

European Economic and Social Committee



1. Implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies
2. Sustaining a Coherent Urban-Rural Development Strategy

Study Guide

European Economic and Social Committee Study Guide

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I. LETTERS

1) Letter from the Secretary-General

Esteemed participants,

I would like to welcome you all to EUROsimA 2024. My name is Alkım Özkazanç, and I am a third-year Political Science and Public Administration student at the Middle East Technical University. This year, I will be serving as the Secretary-General of this esteemed conference during its 20th annual session. EUROsimA has always held a special place for me since my first participation in the conference back in 2019; thus, being able to contribute to such a valuable session simply fills me with pride and excitement. An incredible amount of hard work has been dedicated to this conference, so I am confident that EUROsimA 2024 will not break the tradition and satisfy its participants as perhaps the most academically qualified Model European Union (MEU) simulation in Türkiye.

Our academic team, consisting of competent students who come from different departments and universities yet are definitely united by a strong team spirit, is the reason why I have been able to make the claim that stands just a few lines above. The Under-Secretaries-General and the Academic Assistants have been working hard for the last few months to produce a conference that is rich in content and educatory. I would like to thank every member of the academic team for their commitment.

Moreover, I would like to especially thank our Director-General, Miss Deren Ertan, whose support and company I can never disregard. I am quite grateful for her motivation, diligence, and solidarity, all of which she has exercised to an excellent degree. Seeing her and her team's efforts assures me that EUROsimA 2024 is going to be an unforgettable experience for all participants. Thus, I would like to thank every member of the organisation team for their commitment as well.

EUROsimA 2024 will mark the first time the European Economic and Social Committee has been simulated in EUROsimA. This committee is quite a unique one since the participants in this committee will represent one of the three groups that constitute the European civil society. Thus, the participants will be approaching the problems that are usually seen to be the politicians' concern from the perspective of the civil society. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Miss Eylül Temizkan, who is a very dear and old friend of mine, and Academic Assistant Eda Salik for being bold enough to work towards organising this committee, which has never been simulated in EUROsimA before.

I strongly advise the participants to read the study guides in detail in order to get a firm understanding of the agenda item and to fully immerse themselves in their committees. Only through that immersion could one get a full taste of the committee and accumulate good memories. After this short piece of advice, I would like to once again welcome you all to EUROsimA 2024, hoping that it will be a remarkable experience for you.

Kind Regards,

Alkım Özkazanç

Secretary-General of EUROsimA 2024

2) Letter from the Under-Secretary-General

Most distinguished participants,

I am Eylül Temizkan – a third year architecture student at Middle East Technical University. My journey within EUROsimA started almost three years ago as an academic assistant in the European Parliament. Then, I also had the chance to serve as the Under-Secretary-General of the same committee, and now, here I am, pleased to be a part of this family in the twentieth annual session of EUROsimA.

European Economic and Social Committee was established in 1958 and is a consultative body of the European Union. As a result of the studies of three groups, which are employers, workers, and civil society organizations, the decision-making process of the European Union proceeds in a way close to the citizens.

Two significant agenda items will be discussed in EUROsimA 2024 within the European Economic and Social Committee. The first one is “Sustaining a Coherent Urban-Rural Development Strategy.” At the present time, rapid urbanization is a fact of our lives and directly affects us as the inhabitants of the planet Earth. In this respect, pursuing sustainable urban and rural development policies is a highly crucial aspect of the green transition. The second agenda item is “Implementation of EU Macro-Regional Strategies.” This topic of discussion is not completely disconnected from the regional and urban development agenda in the European Union. While concentrating on broader areas of study, macro-regional strategies have a vital role in the way of determining the EU’s large-scale affairs in many regions.

I would like to give a voice to my appreciation for our Secretary-General, Mr. Alkım Özkazanç. Our friendship goes back to our freshman years in high school and I can undoubtedly say that he is one of the most talented, hard-working people I have ever met. Due to my busy schedule as a student majoring in architecture, I was not the most creditable person about sticking to deadlines during this process. Still, Alkım has not refrained from supporting me once and is the person who deserves the biggest thanks both in a professional and companionate manner.

The other person who is entitled to receive big admiration is my academic assistant – Eda Salik. Eda has put a lot of effort into this period of time, and especially for the agenda about EU’s macro-regional strategies, she played an indispensable role. She certainly did a great job and took half of the responsibility off my hands.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the hard-working organization team led by our Director-General, Deren Ertan.

I hope this conference will be a recallable experience for all of the participants. Do not forget that a good idea only works if we get it right. You can always reach me at temizkan@eurosima.org for your inquiries.

Sincerely yours,

Eylül Temizkan

Under-Secretary-General Responsible for the European Economic and Social Committee

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Being established in 1958, the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** is one of the main advisory bodies of the European Union. Groups of employers, workers, and civil society organisations take part in the EESC's work in order to include the civil society and non-governmental stakeholders in the decision-making process of the European Union. The **opinions** published by the EESC are a result of those interest groups' joint work and have a legal basis for influencing the legislative actions of the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, and the European Parliament (European Economic and Social Committee n.d.).

III. AGENDA ITEM A: IMPLEMENTATION OF EU MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

1) Introduction to the Agenda Item

a. Introduction to Macro-Regional Strategies

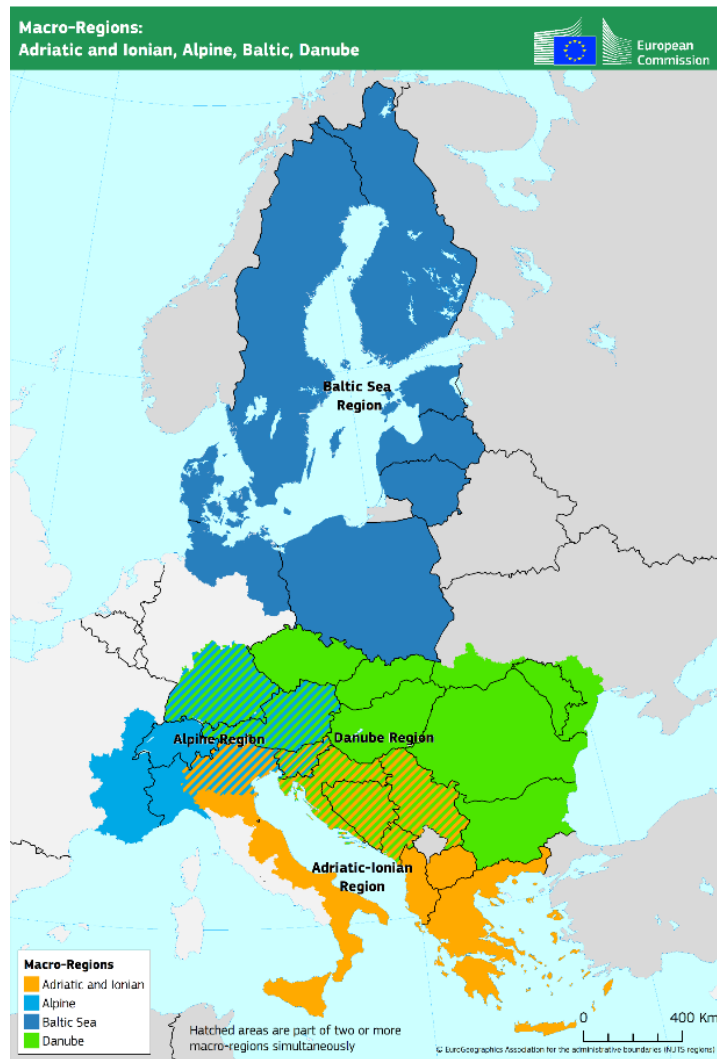
The **Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS)** serve as collaborative frameworks that foster networks among stakeholders to create a transnational, cross-sectoral tapestry of expertise and to reach the potential for enhanced cooperation, value creation, and prosperity. Its main goal is to increase institutional capacities, and to enable the development of innovative and inclusive services that empower individuals and stakeholders within specific regions. These frameworks are intended to reach this aim through the encouragement of active participation in various projects over the medium to long term (European Commission 2022, 1).

