

# Cohesion Policy and Climate Change



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In view of the importance of **fighting climate change**, EU institutions have been setting increasingly ambitious targets such as **reducing Green House Gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030**, and becoming the **first carbon neutral continent by 2050**. In European regions, warming is greater than the global average. Therefore, the negative impacts of climate change may be more severe and, in any case, asymmetric, with southern European regions expected to be impacted the most. In this context, the role of Cohesion Policy in climate action is likely to be essential.

## Main observations

### The study

Provides an assessment of how EU Cohesion Policy currently contributes and can contribute in the future to the attainment of EU Climate Policy goals.

It also sets out policy recommendations for strengthening climate action financed by Cohesion Policy.

**Climate action objectives** were integrated into the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy. This will also be the case in 2021-2027 to ensure that climate change is properly addressed, from programme design to the selection of projects, and that investments are “climate proofed”.

Approximately **EUR 56.5 billion** of Cohesion Policy

funds (ERDF, CF and ESF) were assigned for climate action in **2014-2020**, which is **15.9% of total** planned Cohesion Policy funds. In **2021-2027**, the amount planned for climate change is expected to increase to at least **EUR 77.2 billion**. This is roughly **25% of the total for Cohesion Policy**, a significantly higher share than previously, which should ensure a more robust contribution to the delivery of climate policy outcomes.

In **2014-2020**, most of the Cohesion Policy funds for climate were allocated to **energy efficiency renovation of public infrastructure**, followed by **adaptation to climate change and risk prevention, clean urban transport and energy efficiency in existing housing stock**. In all EU regions, Cohesion Policy has made it possible to finance a wide array of initiatives for climate

change mitigation and adaptation, not without obstacles, but certainly facilitating learning among managing administrations.

In the next programming period, Cohesion Policy will contribute to **the implementation of the European Green Deal**, the European Commission’s overarching plan to achieve sustainability and to protect the environment. From a financial point of view, the Cohesion Policy contribution to the Green Deal is likely to be limited in most Member States but may have an important catalytic effect. The EU has made increasingly **strong policy commitments to decarbonisation**, particularly by reducing the carbon intensity of the power sector (or emissions per unit of electricity generated). It is in line with **the objective of climate neutrality** and the EU’s commitments under the **Paris Agreement**. Decarbonisation and phasing out fossil fuels have costs but will also produce savings on energy import bills which may partially compensate the above mentioned costs.



## Conclusions and policy recommendations

There are some **weaknesses** in how Cohesion Policy pursues climate objectives.

At the policy design stage, it is recommended to: make greater effort to ensure **mainstreaming of climate change** in Cohesion Policy interventions; **coordinate**



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**investment** in order to achieve a critical mass and avoid fragmented initiatives; raise public awareness; promote capacity building amongst public administrators.

There is slow progress, financially and in terms of achievements, of the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy initiatives for climate, most notably support to energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. Thus, it is important to **reduce the administrative burden** for beneficiaries and Managing Authorities. At the same time, Cohesion Policy programmes should avoid climate action being neutralised by investments which are not “climate friendly” (e.g. supporting unsustainable uses of biomass and natural gas infrastructure).

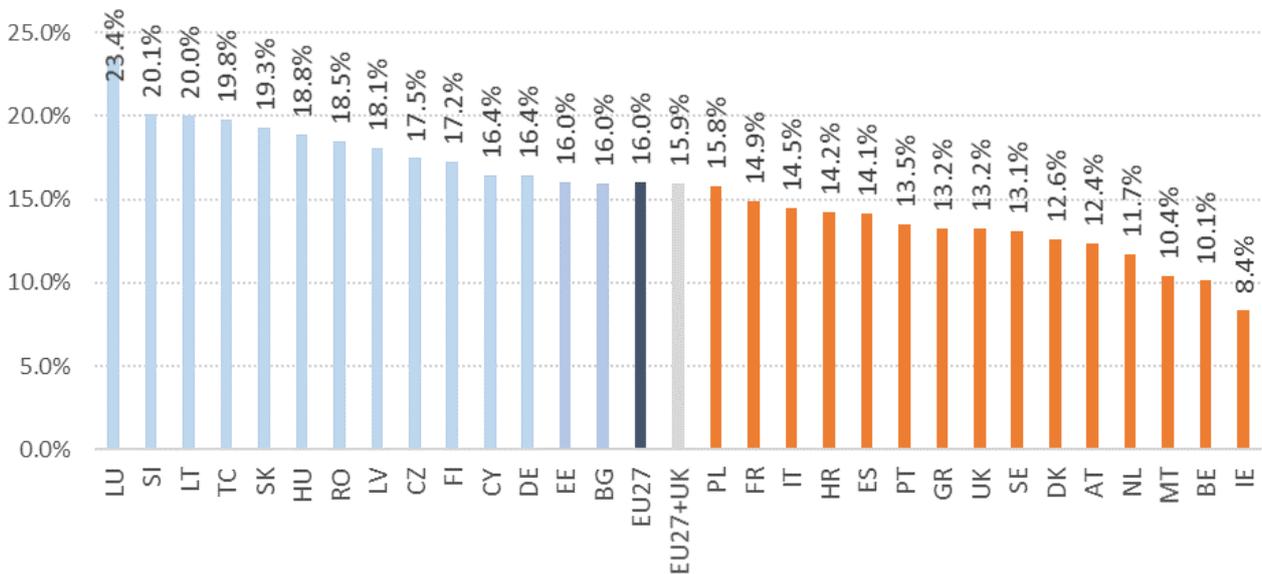
**Local plans** could be used to identify and to ensure the most appropriate energy mix for satisfying the demand of local communities. As regards monitoring, the

method currently used for tracking **Cohesion Policy spendings for climate action (annual average)** has been found to have some shortcomings which need to be corrected. The system of output and result indicators also needs improvement. Finally, **systematic and well-planned evaluations of the contribution** of supported investments towards achieving the set targets are essential.

**Key areas for EU action**

1. Coordinate investments.
2. Reduce administrative burden.
3. Use local plans.
4. Systematic and well-planned evaluations of the contribution of supported investments.
5. Sustainable tourism.

**Cohesion Policy amounts for climate action (annual average)**



Source: ESIF Open data and Eurostat.

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