

RECOMMENDATIONS

to increase the impact of Cohesion Policy
communication on citizen awareness and appreciation



Programming for people

Involvement of citizens in participatory budgeting

CONCEPTION

PROGRAMMES:

With earmarking for communication
And no payment without clear communication plan including **SMART objectives, KPIs & full time staff**



PROJECTS:

Communication strategy as part of the selection criteria of strategic projects

Impact evaluation of communication strategies



DEVELOPMENT



Unified EU FUNDS brand & identity (*no more acronyms used on communication materials*)

Unified PROJECT database including audio visual materials



REACH

Strengthen cooperation with **media** on concrete outcomes & benefits for specific communities, and **mythbusting**



Upgrade social media activity & focus on **storytelling** and engaging messages to open dialogue

1. The starting point is the problematic stature and image of the EU among citizens over the past decade. The image of the EU among the public (what the EU does and how it affects people) has deteriorated over the past decade, a trend which is especially evident in Southern Europe. Importantly, though, attachment to the principle of European Union remains either neutral or positive.
2. **There is clear evidence of the impact of Cohesion Policy on individual perceptions of the EU and European identity.** Survey results demonstrate that awareness of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund in particular, and communication about their benefits for citizen's daily lives and for their region's development contributes significantly to citizen identification with the EU.
3. **Spending through Cohesion Policy improves recognition of the advantages of EU integration.** Focus groups show that people recognise the importance of Cohesion Policy for convergence – narrowing differences in quality of life – and common action to address regional and local development problems. The representative survey of citizens shows that the vast majority of people think that the economic impact has been positive on their region or city.
4. **Perceptions of Cohesion Policy are influenced by exposure (the scale of funding in a country/region) and implementation outcomes,** the effectiveness of the policy (what it does and achieves), and the quality of its management (regularity, efficiency, transparency).
5. Perceptions are also affected by the **perceptions of development needs/challenges and how the funds are deployed.** Focus groups show that many citizens believe that Cohesion Policy needs to be more focused on the perceived needs of their region or city.
6. **Perceptions of Cohesion Policy are influenced by communication.** Citizen awareness and perceived effectiveness of Cohesion Policy are determined by media exposure and communication of EU funding. Regional and local news are generally more positive towards the EU than national news.
7. The significant territorial differences in attitudes to and identification with the EU between and within countries means that both **the use of EU funding and its communication need to be regionally differentiated.**
8. **Communication strategies are improving but are failing to rise to the challenge** in terms of a focus on citizens and their daily lives, clarity in presenting EU funding, sophistication of methods, effective use of both traditional and social media and local differentiation. Focus groups with citizens show that they are inadequately informed about Cohesion Policy and want to have more say on how funds are allocated or governed in their area.
9. **A new, more citizen-focused approach to the programming and communication of EU funds is needed.** Further, the role of communication in programming and implementation should be upgraded to connect more directly with citizens and increase their appreciation of the EU.