A macro-regional strategy, as defined by the European Council, is “a comprehensive framework aimed at tackling shared challenges within a specified geographical region, involving Member States and third countries.” Such strategies foster enhanced cooperation, supported by various

mechanisms including the **European Structural and Investment Funds**, ultimately advancing economic, social, and territorial cohesion (European Commission 2017, 1).

An MRS provides several opportunities to the countries located in the same region to advance the cooperation and coordination among themselves (European Commission 2017, 2). Both EU and non-EU states are part of these strategies, though all are supported by the EU institutions. During the formation and operation of MRSs, strong linkages between governments and the commitments of those governments are essential to overcome common problems and to reach advantages from these partnerships. The responsibility does not only lie on the governments. To offer the strategic coordination of the strategy's key delivery phases, the **European Commission** encourages fundamental partners and follows and prepares reports related to MRSs to protect the interests of EU. The formation of a balance between the leadership of participant governments, inclusive regions and the Commission is necessary to achieve the goals of MRSs (European Commission 2019, 6).





A Map of EU Macro-Regions (European Commission n.d.a)

b. Historical Background of EU Macro-Regional Strategies

EU has adopted four macro-regional strategies, each named after their respective macro-region: the **Baltic Sea Region** (2009), the **Danube Region** (2010), the **Adriatic and Ionian Region** (2014), and the **Alpine Region** (2015). Altogether, they cover 27 countries and over 340 million people (European Commission 2017, 2).

The first EU strategy, the **EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)**, was adopted through a communication and action plan issued by the European Commission in 2009 to cover the Baltic Sea basin and its surrounding hinterlands. The Strategy covers approximately 85

million people and the territory of eight EU members: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden. It is the second largest and most varied macro-regional strategy among EU Member States (European Commission 2022, 7).

The **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)** was officially established on April 13, 2011, following the endorsement of the communication and accompanying action plan on the EUSDR. The action plan underwent a comprehensive revision between 2019 and 2020. Encompassing the basin of the 2,857 km long Danube River, along with the originating areas of its tributaries (such as the Alps or the Carpathians), the EUSDR spans a region inhabited by approximately 115 million people. Involving 14 countries, it stands as the largest and most diverse macro-regional strategy, covering the territories of nine EU member states: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, parts of Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia. It also covers the territories of five non-EU members: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Moldova, and parts of Ukraine (European Commission 2022, 22).

Formally adopted on 29 September 2014, the **EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)** serves as a pivotal instrument aimed at nurturing social, economic, and territorial cohesion to mitigate disparities within the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. It covers the territories of four EU Member States (Greece, Croatia, segments of Italy, and Slovenia), five candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia), and San Marino as a third-party participant (European Commission 2016, 34-35).

The **EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)** is an MRS with seven participant countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, and Switzerland. On 28 July 2015, the Commission approved both a communication and an action plan for the EUSALP. This decision was informed by various inputs, including an online public consultation conducted in 2014, as well as discussions held during the **Stakeholder Conference on the EU**

Strategy for the Alpine Region in Milan, which was held in December 2014 (European Commission 2016, 45-46).

Since 2016, the Commission has regularly prepared implementation reports and **staff working documents (SWD)** to compile detailed knowledge related to the MRSs implementation processes. These documents are prepared by contributions from the MRSs **national coordinators (NCs), thematic coordinators (TCs), and experts** (European Commission 2022, 1).

2) The Fundamental Priorities in The Implementation of MRSs

a. Thematic Priorities Based on European Green Deal and Digital Transition

The EU MRSs relate to the **European Green Deal (EGD)**¹ through a cross-sectoral approach based on multi-level governance and wide stakeholder involvement. In addition, these strategies provide some opportunities for the integration of Western Balkans states and other EU candidates to this EGD. For instance, some key strategic documents about the EGD explicitly mention the contribution brought by the MRSs (European Commission 2022, 2-3).

To give an example, a Commission communication published in 2021 about **Sustainable Blue Economy**² emphasizes the embedding of MRS into the national programming of funds, especially for the MRSs that have a strong maritime dimension. Also, **the EU Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy** and the **REPowerEU Plan** are among the essential strategies that have produced guidelines widely applicable during the implementation of the MRSs. The EU Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy states that it is necessary to boost regional cooperation with the assistance of MRSs to ensure the achievement of large-scale offshore renewable energy

¹ The European Green Deal (EDG) is a widescale EU initiative that aims to proliferate green practices across Europe through numerous projects in order to achieve green transition and to make Europe a carbon-neutral continent by 2050 (Silva 2021).

² Sustainable Blue Economy refers to economic an economic model that utilises sustainable practices while interacting with oceans, seas, and other bodies of water (The Commonwealth n.d.).

planning and deployment. Likewise, the REPowerEU Plan highlights the impact of the MRSs to encourage cooperation and coordination in the investments in hydrogen infrastructure (European Commission 2022, 2).



