

EU Regional Policy - key for achieving Union's 2020 sustainable growth goals

The Commission today launches a call to action to those in Member States managing Cohesion funds, urging wider use of the money to finance sustainable growth projects, and offering advice on how to improve the quality of investments. These messages, designed to promote implementation of the Resource Efficiency flagship initiative of the Europe 2020 strategy, adopted yesterday, underline the key role that regional policy can have in ensuring EU targets in this area are met. Priorities for investment fall in three areas: energy efficiency, renewables and decarbonising transport; protection of the natural environment (ecosystem services), biodiversity, adaptation to climate change including screening for climate resilience, and natural disaster prevention; eco-innovation through deployment of Information and Communication Technologies and "green clusters". Proposals to help improve the quality of investment include applying principles such as energy efficiency throughout the project cycle, and greater use of green public procurement.

The call to action is the fruit of co operation between the Commissioners for Regional Policy, Environment, Energy and Climate Change. Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy said: "*Regional policy is a key instrument in implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy because success in achieving Europe 2020 goals will in large part depend on decisions taken at local and regional level. I and my colleagues urge those in Member States who manage EU funds, to invest more in sustainable growth, and draw on the experience of others, to ensure that the available funds achieve the greatest possible impact. There are plenty of opportunities that can be seized right now, without waiting for the next financial period. The Commission will help build the necessary expertise in a series of seminars this spring.*"

The Communication "Regional Policy contributing to Sustainable Growth in Europe 2020" is presented by Commissioner Johannes Hahn together with Commissioner for environment Janez Potocnik, Commissioner for Energy Günther Oettinger, and Commissioner for Climate Change Connie Hedegaard. It is accompanied by a longer paper setting out the principles behind the advice from the Commission in more detail and offering examples of good practice by regional and local authorities that others are encouraged to learn from.

In the current budget for Cohesion Policy €105 billion is available to fund projects for sustainable growth. The Commission document calls on Member States and regional and local authorities, who manage the funding programmes, to make full use of the funds available, and prepare for the future financial period in which Europe 2020 will be a central focus for Cohesion Funds.

The Communication includes the following recommendations: :

- Regions and cities should accelerate investments in renewable energies and energy efficiency, seizing new opportunities available for energy investments in buildings
- Managing authorities should give priority to projects that enhance resource efficiency of transport
- Managing authorities should invest in natural capital, use Cohesion funding for natural risk prevention and prioritise "green infrastructure"
- Authorities should give greater support to eco innovation, supporting clusters and use regional funding to promote Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- EU programmes and projects should be screened for their climate resilience, and climate change should be addressed in territorial planning, particularly in areas linked to sea or river basins
- Preference should be given to projects which increase efficiency in water reutilisation, waste prevention and recycling.
- Improving the quality of co-funded projects is to be achieved by further drawing on innovative delivery methods such as 'green public procurement'. This means that environmental and social considerations should be taken into account in purchasing procedures.
- EU regions are also encouraged to **develop synergies between regional policy and the other EU instruments** such as the EU's Research Framework Programme, the Rural Development Policy, the Competitiveness and Innovation programme or the [Covenant of Mayors](#) to maximise their impact.
- To prepare for the next generation of programmes, both by having a greater thematic focus on green investment and by building capacity, using technical assistance budgets, to involve local, regional and non-government parties in regional climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Next steps

In the short-term, the Member States can, where necessary, realign expenditures under their cohesion policy programmes to boost resource efficiency and a low carbon economy.

The Commission will further support the regions by leveraging resources with other partners, in particular International Financial Institutions (IFIs), developing expertise and know-how through targeted seminars..

The communication is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/comm_en.htm