Regions and cities still have little say in post-COVID 19 recovery plans, a new consultation warns

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Weaker plans, misallocated funds and increased territorial disparities are among the main risks identified by local and regional authorities.

As EU leaders gather in Brussels for an extraordinary summit and the European Parliament prepares to present its assessment on the implementation of post-COVID 19 recovery plans, a new CoR-CEMR joint consultation sounds the alarm about the worrying lack of involvement of EU territories in the governance, execution and monitoring of National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) have teamed up again to explore the involvement of local and regional governments in the implementation of the European Union's 724 billion euro Recover and Resilience Facility (RRF), the cornerstone of the post-COVID recovery plan for Europe .

One year after an earlier CoR-CEMR study, the results of the new targeted consultation remain largely discouraging: despite some improvements, too often National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) have been implemented as top-down processes, on which municipalities and regions seemingly have little to no impact.

While respondents were broadly positive about the recovery plans' ability to support the green and digital transitions, they were more ambivalent regarding other policy objectives, such as territorial cohesion.

Regarding the implementation of the NRRPs, only a very small share of local and regional authorities declared having an appropriate role in monitoring, or being sufficiently taken into consideration based on their competencies. Ownership of the plans is therefore worryingly low, the results of the consultation suggest.

In this context, respondents identified a strong risk of failing to reach targets and milestones in the recovery plans. A risk of funds being misallocated was also highlighted by a significant share of participants, while the interplay between the NRRPs and other European funds is still unclear for many of them.

"The lack of involvement of cities and regions in the plans is worrying, but I believe that there is still time to correct course, by ensuring that local and regional governments are recognised – in practice, and not just on paper – as full partners in the recovery plans' implementation. This will allow us to make sure that the RRF is not just an historic agreement, but also a success story on the ground," declared Rob Jonkman (NL/ECR), Alderman of the municipality of Opsterland and CoR's rapporteur on the implementation of the RRF.

CEMR Secretary-General Fabrizio Rossi stated: "Local and regional governments know and understand best the challenges faced by their communities and businesses in the post-pandemic era. Central governments would make a huge error of judgement by failing to work in genuine partnership with Europe's municipalities and regions. Only by all working together can we ensure these national recovery plans respond to the needs of our communities and deliver the outcomes that citizens deserve. "

The CoR-CEMR joint consultation gathered the views and experiences of 26 organisations representing a variety of subnational government levels across 19 EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia. These Member States constitute a variety of size, income, geography, constitutional organisation and administrative culture that is broadly representative of the EU as a whole. The targeted consultation was carried out between mid-January and late March 2022. The results can be consulted here.

The results of the previous CoR-CEMR joint consultation (January 2021) can be consulted here.

Today, Monday 30 May, the committees on Budgets and on Economic and Monetary Affairs of the European Parliament will jointly vote on the "Implementation report on the Recovery and Resilience Facility". Article 16 of Regulation 2021/241 establishing the RRF stipulates that

the Commission shall present to the European Parliament and the Council a review report on the implementation of the Facility by 31 July 2022. The purpose of the European Parliament's report is to provide an input to this review.

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