(QazaqGreen 2023)

MRSs are among the influential documents that shape green and digital transitions since they have ties to the **European Digital Strategy**. For both EUSBSR and EUSDR, digital transformation is a cross-cutting objective. Connecting people electronically and supporting the accessibility of public services from remote areas is a fundamental point for EUSALP. Being related to the awareness of innovation and digital transformation in MRSs, these objectives were among the thematic priorities under the Slovak presidency of EUSDR in 2021. Thanks to their focus on innovation and digital transition, the MRSs have improved several innovative projects and approaches. For example, EUSBSR has supported eco-efficiency in the maritime sector in the Baltic Sea through the finding and encouragement of digital solutions developed by industry end-users and research organizations. EUSDR brought instrumental methods in cutting red tape for the shipping industry through the introduction of harmonized and digitalized

control documents. Also, it has increased transnational cooperation among schools to encourage the digital skills of teachers in the Danube Region. Moreover, EUSAIR has supported the development of a network of sustainable tourism businesses and clusters in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. The network targets the adoption and implementation of the **EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)**, the **European Tourism Indicators System for Sustainable Destination Management (ETIS)**, and other green (sustainable) certification schemes. To take steps for digital transformation, the EUSALP began the **smart digital transformation** in the villages of the Alpine region (European Commission 2022, 2-3).

b. The Focus on Social Change

The green and digital transition influences the emergence of new realities through a social transition. Technological development, globalization, and a drive for rationalization profoundly impact the European labour market and cause a demand for new skills, swift adaptation, and strong resilience. In recent years, demographic change, the pandemic, the inflow of refugees, and a general trend of polarisation in Europe have been a part of this social transition. In this process, the MRS could be useful to mobilize stakeholders by providing advanced assistance to them as much as possible (European Commission 2022, 3-4).

The EUSDR, through the **Social Entrepreneurship Education and Development Hub (SI PLUS)**, supports social innovation. The **Baltic Sea Labour Forum for Sustainable Working Life** emphasizes the role of demographic challenges, and it defends active aging and lifelong learning in the EUSBSR. To indicate the awareness of social innovation, the **Alpine Social Innovation Strategy** plans to determine a new vision of social innovation for raising the innovation capacity of EUSALP regions by finding solutions to new challenges. Also, the EUSAIR has supported investment in different fields related to skills and education to achieve a more sustainable blue economy in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Regarding this goal, vocational

and entrepreneurial skills and training were defined by EUSAIR as the main priorities while promoting sustainable tourism practices (European Commission 2022b, 56-60).

c. The Encouragement of Cohesion and Place-Based Development

To improve economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU and to overcome imbalances among states or regions, there is a close connection between four MRSs and the **EU Cohesion Policy**³. At both the local and regional levels, a place-based approach in cohesion policy is supported to get some advantages through partnerships at macro-regional level under the guidance of main European principles. In other words, these initiatives focus on managing the negative impacts of climate change by enabling interaction between local governments and national civil protection bodies, supporting the resilience of mountain and rural villages, and improving small-scale territorial brands in the agri-food sector. To promote entrepreneurship, transnational clusters, and digital innovation hubs and equality between men and women in the fields of entrepreneurship and innovation, active and bottom-up approaches have been encouraged. Despite these achievements, there are still several areas in which the benefits of MRSs are not clearly felt, especially at the local level (European Commission 2022a, 4).

³ The EU Cohesion Policy is the EU Policy aimed at ensuring that there are no gaps (in development) between the different areas of the EU (European Investment Bank n.d.).



(Peddinti 2022)

d. The Partnership Among MRSs, Civil Society, Local Stakeholders and Youth

The **Cross-MRS Shadow Report** states that in the process of cooperation and coordination between MRSs and local bodies and regional authorities, **civil society organisations (CSOs)** could be instrumental to provide some contributions for better decision-making. Civil society is an integral part of the MRSs' implementation process as their inclusion enables participatory planning, the construction of a community, and empowerment both in the contexts of EUSAIR and EUSDR. For instance, the **Forum of the Adriatic Ionian Chambers of Commerce (Forum AIC)**, the **Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities (FAIC)**, and the **Association of the Universities of the Adriatic and Ionian Region (UNIADRION)** accommodate inside them around 120 organisations that actively participate in the implementation of MRSs. Other platforms involve the **Danube Civil Society Forum (DCSF)**, **Danube Networkers for Europe (DANET)**, and the **European House**. Furthermore, CSOs play a pivotal role in the implementation of EUSBSR through their activeness in some specific areas such as education, culture, health and tourism and several action group activities (European Commission 2022a, 4-6).

All MRSs recognise the importance of bringing the youth in their governance mechanisms since the youth's problems and interest are of a special concern for the MRSs. Regarding the encouragement of Youth, EUSALP became the first MRS to create a **Youth Council** in 2021. EUSALP offered some opportunities such as giving a responsibility to the youth in the governance of some projects, and organising summer camp programmes and future participative online platforms. Similarly, the **Danube Youth Council and Youth Organisations' Network (DYC)** was founded under the scope of EUSDR (European Commission 2022a, 4-6).

e. Better Access to Funding and Embedding

The **Interreg** transnational programmes, albeit resource-constrained, play a catalytic role in supporting MRSs. They focus on the alignment of national/regional EU funding with MRS priorities, which is to be supported by the establishment of managing authority networks and thematic workshops. Also, financial dialogue networks could be useful to create connections between MRS projects and available funding streams. Still, challenges persist in harmonizing diverse EU funding sources, requiring increased collaboration and synergy among stakeholders. Also, political commitments need to be later translated into tangible actions that involve businesses; thus, encouraging participation in EU project calls is imperative. (European Commission 2022b, 20-21).

f. Monitoring and Evolution

Despite the contributions of MRSs to the process of cooperation among states and regions, there are still some challenges related to the complexity of measuring or reporting their MRSs' achievements. To resolve that issue, the European Commission has advised that the MRSs should explore the overall macro-regional territorial monitoring instrument (improved by the **European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON)**) for following development

trends in relation to MRSs and reconsidering policy targets accordingly. Furthermore, comprehensive monitoring mechanisms could facilitate maintaining political support and help policymakers understand both the strong and weak aspects of each strategy (European Commission 2022b, 16-21).

g. Better Communication in the Implementation of MRSs

Due to the emergence of a political landscape influenced by the war and the pandemic, MRSs have been increasingly focusing on solidarity and cooperation in the recent years. As a result, the need to improve communication with stakeholders (including the citizens) and craft a common narrative surrounding MRSs have become more apparent (European Commission 2022b, 18-21). Thus, the improvement of communication methods has proved vital for the preservation and strengthening of MRSs. For instance, social media platforms are being frequently used to promote MRSs projects, such as those under the scope of EUSALP. In addition, the **EU MRS Week Events** are annually held in Brussels to create a forum of interaction among MRSs stakeholders, EU representatives, CSOs, academics, and citizens; those events also help concentrate attention on the EU's priorities during the implementation of MRSs (European Commission 2022a, 10-11). Overall, it could be said that the efforts for expanding the communication channels between MRS stakeholders and the wider public prove important for increasing the effectiveness of the MRSs.

3) Detailed Description of EU Macro-Regional Strategies

a. EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

The **European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)** is the first MRS in the EU, which was approved in 2009. It is an EU macro-regional strategy formed by the EU to provide cooperation and coordination with open and transparent participation, inclusiveness and multi-level governance. It brings into light both common problems and opportunities that

could be more efficiently addressed by working together with states across the region (European Commission 2021, 4-8).

