

## Minutes

### **Third meeting of the group of high-level specialists on the future of Cohesion Policy – The role of Cohesion Policy in addressing different developments of European regions**

27 April 2023, Brussels

#### **1. Nature of the meeting**

The third meeting of the group of high-level specialists on the future of Cohesion Policy took place on 27 April 2023. The recording of the public and web streamed session of the meeting is available at [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/how/future-cohesion-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/future-cohesion-policy_en). This session was followed by a non-public discussion between members of the group.

13 members attended the meeting in person, two online and one partly online and in person.

The Commission services were represented by Peter Berkowitz, Directorate B - Policy, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), Andriana Sukova, Deputy Director-General - Funds, Fair Transition and Analysis, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion (DG EMPL), and Ruth Paserman, Director, Directorate G - Investment, (DG EMPL), accompanied by staff from both DGs and the Secretariat General.

#### **2. List of points discussed**

##### **A. Opening remarks**

The meeting started with an opening remark from Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, followed by a speech from Vice-President, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography, Dubravka Šuica. The Chair, Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, gave an introduction to the meeting's topic.

##### **Opening and welcome by Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira**

The Commissioner welcomed all participants and thanked them for taking part in the third meeting of the group of high-level specialists on the future of Cohesion Policy. The Commissioner emphasised the importance of the reflection and debate on how to further adapt Cohesion Policy to new challenges. The recommendations will feed into the reflection process on Cohesion Policy post 2027 and the 9<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report to be published at the beginning of 2024.

Commissioner Ferreira welcomed Vice-President, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography, Dubravka Šuica. The Commissioner also mentioned the recently published Communication on 'Harnessing talents in Europe's regions' which is an extremely important publication for discussions on Cohesion Policy, together with the 8<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report and the Geography of EU discontent and European Regional Competitiveness Report. The Commissioner underlined that Cohesion is essential for democracy and is highly impacted by demographic trends, demography becoming a horizontal issue for our policies.

The Commissioner briefly introduced the agenda for the public session, followed by an internal session. The morning session included presentations by academics, Simona Iammarino and

Anton Hemerijck, by Anita Seļicka, Council Member of European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) and Chair of the Latvian Rural Forum, as well as by Claudia Matera, Chief Development Officer - All Digital.

The Commissioner pointed out that the meeting focuses on how to address different needs of different regions through Cohesion policy, recognising that each region is different. She acknowledged that many regions are trapped in their development strategies within the current cohesion policy framework. She insisted on the necessity to reflect on differentiated approaches to development and related delivery methods.

To conclude her opening remarks, the Commissioner stressed the following questions:

- What needs to be done to strengthen place-based and place-sensitive approaches to address the specific needs of different territories?
- Should Cohesion Policy further modernise to reflect these different needs? Or should the delivery mode be similar for all regions?
- How to balance European common general objectives and the place-based approach?

**Opening and welcome by Vice-President, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography, Dubravka Šuica** The Vice-President, Commissioner welcomed the group and thanked them for participating, highlighting that demography and demographics are highly relevant for this discussion as the state of our democracy is at stake.

Demography is a key factor driving contrasting needs of EU regions and is important for social, territorial and economic cohesion. Demographic trends and challenges are described in the latest report ‘The Impact of Demographic Change in a changing environment’ published together with the Communication on ‘Harnessing talent in Europe’s regions’ in January 2023. The EU working age population is expected to decrease by 35 million up to 2050. The vast majority of European regions are affected by demographic change and according to demographic mapping, every region differs.

Migration could play an important role in rebalancing this development, but many regions have large outmigration flows. Population decline generally affects less developed and rural regions more severely. Member States such as Latvia and Greece also experience declining populations in cities. A smaller working age population will raise tremendous challenges putting our quality of life at risk. It will impede the growth potential of regions, triggering tensions in the labour market with jobs and skill shortages reducing regional attractiveness for investments. This will undermine the potential of less developed regions to catch up and further widen disparities. Demographic decline will also restrain public budgets. An ageing population will increase demand for health care and put a higher financial burden on pension systems. This will further limit public authorities’ capacities to invest.

