



**AER**  
Assembly of European Regions

# TRUST IN THE FUTURE THROUGH STRONGER REGIONS

**AER MANIFESTO FOR THE  
EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2024**

**#AER4EUElections**



## **About the AER Manifesto for the European Elections 2024**

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# Trust in the future through stronger regions

**The Assembly of European Regions (AER)** is convinced that regional governments have a key role to play in European crisis management, and in **creating a prosperous, sustainable, inclusive, and politically integrated Europe** – especially in view of the next European legislative period.

The Executive Board and the Bureau of the **largest pan-European network of regions** therefore make the **following recommendations** to the legislative and executive branches of the European Union.

## **Key recommendations**

- Reinvigorated subsidiarity
- A citizen and solidarity-focused recovery
- An innovative approach to sustainability
- A more vital, participatory Europe
- A complete, values-based Europe

# Reinvigorated subsidiarity



## Subsidiarity means decisions closer to citizens

**Regional and local governance** is becoming increasingly **demanding**. Unprecedented efforts are required from regions and cities: **mitigating economic and social hardship**, responding to a multitude of **new needs of citizens and newcomers** – and setting **the right course** to ensure that all changes made under enormous time pressure prove to be future-proof.

These **changes that our communities must face** have one thing in common: **they can only be successful through local and regional participation** – thanks to regionally committed politicians, citizens, businesses, associations, and civil society organisations.

It is worrying to see that in times of crisis, **more decision-making powers are being accumulated at national level across Europe**, when it is often regions and municipalities that are best placed to identify the needs of the people.

**Subsidiarity means decisions being made close to the citizens** – and ultimately, **higher trust in politics**. Therefore, a key message is that **we must respect and strengthen subsidiarity**.

In the next legislative period, the European Parliament must endeavour to ensure that decision-making powers are not further centralised in the capitals or in Brussels, but that regions, cities, and their interest groups can play a greater role in shaping the changes in the way we live and work.

**The participation of regional and local governments must be more firmly anchored in the working methods of the EU institutions**, to commit both the EU and national governments to **greater cooperation and consultation with the regions**. Should European decision-makers agree on changes to the European treaties, the vital role of regions and cities must be considered.

# A citizen, solidarity focused recovery



## Recent crises demand new prospects for prosperity and stability

In the wake of the recent pandemic, economic pressure, the climate crisis, and geopolitical uncertainty, **citizens expect new approaches to their individual and collective development.** This demands a focus on **new prospects for prosperity and stability** along with strategies for sustainable development.

Europe's regions are setting a decisive course – from the **transformation of traditional economic sectors** to the **establishment of innovative companies**, the **provision of educational capacities** and the **further development of citizen services and social benefits.** Strong political and financial **support for regional development** is therefore needed right now.





# A citizen, solidarity focused recovery



## Expertise on EU funding must be developed further

Most regions are familiar with established EU instruments such as Cohesion policy. However, **the use of new funding schemes as part of the 2021-2027 EU budget** and the economic stimulus package to deal with the Covid consequences continues to require more explanation.

It is important to continue to build up expertise and resources in regions and cities to be able **to utilise this potential**.

## Decentralised funding management is essential

Decentralised funding management is essential for the success, as this is the **only way for regions to respond to social, economic, and other territorial differences**.

A core concern is the **further development of the EU's Cohesion policy for the period from 2027**: more flexible, more compatible with other funding programmes, aligned with overall economic trends and the EU's sustainability goals – to make sure all regions can face the challenges.



# An innovative approach to sustainability



## Europe must lead the innovation agenda with regions' contributions

Securing **the future of our planet** cannot simply be regulated by resolutions and ordinances. **It requires an approach based on innovation, incentives for participation, and tangible benefits** for citizens. There is a need for Europe to lead the innovation agenda.