The main objectives of this MRS are defined under three main pillars which are 1) *the protection of the sea*, 2) *connecting the region* and 3) *improving prosperity*. It facilitates the mobilisation of all relevant EU funding and policies and manages the activities of European Union, EU countries, pan-Baltic organisations, financing institutions and non-governmental bodies to enable a balanced development of the Baltic Sea Region (European Commission 2021, 6).

Moreover, there are many sub-objectives of the strategy such as *clear water in the sea, rich and healthy wildlife, clean and safe shipping, good transport conditions, reliable energy markets, connecting people in the region, Baltic Sea Region as a frontrunner for deepening and fulfilling the single market, EUSBSR contributing to the implementation of Europe 2020 strategy, climate change adaptation, and risk prevention and management* (European Commission 2021, 6).

The activity arena of the EUSBSR is thematically divided into 14 **policy areas (PAs)** that have to concern EU climate and environmental principles: *PA Nutri, PA Hazards, PA Bioeconomy, PA Ship, PA Safe, PA Transport, PA Energy, PA Spatial Planning, PA Secure, PA Tourism, PA Culture, PA Innovation, PA Health and PA Education*. Each policy area (PA) covers activities that are undertaken to realise the objectives of EUSBSR. These activities could be projects (single or grouped in clusters), processes, networks, or platforms; on the other hand, they are not limited to them (European Commission 2021, 12-14).

Thanks to the wide thematic coverage of the policy areas, there are several opportunities for several stakeholders to participate and suggest many activities. In addition to supporting the building-up of longer-term networks and platforms, the participation of new stakeholders and the introduction of novel ideas and initiatives are encouraged through EUSBSR. (European Commission 2021, 12-14).

EUSDR is mainly covers the basin of the 2,857 km long Danube River and parts of some mountain ranges like the Alps or the Carpathians where its tributaries originate. Since it covers the territories of fourteen countries and a total of 115 million inhabitants, it is considered the largest and most diverse MRS (European Commission 2016, 21-34).

This MRS's **presidency** is given to an EUSDR-participating country for one year, following an alphabetic list of the participating countries (European Commission 2022b, 56-73). At national and regional level, ministers from 14 member states of the strategy provide strategic knowledge and reliable political commitment for the pursuit of EUSDR. Moreover, the European Commission's **Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)** manages the strategy at the policy level via in cooperation with the **High-Level Group (HLG)**. This is to facilitate and encourage the cooperation and coordination of states in the implementation of the strategy while offering better interlinkage and communication among Danube region stakeholders. In addition, the European Commission publishes a report to evaluate the influences of EUSDR's implementation every two years; subsequently, the HLG makes recommendations to the Commission about different aspects of EUSDR coordination and monitoring. The HLG coordination and monitoring through the strategy, considers the process of implementation and might offer policy orientation and strategic assistance by the official representatives from all EUSDR EU Member States and non-EU states (D'Ambrogio and van Lierlop 2022, 3-6).

There are several common challenges in the region of EUSDR such as environmental threats (water pollution, floods, climate change), untapped shipping potential and lack of modern road and rail, transport connections, insufficient energy connections, uneven socio-economic development, uncoordinated education, research and innovation systems, and shortcomings in safety and security. Furthermore, the differences among partners, economic difficulties (such as a shortage of funding), a gap in the alignment of funds, climate crisis, and recovery of

pandemic and digital transition impact the implementation of the EUSDR in a negative way. In addition to these challenges, the continuation of Russo-Ukrainian has undermined the EUSDR implementation process due to the damage it has incurred over the Ukrainian regions that participate in the EUSDR (European Commission, 56-73).

Several opportunities have been made available to the region's inhabitants that have been realised through the implementation of EUSDR: fast and cleaner transport through road and rail and developments in the navigability of rivers, cheaper and more secure energy with the assistance of stronger connections and alternative sources, a more sustainable environment thanks to cleaner water, protected biodiversity, cross-border flood prevention. (European Commission 2022b, 22-38).

The priorities of EUSDR have been defined through 12 priority areas that focus on transport connections, energy connections, the environment socio-economic development, and security (European Commission 2022b, 22-38).

Like other MRSs, EUSDR does not possess its own budget that could be used for the implementation of its projects. As a result, there is an economic dependency of the strategy to the mobilisation of funds from other resources; such resourced include the EU-wide, national, regional and private funds (D'Ambrogio and van Lierlop 2022, 6).



A Map of the Regions Participating in the EUSDR (European Commission n.d.c)

c. EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)

The **EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)** was adopted on 29 September 2014. It is an instrument to encourage social, economic and territorial cohesion and to reduce inequalities in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region with through cooperation among the members of EUSAIR. A total of ten states participate in EUSAIR (European Commission 2022b, 38-56). There are six main pillars highlighted by EUSAIR: 1) *blue growth*, 2) *connecting the region*, 3) *environmental quality*, 4) *sustainable tourism*, 5) *funding and monitoring*, 6) *reporting and evolution*. (European Commission 2020, 7-19).

Currently, the Adriatic and Ionian Region lacks clustering and fails to fully leverage the benefits of enhanced cooperation among research centres, public, and private sectors. Insufficient involvement of stakeholders and interrelation among business, research, and the public sector hinder the development of a business resource efficient culture in the region. Key sectors like shipbuilding, boating, and logistics risk losing competitiveness, while others such as marine and blue bio technologies remain underdeveloped. In order to optimize sustainable economic

growth, job creation, and the establishment of businesses centred on blue technologies, it is essential to bolster the exchange of expertise between research and business sectors, enhance their networking and collaboration capabilities, and facilitate better access to seed and venture capital (European Commission 2020, 3-7).

Also, the Adriatic-Ionian Region exhibits notable imbalances and is currently experiencing substantial political transformation. Consequently, bridging political divides is of utmost importance, along with enhancing institutional capacity and management mechanisms that transcend national borders. Mutual trust among neighbouring countries is essential, especially considering that many participants of EUSAIR are undergoing an EU accession process. This process necessitates a shift in mindsets, heightened awareness, confidence-building among public and private stakeholders, and skill enhancement (European Commission 2020, 30-34).

