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Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2020/2039(INI)	Procedure completed
Reversing demographic trends in EU regions using cohesion policy instruments		
Subject 4.10.14 Demography 4.70.02 Cohesion policy, Cohesion Fund (CF)		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Regional Development	 BUDA Daniel	05/12/2019
		Shadow rapporteur	
		 MAESTRE MARTÍN DE ALMAGRO Cristina	
		 SOLÍS PÉREZ Susana	
		 DONATO Francesca	
		 ALFONSI François	
		 MOŹDŹANOWSKA Andželika Anna	
		 KIZILYÜREK Niyazi	
		Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion
	 Employment and Social Affairs		02/03/2020
		 RAFALSKA Elżbieta	
	 Agriculture and Rural Development		26/05/2020
		 AGUILAR Mazaly	
European Commission	Commission DG Regional and Urban Policy	Commissioner FERREIRA Elisa	

Key events			
16/04/2020	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
16/03/2021	Vote in committee		
25/03/2021	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0061/2021	Summary

17/05/2021	Debate in Parliament		
20/05/2021	Decision by Parliament	T9-0248/2021	Summary

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2020/2039(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 159
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	REGI/9/02628

Documentation gateway					
Committee opinion		PE655.690	03/12/2020	EP	
Committee opinion		PE657.414	07/12/2020	EP	
Committee draft report		PE663.033	22/12/2020	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE680.966	09/02/2021	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0061/2021	25/03/2021	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0248/2021	20/05/2021	EP	Summary

Reversing demographic trends in EU regions using cohesion policy instruments

The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report by Daniel BUDA (EPP, RO) on reversing demographic trends in EU regions using cohesion policy instruments.

Current characteristics and challenges of demographic change in the EU

Demographic trends from rural to urban areas, from less developed to more developed national regions, from east to west and from south to north have a direct impact on the lives of EU citizens and local populations. Demographic decline increases existing inequalities between the most developed and the poorest regions.

The report called for particular attention to be paid to the impact of the 'four freedoms' on demographic trends and on the Union's regions and their economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The EU is facing a major demographic challenge which, despite different impacts between regions, should be recognised and addressed in a comprehensive manner. In this context, Members noted significant demographic contrasts related to different economic opportunities, service needs, accessibility, transport and digital connectivity, both at EU level and between metropolitan regions and peripheral areas.

These disparities are particularly visible in rural areas or areas facing natural or specific constraints, such as sparsely populated and mountainous regions, as well as between the mainland and islands and outermost regions. Active ageing policies are needed to reduce the negative dimension of demographic change in these areas. Members also warn of a visible decline in the working population in the regions of Central, Eastern and Central Europe.

Furthermore, the ongoing COVID-19 health crisis will have medium and long-term effects on labour market dynamics. Self-isolating and social distancing measures have had visible effects on production, demand and trade, reducing economic activity. Consequently, a new wave of youth migration within and between Member States can be expected.

Tailor-made responses: finding solutions to the challenge of demographic decline

The report stressed the importance of current initiatives, such as the European Innovation Partnership for Healthy and Active Ageing, the Ambient Assisted Living and the EIT Digital and Health Knowledge Innovation Communities. Members called on the Commission to take into account the solutions already developed by these initiatives for accommodating the demographic shift. They stressed the importance of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning in supporting education and training in areas threatened by depopulation.

Local, regional and national authorities, professional associations and NGOs should play a decisive role as active participants in the development of community-based territorial strategies.

The report stressed the need to develop a rural programme at European level aimed at improving the accessibility, attractiveness and sustainable development of rural and remote areas. In this respect, it stressed the importance of improving transport infrastructure and making investments that will enable a just transition to a digital economy and an online digital education system accessible to all citizens.

The EU Urban Agenda could also serve as a model for providing appropriate instruments to promote growth, integration, cooperation and innovation and to tackle social problems.

Cohesion policy investments should promote the employability of women and single parents struggling to find a job and aim to support young people, the elderly, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups when entering or remaining in the labour market.

Policy recommendations

Members called on the Commission to propose a strategy on demographic change that prioritises the following areas: (i) decent employment, (ii) work-life balance, (iii) territorial aspect of policies promoting economic activity and employment, (iv) adequate provision of social services of general interest in all territories, (v) efficient local public transport, and (vi) adequate care for dependent persons and long-term care, with special attention to new forms of work and their social impact.

