

## COHESIFY Summary

Cohesion Policy or Regional Policy of the European Union currently accounts for one third of the EU budget. More than €50 billion are invested every year to create jobs, promote innovation, improve the environment and upgrade infrastructure in regions across the EU.

COHESIFY is a **multi-disciplinary project** funded by the Horizon2020 Framework programme for Research and Innovation which aimed to assess the impact of EU Cohesion policy on citizens' perceptions of and identification with the European Union. The project also investigated how efficiently the results of Cohesion policy programmes and projects are communicated to the citizens. In times of rising populism and Brexit, the results of the COHESIFY project are all the more relevant and will be transmitted to a variety of stakeholders and policy-makers to be taken into consideration for the post2020 Multiannual Financial Framework and future Cohesion policy set-up. Some Member States wish to cut Cohesion policy budgets or link the distribution of the funds to the compliance of the overall EU values or other policies (e.g. migration).

Started in February 2016, the project consortium comprises **8 universities** and **2 SMES** from a variety of disciplines who over a period of 2 years tried to understand what citizens think of Cohesion Policy and what is needed to improve people's understanding and appreciation of Cohesion Policy.

The main research questions focused on:

1. How European identity and perceptions of the EU and Cohesion policy vary at national, regional and local levels;
2. The impact of Cohesion policy on citizens' perceptions of the policy and identification with the EU;
3. Whether and how Cohesion policy communication strategies affect perception and identification;
4. What is needed to make Cohesion policy more effective in terms of people's perceptions of the policy and the EU more generally.

The project applied an **innovative research approach** by combining **desk research** with **interviews**; **two large-scale surveys** (among more than 8,500 and citizens); a cross-national **media framing analysis** to identify the dominant discourses on Cohesion Policy in the media and social media as well as **50 focus groups** in **17 case study regions** across **12 Member States** involving more than **250 citizens**. Other standard survey tools such as the Eurobarometer do not take data from the **regional level** into consideration and therefore the results of the COHESIFY project provide a new, more comprehensive view on Cohesion policy perceptions.

The **17 case study regions** include Scotland (UK); North-East England (UK); Lombardia (IT); Podkarpackie (PL); Pomorskie (PL); Cyprus; Central Macedonia (EL); Nyugat Dunantual (HU); Zahodna (SI); West Romania; the Province of Flevoland (NL); the Province of Limburg (NL); Baden-Württemberg (DE); Thüringen (DE); Andalucía (ES); Castilla y León (ES); and Southern and Eastern Ireland.



The COHESIFY project (February 2016-April 2018) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No. 693127

## Final event

During the final event “The Voices from the Regions” which will take place on **26 April 2018** at the **Committee of the Regions** in **Brussels**, COHESIFY will bring together policy-makers, programme and project managers, representatives of EU regions and institutions as well as the media to present the key results and recommendations for a post2020 Cohesion policy.

The conference will mainly address three critical questions:

1. What do citizens think of Cohesion policy?
2. How is Cohesion policy presented in the media and social media? We have sampled 300 news articles from 12 Member States as well as 3,700 posts on Facebook and 19,500 tweets on Twitter.
3. How to reconnect with citizens through Cohesion policy?

Apart from advancing the scientific state-of-the-art on the relationship between Cohesion policy, perceptions on the EU and European identity, COHESIFY will provide a set of **key recommendations** on how to better raise awareness on Cohesion policy results and how to reconnect with citizens across the EU on these issues.

In addition, the project will produce a unique body of original, **EU-wide comparative data** that will be made available through **open access** arrangements to other researchers and policymakers. This conference is the first open event at which the results of the COHESIFY project are being made public.

**Event Registration:** [bit.ly/2DI8tFO](http://bit.ly/2DI8tFO)

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