Related to the **blue growth**, the fields of *blue technologies, fisheries and aquaculture*, and *maritime and marine governance and services* are considered. For instance, fisheries and aquaculture play vital roles in blue growth within the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Their social, cultural, and economic significance is especially pronounced at the local and regional levels, particularly in islands and remote areas. EUSAIR targets sustainable and responsible fisheries to ensure continued income generation for coastal communities in the long term (European Commission 2020, 13-19). The establishment of a robust, environment-friendly aquaculture sector (that is both economically sustainable and contributing to job growth and the provision of nutritious food) is necessary. However, several obstacles hinder the realization of aquaculture's full potential in the Adriatic-Ionian Sea basin: absence of a unified policy regarding space access and licensing, industry fragmentation, restricted access to seed funding or innovation loans, and bureaucratic administrative procedures (European Commission 2020, 19-22). In the field of *maritime and marine governance and services*, EUSAIR concentrates on the collaboration across various services; especially collaboration between those associated with

capacity-building in the public sector and the improved coordination of planning activities is essential to lay the groundwork for enhanced cooperation in this field. (European Commission 2020, 26-30).

The primary goal of *connecting the region* is to enhance connectivity within the region and with the rest of Europe with respect to transportation and energy networks. Achieving this necessitates a comprehensive coordination of infrastructure projects and enhanced operation of transport and energy systems among the region's countries. The macro-region grapples with significant infrastructure disparities, particularly between long-time EU Member States and others, which have suffered from years of isolation and conflict. Improved transport and energy links are essential requirements for the macro-region's development and are vital for its economic and social progress. Environmental impacts, such as air emissions, are also considered and given importance under this pillar. Infrastructure initiatives should be integrated into a broader sustainable transport strategy that aligns with local and regional air quality plans (European Commission 2020, 22-34).

The specific objectives of the *connecting the region* pillar are distributed across three key areas. First, there's a focus on *enhancing maritime safety and security*, along with the development of a competitive regional intermodal port system. This initiative aims to ensure efficient logistics and safeguard vital maritime interests. Second, efforts are directed towards *establishing reliable transport networks and intermodal connections with the hinterland*⁴, facilitating smooth transit for both freight and passengers. This effort promotes accessibility and connectivity, both of which are crucial for economic growth and societal advancement. Lastly, there is a desire *to create a well-interconnected and robust internal energy market* that aligns with the EU's energy

⁴ A **hinterland** refers to the remote areas of a country away from the coast or the banks of major rivers.

policy objectives of competitiveness, security of supply, and sustainability (European Commission 2020, 22-34).

The overarching goal of the *environmental quality* pillar is to address environmental quality concerns, covering marine, coastal, and terrestrial ecosystems within the region. Recognizing the critical role of environmental health in sustaining human activities and fostering economic and social well-being, the pillar emphasizes cooperation at the macro-regional level. Specific objectives include ensuring a favourable environmental and ecological status of the marine and coastal environment by 2020 and aligning with relevant EU regulations. Additionally, the pillar aims to support the **EU Biodiversity Strategy** by halting biodiversity loss and ecosystem service degradation by 2020, while also enhancing waste management to reduce pollution in rivers and seas (European Commission 2020, 40-50).

The fourth pillar, spearheaded by Croatia and Albania, is centred on *sustainable tourism*, recognizing its intricate connections with key chapters such as *enterprise and industrial policy* and *education and culture within the enlargement process*. The EUSAIR holds a strategic position in aiding the tourism sector in the Western Balkans recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while simultaneously bolstering its resilience. Leveraging its remarkable natural beauty and rich cultural, historical, and archaeological heritage, the EUSAIR foster a macro-regional identity and brand. This strategic approach aims to broaden market reach and mitigate seasonality challenges within the region (European Commission 2020, 51-63).

The EUSAIR operates without additional EU funds; however, it leverages resources from existing EU, national, and regional funds in a manner similar to the other MRSs (European Commission 2020, 64-66).

heightened competitiveness and innovation to maintain its status as a major economic force, and demographic shifts, including aging populations and evolving migration patterns, pose intricate social and economic dilemmas. In addition to them, climate change threatens the region's environment, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of its inhabitants. Furthermore, the region's unique geographical position as a transit hub, coupled with its distinctive natural features, adds complexity to the global energy landscape. Addressing these challenges necessitates strategic collaboration and innovative solutions to ensure the region's continued prosperity and resilience (European Commission 2016, 45-52).

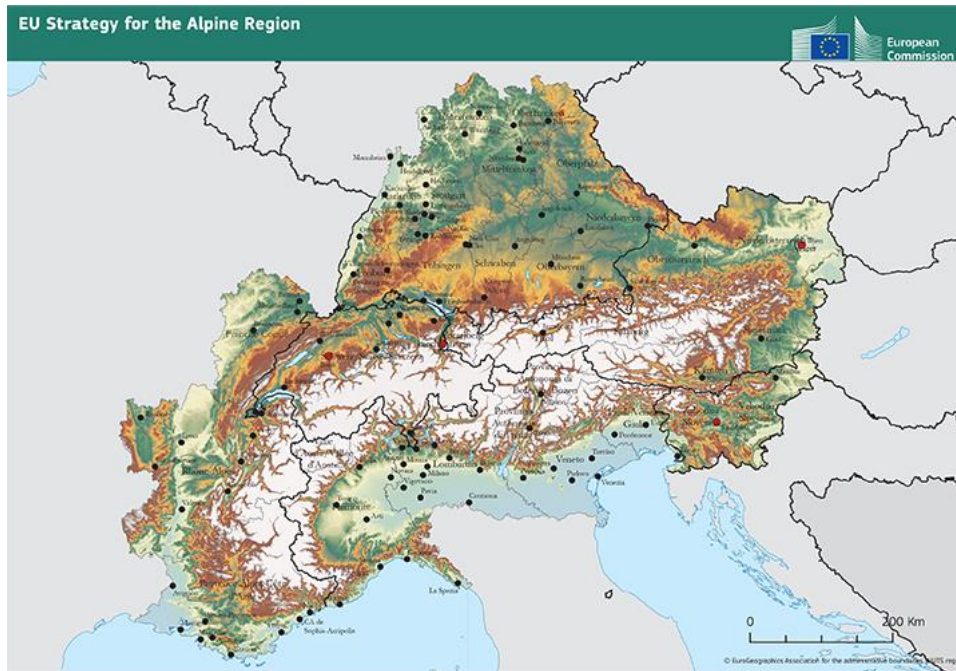
The Strategy for the Alpine Region heralds a transformative paradigm, fostering a novel relationship among metropolitan and mountain areas. The strategy champions three thematic priorities. First, it seeks to bolster competitiveness and innovation, driving economic growth and vitality through enhanced competitiveness and innovation across the region's diverse landscapes. Second, it prioritizes *environmentally friendly mobility*, advocating for *sustainable transportation solutions* to minimize environmental impact and improve connectivity within and beyond the Alpine region. Lastly, it emphasizes the *Sustainable Management of Energy, Natural, and Cultural Resources*, advocating responsible stewardship to safeguard the region's unique heritage and foster long-term sustainability (EUSALP 2020, 1-7).