There are potential steps to mitigate population outflow and encourage people to stay. Raising the attractiveness of regions facing severe depopulation or facilitating the integration of internal migrants will be essential. It will also be important to promote investment as well as develop quality childcare, education and other measures that support families. These measures might not be sufficient to reverse the trends and some adaptation measures will be inevitable. This includes increasing productivity to balance the declining working age population. For most mitigation and adaptation measures, Cohesion Policy could and should play a critical role through its clear place-based orientation with assistance tailored to each region’s specific challenges and needs. Cohesion Policy could better support investments that increase regional attractiveness, improving the qualification and reskilling of people and fostering innovation. It can also reinforce reforms, especially in labour markets and education.

Demographic challenges are already at the forefront in the 2021-2027 programming period, as Member States are invited to address these challenges in their Partnership Agreements. Also, extra allocations will be provided to Member States such as Lithuania and Latvia that have experienced sharper demographic decline.

Demography has no identifiable budget line and Cohesion Policy is the main source of funding, which is why it is critically important to be able to trace the use of Cohesion Policy to address demographic challenges. This is very difficult without indicators linking demography and programming. The reflection on Cohesion Policy and addressing the development needs of EU regions, require indicators to trace investments through EU funds and an identifiable specific objective in the regulation so Member States and regions can approach the challenges strategically and not in a scattered matter.

Vice-President, Commissioner Šuica concluded that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. Science and policy must be applied to real life situations because this is what citizens expect. Citizens' needs must be at the heart of EU policy making and EU democracy depends on it.

### **Welcome and introduction by Andrés Rodríguez-Pose**

The Chair of the group, Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, welcomed Commissioner Ferreira, Vice-President, Commissioner Šuica and all participants. He highlighted that the EU is facing several challenges including geopolitical problems from the Russian aggression in Ukraine and its impacts across the EU, labour market shortages and the green and digital transitions. Furthermore, a major challenge is demographic change which is linked to democracy. The EU cannot try to deliver well-being for all its citizens if a large part of the EU is losing people and as a result, is not making the most of its economic potential. Moreover, less-developed regions face discontent, resulting in Euroscepticism and risks for democracy across the EU.

### **B - Academic Inputs**

The 'Academic Inputs' session included two presentations, each followed by a discussion.

**Simona Iammarino**, invited academic expert (Professor, University of Cagliari and Visiting Professor, London School of Economics):

#### **'Cohesion Policy and its contribution to addressing different development needs of regions'**

Simona Iammarino addressed the following questions:

- Based on recent data, what can regions do to overcome or avoid falling into a development trap?
- What can Cohesion Policy do to further support regions trapped or at risk of falling into a development trap?
- What additional policy mechanisms could specifically target regions, helping to overcome the development trap?

Regions in, or at risk of, development traps face economic, social and political threats that also affect national and European levels, which is a tricky challenge for policy makers at all levels of governance. Different development trajectories can lead to a region being trapped, i.e. from

above in the case of high-income regions, from below in the case of low income regions, or simply stagnating at middle-income levels relative to the EU average.

The Regional Development Trap Index indicators have three economic dynamism variables (income, productivity and employment) and consider three benchmarks (the region itself in the past, the national level and the EU average).

From 2001-2018 the likelihood of a NUTS2 regions being development trapped was highest in France, central Italy, the metropolitan areas of Lisbon (Portugal), Crete (Greece), Canary Islands (Spain), the Belgian Provinces of Luxembourg and Liège, Drenthe region (the Netherlands) and the area of Darmstadt (Germany). The likelihood of being in a development trap was lowest in central Europe.

There are key features of the Development Trap Index. Firstly, a development trap trajectory in the EU affects not only middle-income places,. It also affects regions with higher income per capita, which have a similar probability of being trapped as middle-income regions. Secondly, the Development Trap Index is consistently negatively correlated with levels of manufacturing, positively with non-market services and high dependency ratios. It has a strong negative correlation with the share of government sector R&D to GDP and with institutional quality in high income and, especially, middle-income regions.

The Regional Development Trap Index provides a clear and reliable framework for analysing dynamic trends across EU regions. From a Member State perspective, the Index can help understand regions within their national and EU dynamic context over time and identify new forms of support for less dynamic regions beyond their level of income. From a regional perspective, the Regional Development Trap Index can help local and regional governments identify stagnant areas and industries, align bottom-up and top-down initiatives and think about new strategies to achieve opportunities for residents in these areas. However, it is important to sensibly interpret the Index. Firstly, its dynamic nature exposes it to annual fluctuations. Furthermore, the sensitivity of the Index to geographical scales needs consideration as it influences the level and direction of regional policy choice. Finally, the Regional Development Trap Index is responsive to the definition of regional income categories.

