

BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

GENERAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A **general assessment** of Cohesion policy's **effectiveness** and **implementation** for Baden-Württemberg would be that – despite the European Structural and Investment Funds' (ESIF) limited scope in one of the most prosperous as well as the most innovative regions in Germany and Europe – it certainly made significant contributions to the region's development. While before the last two funding periods this had mainly concerned the previous target 2 areas, especially the city of Mannheim, the shifts in Cohesion policy to the concept of smart specialisation with a focus on 'strengthening strengths' of a region that started with the previous funding period 2007-2013, are clearly in favour of the region and have made it possible to use the funds in the fields and the projects where they can have the greatest impact for the region (like Research&Development, innovation and science-business cooperation/technology transfer). Therefore, a general **recommendation** would be that even developed regions in which ESIFs' programmes are rather small can significantly benefit from Cohesion policy **funding**. This should **continue** for developed regions.

However, **handling Cohesion policy** in terms of **all legal provisions** and especially in terms of **complying with the rules** is generally perceived as burdening or even strangling, often hindering an effective and efficient use of the funds. Almost all stakeholders bemoan that the goal to reduce bureaucratic burdens, which had been proclaimed for the current funding period 2014-2020, has NOT been achieved. Therefore, considering a **general reform** of **Cohesion policy** resulting in **lower bureaucratic requirements** (especially in terms of control), **reduced duties to collect and report data and statistical information**, and an overall less formalised general approach are also **highly recommended**.

Communication of Cohesion policy's role in the region and its **contribution to the region's development** to the **general public** remains a **problem** as two main challenges exist. First, ESIF programmes are small in size and have selected direct beneficiaries. Related to this, Cohesion policy is seen as a too cumbersome topic, something too abstract to get people really



interested. A general challenge is that the general public is mostly interested in that 'things are getting done' or that 'problems are solved', but not – in plain language – in 'who paid for all this'. Thus, citizens are not well informed about Cohesion policy. It is **unlikely** that **improvements for Cohesion policy's communication impact** could be **achieved in the future**, despite the ongoing process of expansion and professionalisation of all communication activities that involves an increased use of social media.

One **policy implication** here is to reconsider the role of communication to the general public in regions in which ESIFs' role is limited since the funds are tailored to narrow specific purposes, or to achieve such goals. However, given that there is a real interest to be clearly and explicitly (i.e., better!) informed about what the EU does in or for one's region (as expressed in focus groups, i.e. by people), a much more **fundamental change of Cohesion policy's communication** part should be **considered**.

This would imply to **focus not only on Cohesion policy's role** in a narrower sense, but **instead to emphasise the positive impacts of the E on citizens' lives in general**; e.g., achievements such as the common market, the 'four freedoms in general', and consumer interests (like single mobile phone rates across Europe). In the end, this would mean a **much more intensive and perhaps a more professionalised public relations** work (or public relations campaign) by the **EU itself**, which could focus on **simple or core messages** to be conveyed to citizens. For that purpose, an increased presence of the EU in Member States would be necessary, e.g. by establishing regional representation offices in ALL regional capitals. In addition, **less detailed prescription for publication requirements** within current Cohesion policy's communication would also be useful and could be **recommended**.

Furthermore, a **focus on transnational projects** would be very useful for making the EU's role more tangible and could, thus, be **recommended**. Strengthening this part of Cohesion policy in general (e.g. by expanding INTERREG programmes) could be considered a **promising way to improve the visibility**, especially of the **positive impact** of ESIF within and across the region. In that, this would create a real '**European added value**'.

Finally, **changes in policy fields outside of Cohesion policy** should be taken into account. As stressed by focus group participants (i.e., "ordinary" citizens), there are other European policies that are seen as much more important when it comes to implanting the idea of European integration and the idea of the EU into the 'hearts and minds' of its citizens, based on the notion that personal contacts with other Europeans and personal experiences in other European countries matter. Thus, **strengthening and expanding programmes** such as **ERASMUS or ERASMUS+** (with a considerable expansion of the latter, e.g. to make it accessible for persons in vocational training), as means to improve communication of the EU's role in general, is also **highly recommended**.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For Baden-Württemberg, it has to be taken into account that the ESIF are limited in scope given that the region (state or *Land* in German) is amongst the most prosperous as well as amongst the most innovative regions in Germany and Europe. Looking at the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) alone, this becomes obvious by sheer numbers: In the period 2007-2013, the fund distributed about 143,4 million EUR, while in the period 2014-2020 it will distribute about 246,6 million in the region. In 2016, Baden-Württemberg's GDP per capita was 476,8 billion EUR. As frequently stressed by all types of stakeholders, ESIF in general and EFRD in particular are often conceived as the 'cherry on the cake' in terms of general public spending for economic or social purposes. However, this should by no means imply that funding from the ESIF is considered unimportant or that it can be neglected.

