



November 2019 – Cohesion Policy

How can Managing Authorities better address the needs of their mountain areas and deliver on their obligation to respect article 174 of the TFEU?

Edited by Euromontana.

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Cohesion policy aims “at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions” and states that “**particular attention shall be paid to (...) mountain regions**” according to article 174 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). Yet, between the earmarking for Priority Objectives 1 and 2 and the targeting for urban areas, it is sometimes complicated for Managing Authorities to see how they can pay specific attention to mountain areas. In particular, the Expert analysis on geographical specificities: Mountains, Islands and Sparsely Populated Areas (2018) has shown that there is a gap between programming and implementation - and mountain specificities are too often lost in between.

This factsheet aims at facilitating the work of the Managing Authorities by providing guidance for them to implement some specific and practical tools for their mountain territories.

During the ex-ante evaluation

The specific socio-economic characteristics (access to basic services, physical infrastructures, ICT and access to broadband, demographic trends...) should be analysed and evaluated for the mountain areas. These generally comprise only parts of NUTS2, or even NUTS3, areas. Consequently, this requires more detailed analysis than currently done at NUTS2 level, in order to help to better address the differences within a region and take sub-regional characteristics into account. It could also encourage better analysis of functional areas. More data at the NUTS3 level could also help to improve analysis of the results indicators during the evaluation process.

In addition, an efficient multi-level governance model, involving regional and local authorities together with stakeholders, should be better implemented at regional and sub-regional levels, especially during the elaboration of the territorial strategies and Operational Programmes at a scale that is coherent with the functionality of their area. Adequate consultation with relevant stakeholders can also help.

When designing and implementing Operational Programmes

1 Develop specific tools & strategies for mountain areas

- A more flexible approach could be used, giving the possibility to systematically take into account sub-regions with geographical specificities, including mountain areas. Some regions are already developing such approaches, such as: The “Comités de Massif” in France have established dedicated Operational Programmes for mountain ranges: the **Operational Programmes for the Massif Central, French Pyrenees and the Alps**. This approach is now being replicated in Romania.
- **Macro regional strategies** are a powerful tool to better take into account territorial cohesion and better answer to local needs. The bottom-up governance developed in the Alpine macro-strategy (EUSALP), combined with the active involvement of regions, is key to better address the challenges and opportunities of mountain areas.

2 Encourage the correct use of Priority Objectives

- Mountain areas can clearly contribute to **PO 1 and 2** on *innovation for a smarter Europe and a greener, low carbon Europe*. The [Mountains 2020](#) publication can inspire you with practical examples. As the complexity of challenges increases, an integrated approach is of clear added value with respect to these political objectives.
- **Use POS**: the priority on *Europe closer to EU citizens* can support integrated and place-based strategies through territorial tools such as CLLD, ITI or other territorial instruments. Some specific support for mountain-focused actions can thus be encouraged.
- **Use Technical Assistance** to support governance and capacity building, for instance to better design integrated territorial development strategies or their dedicated tools (CLLD, ITI or other territorial instruments).

3 Encourage the use of adequate tools

- **Develop ITI and CLLD instruments in your region:** these tools can encourage better bottom-up action that responds to local needs and empowering local communities (especially for CLLD). ITIs have been established in Sterea Ellada (GR) focusing on cultural heritage and tourism development in the Mani peninsula; in the Isonzo valley (IT-SI) focusing on cross-border cooperation among three municipalities; and in Valvecchiana 2020 (IT) focusing on Inner peripheries. One CLLD in the INTERREG programme IT - AT focuses on cross-border cooperation. In Tyrol (AT), a CLLD ERDF on urban rural linkages has been established. The use of these instruments should be reinforced in order to better implement integrated approaches to territorial development.
- If you use such ITI and CLLD instruments, **adequate coordination of the different funding schemes (ERDF, ESF, EAFRD) is essential** in order to facilitate multi-funding approaches and ensure similar timing, requested documents and eligibility rules for the reporting, to minimise complexities in implementation for the beneficiaries.
- Be aware of the options concerning **the Lead Fund in Art. 25** of the regulation on the Common Regulations: the relevant Managing Authorities shall organise a joint call for selection of those strategies and establish a joint committee for all the Funds concerned by the strategies. In addition, the Managing Authorities may choose one of the Funds concerned as the Lead Fund. The authorities of other funds shall rely on decisions and management verifications made by the competent Lead Fund authority.
- Plan specific **financial instruments to invest in mountain areas:** while this was not done during the previous programming period, some Managing Authorities have used this approach for islands, for instance.
- **Support building human capacity:** human capacity is lacking to develop local projects and seize all the opportunities. A Managing Authority could have a locally based technical advisor who explains how to use the funds and the adequate tools, and facilitates animation and capacity-building, in order to build human capital. Such advisors can increase local leadership and can help stakeholders to better understand which drivers hinder or support market initiatives in their rural areas. This is critical for long-term benefits, even if it takes time to realise.

4 Encourage simplification

- **Consider the possibility to have more synergies between the different Operational Programmes in one region** (including between the different Operational Programmes of ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund, but also with EAFRD or cross-border or transnational Operational Programmes or other national instruments). To help these synergies, it would be beneficial to have **one monitoring committee** for all the different programmes of the same territory and clear demarcation of tasks and responsibilities for each programme, to avoid costly administrative overlaps or duplication.
- **Consider a one-stop shop for all managing authorities of Structural and Investment Funds at all levels**, to ensure easier access to funding for beneficiaries and a single, uniform monitoring system for the different Structural and Investment Funds. A one-stop shop at EU, national and regional levels encourages better horizontal and vertical integration and more coherence between the funds. Experience from the Tyrol region (AT) shows that such a unique organisation is better identified by potential beneficiaries.
- Use the different options to **simplify the financial management of the funds**, such as lump sums or unit costs. This could help in implementing operations, especially for small projects that do not always have a strong administrative capacity – and can also help to avoid financial errors.

During the selection of the operations to be funded

- Launch **calls for projects** specifically targeting mountain territories
- Use the possibility to **award additional points** for projects in mountain areas or more widely to areas with geographical specificities as recognised in article 174 during the selection process of operations.

During the monitoring of the Operational Programmes

Some key indicators could be analysed at the sub-regional level to better monitor the changes implemented in mountain areas. Do not forget to mention when the operation is funded in a mountain area.

During the ex-post evaluation

Implementation in mountain areas could be systematically evaluated at this sub-regional level. This would allow the Member States and then the Commission to better justify how article 174 of the TFEU is adequately taken into account in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy.

More information:

[DG Regio's new webpage](#) on Mountains, Islands and Sparsely Populated Areas.

Feedback of the event "[Cohesion Policy in mountain areas: How to increase the contributions from mountains and benefits for mountain territories](#)" co-organised by DG Regio and Euromontana on 7th June 2017

Euromontana is the European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories. It embraces regional and national mountain organisations throughout greater Europe, to promote living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas.

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