The conclusion elaborated on the importance of the Index for decision-makers at all levels of governance. Firstly, awareness of regional development traps should be increased as these seem to be a major source of discontent. Secondly, regional trajectories need to be identified over shorter and longer terms and at various geographical scales. Thirdly, there is a need to disentangle the regions that have been trapped through a renewed way of classification of regions, based on an evaluation of their potential for interregional connectivity and complementarity in terms of industrial knowledge, educational systems (with more focus on managerial skills) and institutional capacity. Furthermore, trapped and nearly trapped regions should be added to policy portfolios, as having regions whose inhabitants feel they don't matter can become a source of continuous discontent and plant the seeds for unrest. Also, there should be experiments with new policy tools in selected regions in/or at risk of development traps, more policy evaluation and a focus on risk prevention. Lastly, regional regeneration and revitalisation need place-based policies.

#### **Key issues discussed**

The discussion following the presentation involved Andreea-Alexandra Scrioşteanu, Constanze Krehl, Helga Trüpel, Joaquim Oliveira Martins, John Bachtler, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Pervenche Berès, Peter Osvald, Riccardo Crescenzi and Zornitsa Roussinova.

The first two issues concerned a definition of trapped regions and how to define policies for them. It is important to define which regions are trapped so we do find specifically tailored

solutions for such regions that are putting the EU at political risk. Iammarino highlighted the importance of communicating that the EU is thinking about trapped regions and to start experimenting with new policy tools. In addition, the Index can be connected with a high level of income and needs to be differentiated from the poverty trap, because indeed development trap does not mean poverty trap. Hence, the need to update the current indicators, to encourage an ‘appropriate growth policy’ based on an enriched, more transactional cohesion policy.

At NUTS2 level, some regions are homogeneously trapped (i.e. all their NUTS3 sub-regions are affected), while in others only some places are trapped. Therefore, analysing the index at NUTS2 level requires caution. Regions also can get out of the trap, such as Abruzzo in Italy, though this is rare. At national level, some countries (e.g. Italy and France) are more trapped than others. Moreover, it is important to understand differing development dynamism in Central and Eastern Europe, as to avoid that some these regions are trapped in the future.

The second issue addressed the possibility of using existing networks to tackle challenges for trapped regions. Iammarino emphasised that reinforcing networks that target segments of population (European Universities’ network, network of metropole regions, networks fostered via the Erasmus+ programme) is one approach, but this should be extended at lower levels of education, in a more holistic way, to avoid the feeling of people isolation. Also, she mentioned that the most important benchmark is the recession of 2009, because most regions became trapped after that and never recovered.

The third issue focused on possibly rethinking the classification of European regions. According to Iammarino, the Cohesion Policy classification should be adjusted by introducing trapped regions.

The next questions focused on the importance of revitalising sectors to avoid regions becoming trapped. For this, it is important to understand if that sector is integrated in EU value chains or not. Supporting manufacturing at all costs when there is clear evidence that the industry is not integrated in value chains could be counterproductive. In this context, regional development agencies play a crucial role. In addition, there is a positive correlation between regions being trapped with a higher level of services (especially publicly provided services). However, regions with more knowledge-intensive business services are not trapped at all.

**Anton Hemerijck**, invited academic expert (Professor of Political Science and Sociology, European University Institute):

### **Taking Social Investment Seriously in EU Cohesion Policy**

Hemerijck linked his presentation to his work undertaken as Member of the high-level group on the Welfare State and Social Protection in the EU. He recalled the current challenges and megatrends in terms of demographic change, digitalisation, changing world of work, climate change and green transition. Indicators show social (under) performance such as child poverty (19%), young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) (16,5%), rising number of very old people over 75 and growing number of non-standard workers not covered by social protection. This under performance justifies policy change, in order to make social investment a ‘double dividend’ work and not waste any ‘low hanging fruit’. Inclusive welfare provision is not only about reducing monetary poverty or increasing employment, but also about actively supporting ‘human flourishing’ and ‘well-being’. There is an essential need for a holistic approach to improve our active labour market policies and to change our work and mobility patterns in coordination with other measures related to integration and migration movements, energy efficiency in housing and public transport, green transition through urban

design and healthy food provision, digital public administration, e-health and third sector engagement.