Environmental challenges are one of the main concerns for Alpine region. For instance, climate change is one of the main targets of the programme regarding environmental protection. In this field, the activities made by EUSALP follow the priorities of European Green Deal. In 2020-2021, the French presidency encouraged green transition in the region to fight against climate change. Also, the Italian presidency (2022) stated that the EUSALP region could be the first carbon-neutral macro region through the objectives of EU Climate Action and the European Green Deal. In other words, EUSALP provides several opportunities for the implementation of the European Green Deal's targets. It could be useful for coordination in decision-making and

action cross-sectoral approaches, multi-level governance and stakeholder involvement. Moreover, digitalisation is among the priorities of the programme. It has a high potential to realise green transition via digitalisation. For example, **Smart Villages Project** got funds from **Interreg Alpine Space Programme**. Between 2020 and 2022, the creation of the **Digital Exchange Platform**, the establishment of **Smart Alps Network**, policy recommendations for digitalisation demonstrated the increasing importance of digitalisation in the region (European Commission 2022b, 56-59).

The administration of the programme is distributed between the **General Assembly**, the **Executive Board** and the **Action Groups**. The General Assembly consists of the Commission, Alpine Convention, observers, state or region representatives who are responsible for general political framework of EUSALP. In the Executive Board, representatives from states or regions, Interreg Alpine Space Programme, representatives from Commission, Alpine Convention and observers are the key actors. Lastly, action groups provide the implementation of the projects (European Commission 2022b, 56-62).

The Strategy operates without additional EU financial resources, and it utilizes existing funds through an integrated approach. The countries in the Alpine region may use the funding received through EU cohesion policy, other EU programs and financial instruments, as well as resources from various international financial institutions to support EUSALP's implementation (EUSALP 2020, 1-7).



A Map of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (European Commission n.d.e)

4) Questions to be Answered

- 1- What are the characteristics of a macro-region?
- 2- How and in what ways can the macro-regional strategies impact the territorial cohesion in relation with economic and social cohesion?
- 3- How do macro-regional strategies act as intermediary occasions between national and federal points of views?
- 4- Is the involvement of the civil society (and the relevant stakeholders) enhanced within the macro-regional strategies? If so, in what ways?
- 5- Can the cohesion policy strategies be improved within the macro-regional strategies at European level? If so, what could be the instruments of this process?
- 6- What is the position of regional development policies under the macro-regional policies with respect to urban agenda?
- 7- What is the role of environmental agenda within the framework of macro-regional strategies?
- 8- How do the macro-regional strategies add value to the European identity?

- 9- What are the roles of “macro-regional cooperation opportunities” and macro-regional strategies in terms of sustaining a prosperous way of foreign affairs?
- 10- In what ways can the macro-regional strategies enrich Europe’s wholesome development strategy?
- 11- What are the prerequisites of a “good” macro-regional governance?
- 12- What is the importance of “place-based approach” within the macro-regional policies of the European Union?
- 13- How can the disparities between different regions should be tackled in accordance with the concept of “urban-rural linkage”?
- 14- How can the macro-regional policies affect the small and medium sized settlements?
- 15- How can the macro-regional strategies impact the problem-solving processes in the dense urban areas with a specific focus on climate crisis?
- 16- How can the macro-regional strategies work in the way of empowering different age groups, especially the youth?

IV. AGENDA ITEM B: SUSTAINING A COHERENT URBAN-RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

1) Introduction to the Agenda

In today's world, establishing a strong interrelation between urban agenda and rural development is a must in the way of achieving sustainability within cities and rural settings. In this direction, there are multiple aspects to take into consideration because this issue is a wholesome composite of different layers concerning urban and rural sustainability. Ecological, social, cultural, and economic sustainability are all significant tiers of this concept, and it would not be possible to analyse the situation by considering these concepts separately. In this respect, the problems should be handled by making considerations about the place of various professions and interest groups within the agenda. Thus, the essence of this agenda is to question the built environments around us through critical thinking and in connection with the processes of urbanization. (Zeng et al. 2022, 16)

a. Explanation of the Key Terms

Urban: The term “urban” refers to any type of relation to a city. Being the root word for other concepts such as but not limited to “urbanism” and “urbanization”, this term stands as one of the most fundamental notions in the terminology surrounding development studies. (Vlahov and Galea 2002, 3)

Urbanism: Urbanism is a term that addresses the way inhabitants of urban settlements interact with the surrounding built environment. The term was first introduced by *Ildefons Cerdà Sunyer*, a Spanish urban planner and civil engineer, and it actually highlights the intersection of different disciplines like urban planning and urban sociology (Wirth 1938).

Urbanisation: Urbanisation is the process which demonstrates the shift from rural to “more urban”. This term is often confused with the concept of **urban growth**, which actually refers to

an increase in the exact number of people living in urban areas while **urbanization** refers to an increase in the proportion of the urban population to the total national population. (Vlahov and Galea 2002, 5)

Rural: In the most basic terms, rural settlements function as the opposite of the urban structures as cities and towns are excluded from the attribute “rural” by definition. The local economies of the rural settlements mainly depend on forestry, agriculture, and resource extraction. Considering the fact that the world population shifts towards urban areas, the urbanization process and the sustainability aspect of this process is highly significant for comprehending the interconnection between “urban” and “rural”.

Sustainability: Often reduced only to an ecological perspective by the general public, the concept of sustainability actually covers a much wider scope. The ecological, cultural, social, and economical aspects of sustainability could not be treated separately, especially when the compact form of human settlements is taken into consideration. With respect to this matter, the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** should be celebrated as they have set the fundamental guidelines for achieving an equal, just, and sustainable way of communal life. (Zeng et al. 2022, 16)

Regional Development Policy: While being a broad term and involving many paradigms, regional development policy refers to a general effort for reducing the economic gaps and inequalities of opportunity, and thus enhancing the welfare of public, within a specific region. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development n.d.) (Lagendijk and Cornford 2000, 209)

b. Primary Considerations

i. Cohesion Policy

Cohesion Policy is the general regional policy of the European Union and aims to reduce regional disparities within EU Member States. The policy supports all regions of the European Union regardless of their urban, rural, or transitory⁵ characteristic. The Cohesion Policy's five main objectives are *job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and improvements to citizens' quality of life*. (European Commission n.d.) 392 billion euros has been allocated for the 2021-2027 period of this initiative, which roughly corresponds to the one third of the total EU budget. Funding of the Cohesion Policy is provided via four different specific funds which are the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Cohesion Fund (CF), European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and the Just Transition Fund (JTF)**.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was established with the aim of making Europe stronger in terms of ensuring economic, social, and territorial cohesion. Being allocated by the EU under the scope of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds, ESIFs), this fund transfers monetary resources from relatively more developed and richer regions to the ones which are not that advanced.