Regions and cities play a central role in both the **economic and social dimensions of the green transition**, which must be more strongly recognised and utilised by national governments and European and international institutions. For example, **companies with regional roots** – including **small and medium-sized enterprises** – are drivers and inventors of environmentally friendly solutions and products.

**Regional and local governments are also indispensable in political coordination** to ensure that EU and global climate targets can be realised locally. They support **sustainable economic activity**, for example through better **digital networking**, **support for start-ups**, and targeted **training programmes**.

At the same time, if they are sufficiently involved in the development of sustainability and climate policy, **they can ensure that citizens feel sufficiently involved**.

With their expertise, regional and local governments can help ensure the green and digital transition is planned and realised in a manner that reflects the **realities of different population groups and their economic and social needs**. Such a **bottom-up approach** ultimately contributes to **identification of citizens with the necessary changes** and our political communities as a whole.



# A more vital, participatory Europe



## Regions and cities can foster active citizenship at community level

As a **peace project** for an entire major region of the world, the EU is based on democratic principles. It can be proud of its legitimacy, its values, and its capacity for balance; its institutions are increasingly open and transparent.

However, due to the complexity of the EU's political model – and the growing challenges in an environment of crises – **political processes must be even more closely linked to the everyday lives of people** and their needs in our regions and cities.

**Local and regional authorities have unique potential to foster active citizenship at community level**, and their efforts must be supported by the EU. They are the ones who can make politics tangible for citizens by supporting their political participation.

**Citizen dialogue must be intensified to prevent, disenchantment with politics and divisions in society.** In a growing number of regions, there are good examples of how citizens' assemblies can lead to greater participation.

These cannot replace parliaments but can act as complementary democratic mechanisms that provide politicians with valuable feedback and impetus.

**Successful models of participatory democracy** ensure that not only vocal representatives of individual or group interests have their say, **but also a diverse cross-section of the population** – based on gender equality, including vulnerable groups in society, minorities, and people who are not already politically organised.



# A more vital, participatory Europe

## Participatory mechanisms must become permanent forms of dialogue

As decisions taken today will have a greater impact on young people and future generations, **participatory mechanisms are needed** to encourage them in being active participants in decision-making processes at all levels of governance.

The experience gained **from the Conference on the Future of Europe must also be used and consolidated as a form of permanent dialogue**. Civic engagement is an important element of Europe's future; on an equal footing with social, economic, environmental, and geopolitical political priorities.



# A complete, values-based Europe

## The Europe of the EU is not yet complete

**The Europe embodied in the EU is not yet complete**, as the European family is bigger than it. All European countries that share the EU's values and fulfil the requirements must be able to become members. This includes the current accession candidates and applicant states in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe.

We believe in the **values of democracy and transparency, fairness and solidarity, openness, and dialogue**. **Local and regional authorities** have a **vital role to play in the enlargement**. As the level of government closest to citizens, they are uniquely well-placed to support this process and translate the EU's support into effective change on the ground; contributing to greater prosperity, stability, and peace.

We call on lawmakers and decision-makers to acknowledge **the role of local and regional authorities in EU enlargement** and to develop and implement policies in full partnership with them.

**A successful EU enlargement requires applying the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and multilevel governance**; to give a stronger focus to regions and cities in the enlargement strategy and in integrating new EU members.

Regional governments in candidate countries deserve more support in building structures and resources for their tasks critical to the **implementation of reforms**, including **decentralisation and subsidiarity, and the EU acquis**.





# A complete, values-based Europe

## EU Enlargement must pay attention to values-based policy and civil society dimension

The Russian war against Ukraine has shown that **enlargement cannot be a solely technical, parameter-oriented process.**

EU institutions **must pay particular attention to values-based policy and the civil society dimension**, as well as enrichment through diversity in Europe – including preserving Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity.

Important elements are **the promotion of human and civil rights, a pan-European sense of citizenship** and more opportunities for exchange between citizens and decision-makers of all European regions **to facilitate mutual learning.**