The background idea is that two interrelated but analytically distinct processes shed light on the territorial dimension of public policy in general. The first is territorial agglomeration leading to divergence (not only economic, but also social, political, institutional, environmental and cultural differences) between and within regions. The second is territorial rescaling – territorial redefinition of the role of national government in public policy.

He mentioned three key welfare functions: developing life-long human capital 'stock', easing 'flows' related to family life-course and labour market transitions, as well as upholding inclusive social protection 'buffers' in times of need.

'Life-course multipliers' also need to be considered. Social investment returns should generate a positive cycle of well-being returns over a lifetime. Subnational institutional capacity and autonomy are essential to effectively deliver social investments with learning-by-monitoring policy feedback mechanisms. The shift towards a more service-oriented welfare state has triggered a progressive expansion of the stakeholders involved in territorial service provision.

Countries that do well on early childhood education and care, allowing more parents to enter the labour market, contribute to a life course multiplier, leading to capital stock development – fertility does not decline as fast in regions with good work life balances. Hemerijck proposed two ways to think forward. Firstly, empirical evidence shows that there is a clear need to align these policies (often working in silos with different Ministries in charge) to take be further embedded in the local setting. Secondly, there is an equally important need to encourage laboratories of social investment (as in cities like Amsterdam, Warsaw, Milan), with a risk of failure.

Cohesion Policy can support and boost social investments enabling services to bring long-term well-being returns. Without Cohesion Policy, less developed Member States would probably have few resources left to invest in enabling services after meeting their commitments for social security buffers. Also, Cohesion Policy is a key EU-level instrument for progressing Future of Social Protection and of the Welfare State in the EU (2023) recommendations. Cohesion Policy invests in three types of capital necessary in post-industrial economies: physical, human and social. This has been a strength of Cohesion Policy and should be continued in post 2027 Cohesion Policy. However, there is room to better align Cohesion Policy with social investment.

To conclude, Cohesion Policy has huge leverage potential to deliver social investment and governance with a substantive and long-term focus. However, historically more attention has been given to physical than to social infrastructure, which can be cheaper and more inclusive.

### **Key issues discussed**

The discussion following the presentation involved Andreea-Alexandra Scioşteanu, Helga Trüpel, Joaquim Oliveira Martins, Peter Osvold and Riccardo Crescenzi.

The first issue focused on links between social investment and Youth Guarantee. According to Hemerijck, the good point of Youth Guarantee is that funds are distributed according to needs. The importance of institutional capability in implementing Youth Guarantee was highlighted.

Hemerijck felt that NGEU could have learned from Cohesion Policy but this lies in the character of NGEU. He also mentioned good things about NGEU such as helping to stabilise national unemployment insurance systems. He emphasised the need to take into account the first lessons learnt from NGEU (subnational ownership more aligned with national political ownership,

effective conditionalities, and performance based financing models). A reflection should be undertaken on what NGEU has brought in terms of how to react to crisis.

The third issue concerned links between working from home and service provision. According to Hemerijck there are two concerns: digitalisation and the provision of quality childcare.

Other issues concerned the equity and efficiency trade-off. Investing in younger and older generations must be balanced as a lack of investment in younger generations creates a big risk for pension systems in the long run. 'Pride' should also be embedded in our social policies, as a catalyser for integration.

## **C - Institutional Input**

The public session also included presentations by the ELARD, European LEADER Association for Rural Development, and ALL DIGITAL, followed by discussions.

**Anita Selicka**, invited expert (**ELARD** Council Member and Chair of the Latvian Rural Forum)

Anita Selicka explained the role and mission of ELARD, which unites 29 members from the EU and wider Europe with 2600 Local Action Groups (LAGs). The mission of ELARD is to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to maintain rural populations through sustainable, integrated local development. ELARD promotes the unique LEADER and CLLD methods to support rural and regional development, promote cooperation and influence EU policies.