The Cohesion Fund (CF) invests in the fields of environment and transportation for the less developed countries within the European Union. Cohesion funds will be provided to Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia for the 2021-2027 period. The fund offers a programme that enables shared work between European Commission and the national governments as well as the regional authorities like municipal bodies.

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) mainly focuses on policies regarding employment, society, education, and skill-development within European Union borders. The implementation

⁵ That is, currently undergoing a transition from rural to urban.

of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, which is built on 20 key principles, is also important for this fund. The whole world went through a challenging process during and after the coronavirus pandemic and the compelling aftereffects of this process are still influential. Especially in terms of re-establishing and re-ensuring the educational and health systems' prosperity within the member states after the pandemic, this fund proves significant for building fair, equal, and inclusive societies. The previous programming period, which was held between 2014 and 2020, involved four different funding tools, which were the **European Social Fund (ESF)**, the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)** the **Youth Employment Initiative** and the **European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)**.

The **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** is a new formation within the Cohesion Policy and its utmost aim is to make sure that no one is ever left behind in the process of green transition, a very important aspect of the **European Green Deal**. The fund aims to eliminate the regional disparities that occur in connection with the measures that are taken for the aim of achieving climate neutrality.

In the way of achieving a sustainable cohesion within the European Union, there are several fields of study such as but not limited to education, employment, energy, environmental agenda, single market, and research and innovation. (Farole et al. 2011, 1089)

There are six different priorities of the European Commission for the period of 2019-2024, which are:

- The European Green Deal
- A Europe Fit for the Digital Age
- An Economy that Works for People
- A Stronger Europe in the World
- Promoting Our European Way of Life
- A New Push for European Democracy

While all of these priorities are crucial in tandem with the Cohesion Policy, the first three ones come to the fore especially. In this direction, actions that are taken within all territories (border regions, urban areas, remote or lowly populated areas, and outermost regions) highlight the European solidarity.

ii. Holistic Approach and 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals

Under the leadership of President von der Leyen, political guidelines of the European Commission have been marching within the scope of **United Nations 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The political programme of the Commission is integrated with the Sustainable Development Goals in connection with the prior guidelines that are depicted in the picture below.



Figure 1: President von der Leyen’s Political Guidelines (European Commission n.d.)

iii. Medium-Sized Cities

Medium-sized cities have considerably significant roles in the way of achieving sustainable urban and rural development. The **Urban Agenda of the European Union** is highly influenced by medium sized cities because they offer a mobile connection between metropolitan areas and rural regions as well as proposing political cooperation and providing services. At this point, it would be highly crucial to underline the importance of **Eurotowns**. The formation of Eurotowns is based on a network of cities which have a population in the range of 50,000 to 250,000. Being founded in 1991, the member cities are Avilés, Böblingen, Chelm, Detmold, Eskilstuna, Gävle, Girona, Haarlem, Halmstad, Hasselt, Jyväskylä, Manresa, Reggio Emilia, Roeselare, Sabadell, Schiedam, Sindelfingen, Solingen, Ulm, and Varberg. Their motto is “big enough to cope, small enough to care”.



Figure 2: The Map of Eurotowns (Eurotowns n.d.)

iv. **Culture & Cultural Heritage**

Culture is one of the core elements of Europe’s historical heritage and has a very specific role of bringing a unique characteristic of identity to the urban fabric of the cities, and it also influences the rural locations. Therefore, protecting cultural heritage is not an isolated objective within itself and it also has social, economic, and ecological outputs. With the preservation of

cultural heritage, more sustainable and equal societies in which diversities are welcomed, economic performances are further strengthened, and well-being is improved can be built; for those results to be achieved, healthy policies on the protection of both natural and built heritage need to be implemented.

v. **Urban Areas in the Post-Covid Era**

Approximately 75% of the whole population in the European Union live in urban areas. Due to high population density in cities, the measures that were taken for preventing the spread of the virus drastically affected the life in the urban settlements. (Beatriz, Salama and McInney 2021, 1) While also going through a series of challenges, rural communities were not as widely affected as the urban communities. With respect to Covid recovery, **Next Generation EU (NGEU)** is an important recovery package which was created with the aim of supporting the Member States in their recovery process.

2) **International Community Frameworks**

a. **UN-Habitat the New Urban Agenda**

The **United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)** is managed by the UN General Assembly in with the primary purpose of achieving sustainable cities and towns; the programme is the central part of all urban studies within the system of United Nations. The **United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III)** was held in Quito, Ecuador on 17 – 20 October 2016; during the conference, the creation of a “New Urban Agenda” was proposed to contribute to the ongoing search for exploring sustainable urbanization methods.

b. **OECD Principles on Urban Policy**

The **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** published the **OECD Principles on Urban Policy**, which was developed through the support of a wide range

of stakeholders. The OECD has been working on the urban policy with an experience exceeding twenty years. The images below give information the urban policy studies of the OECD.



Figure 3: Who are the OECD Principles on Urban Policy for? (OECD 2019)