They urged Member States and regional authorities to implement an integrated approach to address demographic challenges through cohesion policy instruments, and encourage the promotion of smart villages and other incentive schemes to retain population and attract young people to rural and semi-urban areas.

In general, Member States are called on take into account the different demographic challenges in the design of their national recovery and resilience plans, their national development policies, long-term strategies for sustainable development and tailored cohesion policy programmes, correlated with the European Semester goals, with a view to ensure proper financing aimed at tackling depopulation and reversing negative trends and enhancing territorial attractiveness.

In this context, it is important that the Commission and Member States share best practice on the use and benefits of long-term cooperative governance and planning tools to support polycentric development.

Reversing demographic trends in EU regions using cohesion policy instruments

The European Parliament adopted by 633 votes to 16, with 45 abstentions, a resolution on reversing demographic trends in EU regions using cohesion policy instruments.

According to the European Regional Competitiveness Index 2019, there is a gap between central/metropolitan regions and more peripheral areas. While 78% of the EU population living in urban areas benefit from quality energy, transport and digital connectivity services, many remote regions, including rural areas which account for 44% of the EU's surface area, suffer geographically, socially and economically.

Demographic decline increases existing inequalities between the most developed and poorest regions, while the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have a significant impact on birth rates, death rates and migration flows in Europe both within and between Member States.

Challenges related to demographic change in the EU

Parliament called for particular attention to be paid to the impact of the 'four freedoms' on demographic trends and on the EU's regions and their economic, social and territorial cohesion. They believe that the major demographic challenge facing the European Union should be recognised and addressed in a comprehensive manner.

While warning of a visible decline in the working population in the eastern, southern and central regions of Europe, Members suggested developing active ageing policies to reduce the negative consequences of demographic change in rural and remote areas and to ensure an adequate quality of life for all inhabitants.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted significant disparities in the quality of and access to health care services. In this respect, Members recalled the need to strengthen public services in rural areas, such as health care facilities, and to address the digital divide, which particularly affects the elderly and those living in less developed regions, in remote rural and/or mountainous areas, as well as in the outermost regions.

Parliament recommended exploring the possibility of using other indicators in addition to GDP and population density for the classification of territories with severe and permanent handicaps.

Tailor-made responses: finding solutions to the challenge of demographic decline

The resolution stressed the importance of current initiatives, such as the European Innovation Partnership for Healthy and Active Ageing, the Ambient Assisted Living and the EIT Digital and Health Knowledge Innovation Communities. Members called on the Commission to take into account the solutions already developed by these initiatives for accommodating the demographic shift. They stressed the importance of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning in supporting education and training in areas threatened by depopulation.

Local, regional and national authorities, professional associations and NGOs should play a decisive role as active participants in the development of community-based territorial strategies.

The resolution stressed the need to develop a rural programme at European level aimed at improving the accessibility, attractiveness and sustainable development of rural and remote areas. Transport networks could play a decisive role in halting depopulation by increasing connectivity between rural and urban areas. Sustainable rural tourism could also play an important role in promoting job creation and economic and demographic diversification in rural areas.

The EU Urban Agenda could also serve as a model for providing appropriate instruments to promote growth, integration, cooperation and innovation and to tackle social problems. Members encouraged the promotion of smart towns and other incentives to retain population and attract young people to rural and semi-urban areas.

Cohesion policy investments should promote the employability of women and single parents struggling to find a job and aim to support young people, the elderly, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups when entering or remaining in the labour market.

Policy recommendations

Parliament called on the Commission to propose a strategy on demographic change that prioritises the following areas: (i) decent employment, (ii) work-life balance, (iii) territorial aspect of policies promoting economic activity and employment, (iv) adequate provision of social services of general interest in all territories, (v) efficient local public transport, and (vi) adequate care for dependent persons and long-term care, with special attention to new forms of work and their social impact.

Member States and regional authorities are urged to implement an integrated approach to addressing demographic challenges through cohesion policy instruments and to integrate demographic challenges into their national development policies and long-term sustainable development strategies and to link them to the European Semester.

In this context, it is important that the Commission and Member States share best practice on the use and benefits of long-term cooperative governance and planning tools to support polycentric development.