Cohesion Policy can help strengthen urban-rural links and the role of smaller cities and towns in supporting rural areas. Firstly, it can encourage territorial and inter-fund approaches, based on the fundamental principles of CLLD and its added value. Secondly, Cohesion Policy can build more concrete interventions and links between CAP (EAFRD) and other funds. Thirdly, Cohesion Policy can develop and invest more in tools like smart and start-up villages, energy communities, LEADER and tax incentives for businesses in remote areas. Lastly, support is needed for inter-sectoral rural policy and rural proofing (no-harm principle) at all levels.

During the presentation, it was explained how Cohesion Policy can better address the needs of left-behind places. To start with, Cohesion Policy needs to show more trust towards LEADER and CLLD and empower rural communities and civil society, including developing skills and talent. Moreover, it needs to recognise LAGs as essential partners in rural areas and their active involvement in governments and institutions in a transversal way. Also, it needs to consolidate administrative and financial engineering in rural areas and be more sensitive to the financial needs of left-behind places. Cohesion Policy needs to earmark funds for rural areas, including at least 8% for CLLD. Finally, tailored and holistic support with more communication about European funding and policies in rural areas is needed.

**Claudia Matera**, invited expert (Chief Development Officer – **All Digital**)

Claudia Matera addressed gender inequalities in ICT education and employment. All Digital is a pan-European association representing organisations across Europe that work with many digital competence centres. It supports all Europeans with insufficient digital skills. Digital competence centres play a crucial role in this and face different challenges in rural and urban areas. Centres in rural areas have reduced outreach and everyday support focuses on providing facilities such as access to hardware and software and even internet connections. Centres in urban areas are usually larger, with more diversified offers and the capacity to adapt to change.

Challenges for informal training to strengthen people's digital skills concern infrastructure and equipment for the learning centers (both labs and software) and recognition of informal training provided by the centres.

Government, education and infrastructure are three essential elements for improving digital skills. This also involves the need to provide people with conditions, which allow them to attend digital training sessions and use the skills they gain, e.g. childcare, housing and job opportunities. Furthermore, issues such as digital literacy need to be included in policies. These policies should be implemented while involving the citizens, through place-based policies.

Special attention should also be given to how to encourage the turn from STEM (that represents science, technology, engineering and mathematics) to STEAM (representing STEM plus the arts – humanities, language arts, dance, drama, music, visual arts, design and new media).

### **Key issues discussed**

The discussion following the presentation involved Andreea-Alexandra Scioşteanu, Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, Jasna Gabrič, Peter Osvald and Zornitsa Roussinova.

The discussion raised the issue of prioritising investments in 'software' and 'hardware' due to financial constraints. In many places, infrastructure or 'hardware' is still insufficient. This also concerns access to rooms or multi-functional community centres for (young) people in rural areas. Investment in hardware should come hand in hand with investment in skills (access and development).

Furthermore, the importance of involving local people in defining local strategies and needs was highlighted. This includes ways to build trust in less developed regions and ensure that people do not become 'victims' of where they live.

The diverse needs of different regions was mentioned several times.

### **E - Key discussion points of the internal session**

The internal session of the group was an open discussion about a new narrative for Cohesion Policy with possible rationales to put forward. This also involved considerations such as the importance of trust, democracy, demographic change and the EU's role in the world.

The debate about a new narrative also links to balancing realism and boldness pushing for a stronger focus on cohesion and Cohesion Policy. Another question related to how much Cohesion Policy should be changed. This is an open question, as every change also involves disruption and costs. Currently even the effects of changes introduced in the current programme period are not yet known. The approach put forward is to change only what needs to be changed for the policy to perform better and respond more efficiently to the needs of people and territories.

Within any new Cohesion Policy narrative different rationales could emphasise the need for place-sensitive approaches. This includes the threat that places left behind pose to the future of the EU, the need to address development traps and to link territorial and sector policies.

Members also stressed the importance of trust, the need to address demographic change, challenges to democracy and the EU's role in the world, especially related to competitiveness.

### **3. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions**



The exchanges highlighted the role of Cohesion Policy in addressing diverse developments in European regions.

The EU faces many problems, challenges and mega trends, including demographic and climate change, digitalisation, global competitiveness, democracy challenges and increasing anti-EU sentiment. At the same time the EU shows a lack of dynamism and has been growing slower than most other parts of the world. The lack of dynamism is unevenly distributed across the EU.