Nonetheless, in terms of communication of the role and impact of Cohesion policy to the general public, this poses certain challenges, which have been, to some extent, 'amplified' by shifts on Cohesion policy's general goals and design in the previous, and even more so in the current funding period (concept of smart specialisation with a focus on 'strengthening strengths' of a region). The latter became especially relevant for Baden-Württemberg, which solely focuses on research/climate change mitigation and innovation/technological change with its ERDF' Operational Programme 2014-2020. The main challenge is that given these circumstances, i.e., the policy's targets in the region, raising awareness amongst the general public for what 'the EU does for the people in the region with its funds' is very difficult, which also corresponds to assessments of stakeholders.

Under the general circumstances described, stakeholders often do not even consider communication with the general public as relevant or useful, but rather stress the role of policy stakeholders as their major communication target groups; for example, science and research communities, despite the mandatory publication provisions in the ESIF regulation, that are complied with. Along that line, communication is often also rated as the least important task amongst the four major tasks associated with Cohesion policy that COHESIFY inquired into. A general challenge is that the general public is mostly interested in that 'things are getting done' or improved (e.g., in terms of infrastructure, economic investments or employment opportunities) or that 'problems are solved', but not in the financial aspects here, i.e., who contributed to it in financial terms or – in plain language – 'who paid for all this' in order to make it possible (as also frequently stressed by stakeholders).

Given all that, a realistic assessment, especially having in mind possible strategies and tools for improvements, would be that it is rather unlikely that (tremendous) improvements in terms of the impact of Cohesion policy's communication could be achieved in the future, especially not with Cohesion policy's toolkit itself (such as changes in the publicity and communication requirements). As a result, the EU (the Commission in particular) should reconsider the importance of communicating to the general public in rather wealthy regions in which the role of ESIF is limited, and in which the funds are tailored to narrow very specific purposes or to achieve such goals.



Despite this, an ongoing process of professionalisation and extension of communication activities within Baden-Württemberg's Cohesion policy could be observed in recent years. I.e., communication also to the general public remains important and has by no means been downgraded, despite its limited reach. The latter motivates to put more emphasis on the use of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, although most stakeholders are still rather hesitant of this, given the considerable staff costs required for this. Furthermore, a general recommendation in terms of (major) shifts within Cohesion policy's communication would not be appropriate. This corresponds to stakeholders' assessment that all existing communication channels remain important (e.g., also brochures). The only exception here would be to consider a general relaxation of publicity requirements in the ESIF regulations, i.e. to give the regions more discretion in terms of designing communication strategies/concrete policy measures. Overall, with given current Policy characteristics, one should strive for improvements despite the fact that the impact of communication instruments remains limited.

Based on that, at least three main and concrete recommendations in terms of improving Cohesion policy communication's success could be made: first, it turned out that the so-called Europe Days and their events that take place in the region once a year, are considered to be of great help to communicate Cohesion policy and the role of ESIF within the region. Therefore, it is highly recommended to have such Europe Days and the events involved not only in the region's capital, Stuttgart, but also in other cities of the Land, and perhaps also more often. Closely related to this, embedding concrete, 'face to face' communication activities (like information points) within general regional or local yearly events – such as the *Landesgartenschau* (state gardening exhibition) or *Tag des offenen Denkmals* (day of opened monument) – could be very useful to reach larger segments of the general public. As a result, people who have learned about the EU's positive role could function as intermediaries.

Second, as special as the EFRD's role for regional development is, besides innovation and R&D within companies, closely tied to projects in research and science of public research institutions, it is recommended to considerably strengthen communication activities around these projects; for example, when a new building is inaugurated. One way of achieving this could be to require beneficiaries (i.e., researchers) to be involved to a greater extent, e.g. in terms of face to face communication with the local population attending these events. This would considerably improve the communication activities that are related to concrete projects co-financed by European funds and that contribute to the most promising approach of conveying concrete 'success stories', i.e. where the EU's contribution becomes clearly visible and where it is obvious that it made a difference.

Third, given that using social media requires staff time as usually at least one person has to be employed full-time solely for this task (tweets have to be replied on within a very short time), it should be considered to finance necessary additional personnel with means from increased technical assistance sums (at least for central stakeholders, like the ERDF administration unit within the ministry or respective units within other ministries involved). In this case, the growing role of social media within Cohesion policy's communication is seen as positive.



Furthermore, focus group participant and stakeholders emphasised that transnational projects would be much more useful for making the EU's role more tangible. While not being within the scope of Cohesion policy's communication part as such, strengthening this part of Cohesion policy in general (e.g. by expanding INTERREG programmes), could nonetheless be considered a promising way to improve the visibility, especially of the positive impact of ESIF, within and across the region. Consequently, this would create a 'real European added value.

Finally, in addition to Cohesion policy as such, as also frequently stressed especially by focus group participants, there are other European policies that are seen as much more important when it comes to implanting the idea of European integration and in particular the idea of the EU into the 'hearts and minds' of its citizens, especially if compared to the role of 'money' spent. These include personal contacts with other Europeans, and personal experiences in other European countries. Thus, strengthening and expanding programs such as ERASMUS or ERASMUS+ as means to improving communication of the EU's role in general, is also highly recommended.

