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to influence EP positions;
 - Mobilise regional EU Offices to influence at EU level;
 - Join the #CohesionAlliance

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Task force on Cohesion Policy – how do we work?

- Build up contacts with policy-makers within EU institutions, especially the European Commission, the European Parliament and Council of the EU, where we disseminated the AER position. Examples of this in practice:
 - a series of meetings with EU Commissioners Corina Crețu and Günther Oettinger
 - Participation in Structured Dialogue meetings between EC Commissioners and European associations of cities and regions
 - Meetings with the European Parliament Committee on Regional Development and its chairs
 - Meetings with the Presidencies of the Council of the EU (perm rep in Brussels). For example the AER President & Secretary General is having a meeting with Irena Andriasy, Perm Rep of Croatia to the EU. We are very pleased that one of the priorities of the Croatian presidency is that of an ambitious, balanced and sustainable EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027.

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Task force on Cohesion Policy – how do we work?

- Provide joint submissions to the European Commission public consultations on EU funds in the area of cohesion
- Develop common positions with AER members policy propositions that we use to influence policymakers
- Work in coalition with the European Committee of the Regions and European associations of regions and cities under the #CohesionAlliance
- Recently, AER advocacy towards the Members of the European Parliament during the Plenary Session in Strasbourg on 22-24 October to build support for the AER positions in the context of the interinstitutional negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework and the cohesion policy legislative package 2021-2027.

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Cohesion Alliance

- The Cohesion Alliance was created through cooperation of the leading European Association of Cities & Regions as well as the Committee of the Regions (CoR)
- Objectives:
 - Convene all those actors who believe in cohesion policy and build their influencing role with the EU decision-makers for a stronger, more effective, visible and available cohesion policy for every region in the European Union
- Added value:
 - Maximising influence
 - Amplify the advocacy reach and impact of our advocacy work. Able to get our voice across decision-makers
 - Through associations mobilise a wide number and range of local and regional authorities. Able to more effectively address the European institutions and influence its decision-making by demonstrating a wide base of support for our positions
 - Knowledge and expertise the alliance is able to aggregate, enabling to deliver better policy proposals. It involved other organisations from other sectors: civil society, academia

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Cohesion Alliance

- How it is working:
 - Alliance is led by the CoR.
 - We worked on an advocacy plan for cohesion policy reform and identified together: situation analysis; goals; actors (supporters and opponents to our positions); targets; decision making process for entry point opportunities in Commission, Council (in particular the Presidency of the EU, EP, CoR, Cities and Regions Networks; and key joint messages
 - Developed a Joint Declaration
 - Use social media
 - Members combine advocacy in Brussels (EC, Presidency, EP) with Advocacy in-country through their members, including cities, municipalities and regions and their national associations
 - Presidents of the Associations met Elisa Ferreira in January

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Cohesion Alliance

- Achievements:
 - Reached over 10.000 signatories
 - Supported by Commissioner, MEPs.
 - Mobilisation of partners
 - Social media
 - MEPs backed up key requests by the Alliance in their Report on Common provisions governing 2021-2027 European funds for regional development and cohesion and Report on future European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Funds 2021-2027

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How can regions be engaged?

- Influencing work in-country and in Brussels by:
 - Reaching out to national policy-makers, including Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy to influence the discussions and conclusions adopted by the Council (conclusions on Cohesion Policy and as well as on the next Multiannual Financial Framework)
 - Contacting Members of the European Parliament
 - Mobilising regional EU Offices to influence at EU level, notably by reaching out to Permanent Representations and their representatives following the EU budget and Cohesion Policy negotiations
 - Contributing to the Committee of the Regions actions (for those regions represented in the CoR)
 - Supporting the Alliance for a Strong and Effective EU Cohesion Policy Beyond 2020

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Thank you

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