

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine on EU cohesion Part II: Overview and outlook



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The COVID-19 pandemic was a major shock, deeply impacting people, enterprises, public authorities, municipalities and regions. The war in Ukraine is exacerbating vulnerabilities for many places and societal groups already weakened by the pandemic. The pandemic, Russia's war on Ukraine and a range of mega-trends affect Europe's pathway to cohesion. They risk further reducing cohesion in Europe and increasing disparities between places and people, as less developed regions are often more affected than more developed and affluent regions.

The worst and most direct impacts have been avoided by swift policy actions. In this context Cohesion Policy played an important role.

Key lessons

It is important to shift gear and start considering the crises as a chance to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable, digital and cohesive future. Key lessons from this study include:

The study

is the final report of the second phase of the research project on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis on EU cohesion, impacts of the pandemic, the war and selected mega-trends on cohesion and different types of regions as well as conclusions and recommendations.

European semester, the European Parliament should address the role of the local and regional level in Cohesion Policy and in NRRPs.

- **Administrative capacity constraints risk reducing the quality of new programmes.** The European Parliament should advocate efforts for administrative support to programme authorities and simplification. Furthermore, it should advocate the possibility for a voluntary mid-term review and for re-programming in 2023, where programmes could not devote the envisaged efforts to programming for the 2021-27 period.



- **Strengthening regional resilience.** It is impossible to have blueprints which work for all parts of Europe and for all sorts of external shocks. The main lesson from this is the need to increase resilience at all levels of governance. In this case, resilience is the ability to adapt to changing situations, rather than bouncing back to a previous equilibrium. Cohesion Policy should be used to help local and regional authorities in Europe to increase their capacities to deal with unexpected shocks and become more resilient.
- **An ambitious long-term perspective.** The European Parliament should advocate a European strategic framework (or long-term vision) underpinning Cohesion Policy post 2027, as well as place-based development visions at the level of programmes and territorial tools to bring Cohesion Policy closer to citizens.



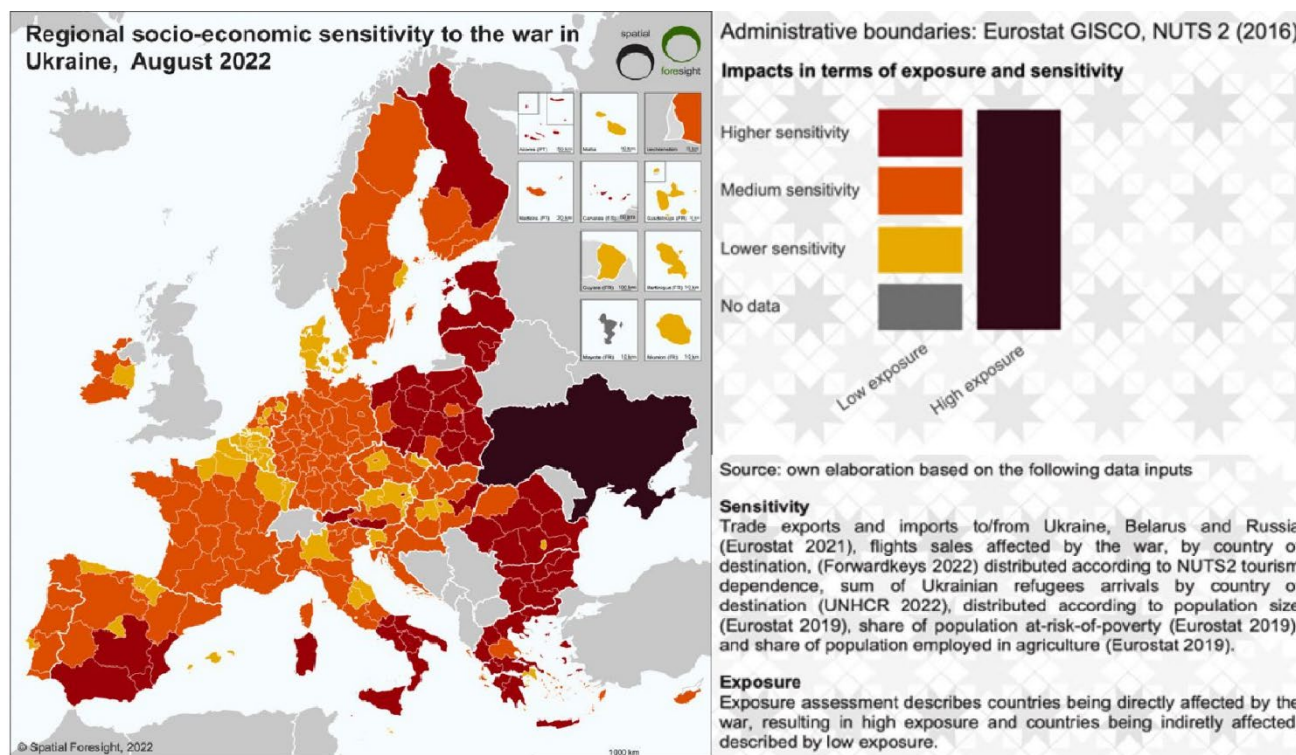
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- **2023 as a moment to reflect.** In 2023, insights on the interplay between NRRPs and Cohesion Policy programmes, the strategic orientation of policies post-COVID, and an early review of the long-term orientation of Cohesion Policy programmes should inform a broad reflection on possible re-orientation towards more strategic long-term needs. The European Parliament should ask the European Commission to address these points in country reports and country specific recommendations in 2023. Furthermore, it should launch an EU-wide assessment on the interplay between NRRPs and Cohesion Policy.
- **Strengthen cohesion as an underlying value.** The crises challenge cohesion in Europe and broaden the gaps between prosperous and lagging regions. Many of the mega-trends affecting local and regional development in Europe are expected to further accelerate these disparities. Cohesion Policy must

offer a platform for regions which risk being left behind, to increase their capacities to develop desirable future perspectives for their areas and forward-pointing projects funded by Cohesion Policy.

The role of Cohesion Policy post 2027

Cohesion Policy post 2027 can be radically different from today. It could become a new era for Cohesion Policy as the driver for transition and a policy integrator. Cohesion Policy could also become a narrowly focused funding scheme among an increasing number of purpose-built policies. Alternatively, Cohesion Policy might be phased out as it lacks agility and flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances. Now is the time to shape the debate about Cohesion Policy post 2027.



Source: Study team elaboration

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Contact: Poldep-cohesion@ep.europa.eu; Further information: www.research4committees.blog/regi. Follow us: [@PolicyREGI](https://twitter.com/PolicyREGI)

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