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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

On: 28 November 2024

To: Delegations

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Subject: The role of cohesion policy in addressing demographic challenges in the EU
- Council conclusions (28 November 2024)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on the role of cohesion policy in addressing demographic challenges in the EU, as approved by the Council (General Affairs/Cohesion) at its 4062nd meeting held on 28 November 2024.

Council Conclusions on the role of cohesion policy in addressing demographic challenges in the EU

CONSIDERING THAT:

- (1) The Granada Declaration of 6 October 2023 emphasised the need to address demographic challenges, as part of the efforts to build a stronger, more dynamic, competitive and cohesive Europe in a changing world, all while guided by the European values and principles, fundamental rights, democracy, and the rule of law;
- (2) The Communication of the European Commission on “Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action” emphasised the importance for Member States to mainstream demographic concerns in relevant policy proposals and their accompanying impact assessments, and for the Commission to do so at EU level, where appropriate;
- (3) The Communication of the European Commission on “Harnessing talent in Europe’s Regions” highlights the set of challenges faced by regions most affected by the ongoing demographic transition, particularly regions that are in a talent development trap, most of which are less developed regions, and regions at risk of falling into such a trap, as well as the related risks on the emergence of new and increased territorial disparities in the EU;
- (4) The Council Conclusions on “Managing demographic change in Europe” underlined the need for further action to manage demographic change by undertaking continuous efforts to reflect demographic change and its impact on competitiveness, human capital and equality, in view of further discussions on a topic of such strategic importance for the Union;

- (5) The Council Conclusions on cohesion policy, the Council Conclusions on the future of cohesion policy and the Council Conclusions on the Communication on the 9th Cohesion Report emphasised the digital, green and demographic transitions the Union is facing, as well as the current and emerging challenges listed therein;

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- (6) ACKNOWLEDGES that demographic challenges play a crucial role in shaping the future of all EU regions and citizens and may significantly affect economic, social and territorial cohesion, and the resilience and competitiveness of the EU as a whole, potentially widening disparities between and within regions;
- (7) RECOGNISES that cohesion policy has been one of the most important EU instruments contributing to tackling demographic challenges by supporting both mitigation and adaptation measures, especially through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) by investing in people, human capital, social inclusion and social innovation, and through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) by investing in fair economic transformation and revitalisation, innovation, digitalisation, as well as in sustainable infrastructure and accessible services in the regions;
- (8) UNDERLINES that policy responses to demographic challenges should be in line with the strategic priorities of the European Union, while also based on local and regional realities, and designed and implemented with the active involvement of national, regional and local authorities; also considering that demographic challenges do not affect all areas to the same extent, IS OF THE OPINION, therefore, that cohesion policy should continue to play a pivotal role in tackling these challenges also in the future, through integrated place- and people-based strategies, in line with the subsidiarity principle, the partnership principle and multilevel governance, as well as shared management;

- (9) CONSIDERS that effectively addressing demographic challenges requires a holistic approach and a comprehensive set of measures under cohesion policy, especially in less developed regions, to bolster regional competitiveness and resilience, retain talent and reverse brain drain, as well as to prevent skill shortages in a way that ensures long-term sustainable growth and social inclusion across regions of the EU, along with relevant structural reforms aligned with Member States' priorities and support to strengthening administrative capacity;
- (10) UNDERLINES, therefore, the importance for cohesion policy to address the current specific objectives of both the ESF+ and the ERDF; and INVITES the Commission to explore further areas of support for the future that are relevant to addressing demographic change;
- (11) EMPHASISES that, given the lack of an overarching approach, support under cohesion policy to tackle demographic challenges has remained fragmented so far; UNDERLINES that comprehensive territorial development strategies could also address demographic needs and challenges; INVITES the Commission, therefore, to consider enhancing synergies among the cohesion policy funds post-2027, including by reinforcing integrated territorial approaches;
- (12) UNDERLINES that a more integrated approach of cohesion policy in the future would also enhance the EU's efforts in acknowledging and addressing both the impact of demographic change and the effects this challenge can have on the green and digital transitions;
- (13) REMINDS that these conclusions are without prejudice to the negotiations on the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.
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