Many areas are caught in a development trap as they perform worse in terms of GDP, employment and productivity than they did in the past as well as relative to their neighbours and the rest of the EU. That is creating serious economic, social and political problems concerning people and territories with many people – in all types of territories, irrespective of their level of development – caught in a trap of inadequate opportunities.

Many middle-income areas with limited development and dynamism face development traps, creating economic, social and political problems. This can affect democracy and EU integration and push the inhabitants of places falling behind and seeing increased poverty to political extremes.

Reasons for regions falling into a development trap are linked to:

1. Economic structure, when limited manufacturing growth is associated with a development trap and correlated with non-market services ('assisted economies');
2. Demographic changes, which can result in high dependency ratios;
3. Innovation and skills, when low R&D leads to talented people moving to more dynamic areas;
4. Low institutional quality that can cause a development trap;
5. Consequences of changes in global production networks and global value chains.

Many of these factors also reduce opportunities, and a traditional approach to the welfare state is not enough to address these challenges. It is necessary to rethink Cohesion Policy so it can support regional and local authorities to address such challenges and the lack of development in their areas. It might help to discuss future Cohesion Policy in terms of:

- Three criteria for funding distribution and eligibility based on challenges stemming from a lack of development, the level of economic dynamism and the available opportunities; and
- Three target groups to be addressed:
  - Left behind / lagging regions with low development, which often need investment in infrastructure, education, upskilling and institutional quality;
  - Falling behind / development trapped regions with a lack of dynamism, which would benefit from investments in education, upskilling, innovation, institutional quality, and targeted structure interventions e.g. related to diversification;
  - People caught in opportunity traps (including the young, old and minorities), which need support to address complex challenges such as early childhood education and care, elderly care, education, labour market policies, active aging, lifelong learning, poverty reduction and inclusion. In order to strengthen our social cohesion, it is important to tackle in particular the lack of opportunities via a lifelong intervention type of policy (investments in early childhood education and care, labour markets, work life balance, active ageing).

Better institutions and improved multilevel governance arrangements (at all levels) are crucial to mastering the challenges ahead. This is a fundamental issue, not just for Cohesion Policy.

#### 4. Next steps

The group has six more meetings scheduled up to December 2023, each with an established agenda. All information about these meetings will be published on the group web page: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/how/future-cohesion-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/future-cohesion-policy_en)

##### Next meetings

|                 |                   |   |
|-----------------|-------------------|---|
| Fourth meeting  | 23 May 2023       | Role of place-based policies and development strategies   |
| Fifth meeting   | 04 July 2023      | Reinforcing territorial cooperation and addressing challenges to European integration   |
| Sixth meeting   | 14 September 2023 | Anchoring financial support from the policy in reforms, in the context of the European Semester and in synergy with other EU policies |
| Seventh meeting | 10 October 2023   | Increasing policy effectiveness through renewed conditionality mechanisms   |
| Eighth meeting  | 14 November 2023  | Revisiting the delivery mode/ mechanics taking into account priorities  |
| Ninth meeting   | 14 December 2023  | Enhancing the policy capacity to respond to sudden shocks and crises  |

#### 5. List of participants

##### Speakers:

- Ferreira, Elisa – Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms
- Šuica, Dubravka – Vice-President, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography
- Iammarino, Simona – Professor of Economic Geography, London School of Economics
- Hemerijck, Anton (online) – Professor of Political Science and Sociology, European University Institute
- Selicka, Anita – Council Member of European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD) and Chair of the Latvian Rural Forum
- Matera, Claudia – Chief Development Officer – All Digital

##### Members of the reflection group:

###### In person:

- Andor, László
- Bachtler, John
- Crescenzi, Riccardo
- Finn, Alva (afternoon session)
- Gabrič, Jasna
- Krehl, Constanze
- Lambertz, Karl-Heinz
- Oliveira Martins, Joaquim
- Osvald, Petr
- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés
- Rossi, Enrico
- Roussinova, Zornitsa

- Scrioşteanu, Andreea-Alexandra
- Trüpel, Helga

Online:

- Berès, Pervenche
- Dulkiwicz, Aleksandra
- Finn, Alva (morning session)
- Rautio, Sari