

Reaction to the European Commission's proposal for the Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2028-2034

In response to the European Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 – *"An ambitious budget for a stronger Europe"* – the Assembly of European Regions is calling for urgent revisions to ensure the MFF does not weaken territorial cohesion and rural development. Thus, we demand an EU budget that empowers regions in the green, digital and demographic transitions, and delivers on the promise of a more inclusive, resilient Europe.

The AER welcomes flexibility in the next budget; however, flexibility must come along with predictability and a place-based approach. The National and Regional Partnership Plans must be clearly aligned with territorial realities and needs. We advocate for a future EU budget that supports regions to realise their enormous economic opportunities to boost not only regional competitiveness but also the EU's.

To meet the European Union's established objectives, the next MFF must be territory-driven. The AER, as a founding member of the *#CohesionAlliance* calls for a rebalanced financial framework that delivers real impact through simplification, subsidiarity, and cohesion-centred investments without centralisation tendencies.

"An EU Budget that works for all REGIONS"

- R**esilience & Readiness: build flexibility into the EU budget to respond to future crises without undermining long-term investment.
- E**quity through Cohesion: reinforce territorial cohesion as a guiding principle across all EU policies and programmes.
- G**overnance for All: embed multilevel governance and subsidiarity through structured, inclusive partnerships.
- I**ntegration & Simplification: streamline the EU funding system to make it more accessible, efficient, and strategically coherent.
- O**pportunities in Transition: empower regions to lead the green, digital, and industrial transformations with targeted support.
- N**ew Life for Rural Areas: revitalise rural communities through agricultural renewal, infrastructure investment, and youth empowerment.
- S**olidarity in Action: ensure EU funds reflect real needs on the ground and uphold democratic legitimacy through participatory governance.

Resilience & Readiness

Build flexibility into the MFF to prepare for future crises without sacrificing long-term investments. The future European Union's budget must include a robust emergency reserve and flexibility mechanism—but not at the expense of long-term cohesion and rural development priorities.

"Crisis response must complement—not cannibalise—structural investment. Long-term transformation must be protected."

Equity through Cohesion

Reinforce territorial cohesion across all EU policies. Cohesion policy must remain a central pillar of EU investment. As the #CohesionAlliance has been advocating for the establishment of a legally binding Do No Harm to Cohesion; principle that is essential to ensure all EU policies support balanced development.

"Without stronger cohesion support, many regions risk falling further behind in the green and digital transitions."

Governance for All

Embed multilevel governance and subsidiarity via a binding Partnership Pact. The partnership principle must be fully applied across all EU funding. We call for the proposed National and Regional Partnership Pacts to formalise coordination between EU institutions, national governments and regional authorities with clear place-based objectives.

"Only a true multilevel governance system will deliver investments aligned with local realities and restore trust in EU policymaking."

Opportunities in Transition

Support regional leadership in the green, digital, and industrial transformations. Regions undergoing industrial transition are ready to lead the EU's shift toward climate neutrality. To do so, they need significantly increased and flexible funding, targeted support for regional innovation clusters, and investment in critical infrastructure and workforce development.

"Regions are not just implementers—they're innovation hubs."

New Life for Rural Areas

Invest in agriculture, services, and infrastructure to revitalise rural communities.

We urge for greater investment in rural development. Rural, agricultural, and cohesion policies each serve distinct but complementary purposes. To ensure balanced territorial development across the EU, these funding instruments must be coordinated, not placed in competition. A well-aligned approach will strengthen resilience, inclusion, and sustainability in all regions.

"A thriving rural economy is essential for EU resilience, food security, and territorial cohesion."

Solidarity in Action

Ensure EU funds reflect real needs on the ground and uphold democratic legitimacy. This means aligning EU investment with local realities, supporting inclusive policymaking, and reinforcing trust through participatory governance and transparent funding decisions.

"Real solidarity is shown not just in words, but in how and where EU money is spent."

Brussels, 17 July 2025