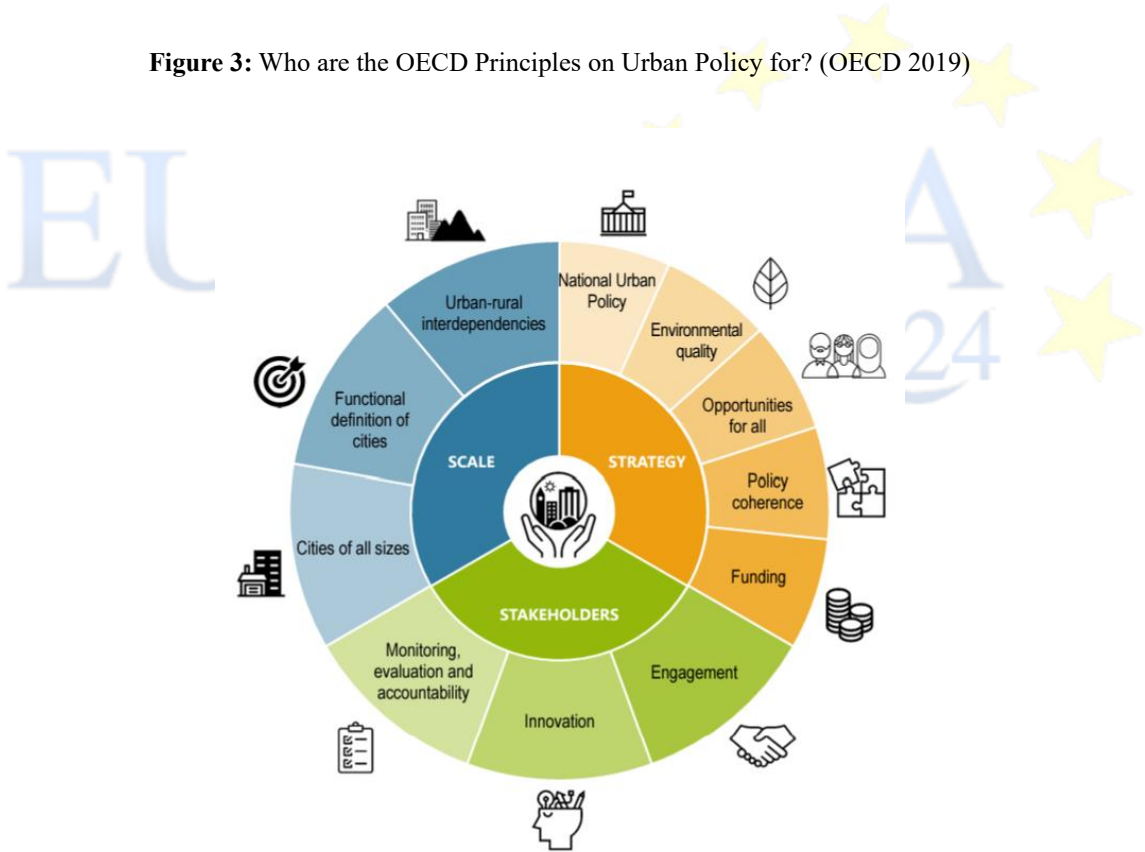


Figure 4: OECD Principles on Urban Policy (OECD 2019)

3) EU-Based Frameworks
a. European Green Deal

The European Green Deal is a comprehensive agenda involving many projects related to the green transition of Europe; its main objectives are achieving climate neutrality in Europe by 2050, providing economic growth that would not cause in resource overexploitation, and achieving those objectives in line with the “*no person nor place is left behind*” maxim. (European Commission n.d.)

Being aware of the fact that maintaining urban and rural sustainability is a challenging task that requires the careful balancing of interests and the consideration of several concepts at once, the European Union has been conducting studies about those concepts in the following working areas:

- Climate Action
- Energy Use
- Environmental Actions
- Agricultural Policies
- Sustainable Mobility
- Green and Digital Industry
- Transformative Research and Innovation
- Financial and Regional Development

b. Farm to Fork Strategy

“Farm to Fork” is a strategy that lies in the heart of the European Green Deal. Its ultimate goal is to ensure the prosperity of the food systems within the European Union. Having a positive effect on the environmental agenda, promoting policies that recognise the reality of climate change, preserving the biodiversity, producing affordable food, and ensuring food security are some of the exclusive objectives of this strategy. (Justus 2022, 1829)



Figure 5. A description of the Farm to Fork Strategy

c. Common Agricultural Policy

First established in 1962, the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** makes the connection and cooperation between society and agriculture possible in Europe. The primary objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy are ensuring that the farmers have a reasonable level of income, managing the natural resources in a sustainable way and supporting agricultural industry across European (Gray 2000, 1). The policy has undergone some changes throughout the years to meet with dynamic needs of the society in accordance with the economic conditions of the times. The CAP 2023-27 came into force on 1 January 2023 (European Commission n.d.). The European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy form the core parts of the “strategic plans” that emerge within the latest version of the Common Agricultural Policy. Due to the fact that there is a dependence of farming to conditions beyond our control, vulnerabilities may occur within this field at some points. In order to prevent possible negative outcomes, the Common Agricultural Policy’s activities are conducted under three major categories. Those categories are:

- *income support through direct payments*
- *market measures*
- *rural development measures*

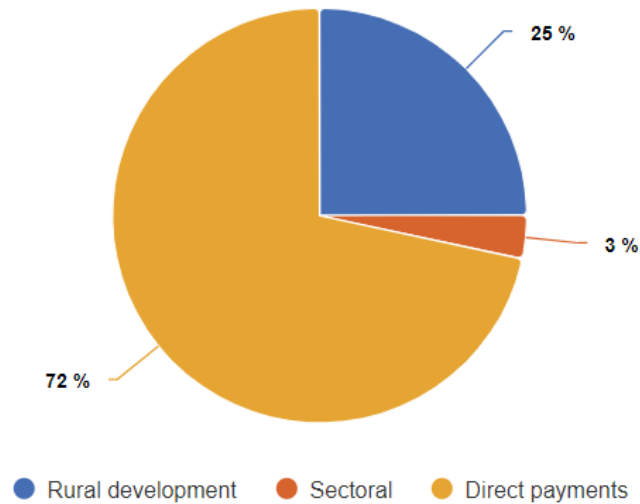


Figure 6. Planned Financial Allocations Under the CAP Strategic Plans 2023-27 (European Commission n.d.)

The funding of the Common Agricultural Policy is provided within two main funds under the budget of the European Union, which are **the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF)** (for direct support and market measures) and **the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)** (for the agenda of rural development). These payments are regulated at national levels.

d. European Industrial Strategy

European Commission planted the seeds of an industrial strategy that will support both the green and the digital transition on 10 March 2020, just before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2021, **the EU Industrial Strategy** was updated by the European Commission with the aim of further strengthening the ongoing studies with respect to the global pandemic. The pandemic has drastically affected the economy of the EU as well as it did in other parts of the world. An overall decline of %6.3 was observed in the EU economy and the fall in intra-EU trade in the second and third quarters of 2020 was 24%. (European Commission n.d.)

Also, it is really important to underline the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as they are the main motors of development in many economic sectors. In 2020, 60% of the SMEs in Europe reported a fall in turnover.

In this respect, the updated Industrial Strategy specifically focuses on:

- Strengthening of the resilience of the Single Market
- Supporting Europe’s Open Strategic Autonomy through dealing with dependencies
- Supporting the business case for the twin transitions (Green Transition & the Digital Transition) (European Commission n.d.)

In connection with the target of strengthening the resilience of the single market, the European Commission has proposed the **Single Market Emergency Instrument**, **Deepening the Single Market** and **Monitoring the Single Market** as three major strategical agendas. The last one involves 14 industrial ecosystems which are depicted in the image below:



Figure 7. 14 Industrial Ecosystems (European Commission n.d.)

Strengthening the economic autonomy of the European Union is another dimension of the issue. European Union is a major importer and exporter; therefore, trade and investments at the global

scale are inevitable. However, the worldwide pandemic has shown that further improvements in this area are more than necessary since some setbacks can occur in the global supply chains in some situations. Therefore, the European Commission proposes diversified international partnerships, industrial alliances, and the monitoring of strategic dependencies in order to reduce dependencies.

4) Prioritised Agendas for the Sustainable Urban Development in EU cities

In order to maintain sustainability in urban development, the measures used for tackling numerous problems across different fields need to be coordinated. Thus, a study of the natural and man-made elements of the urban environments carry significance for the development of adequate sustainable urban development strategies. The sub-chapters under this chapter all highlight a component of the urban natural or social landscape and goes on to give a brief account of the EU's current Union-wide policies about those components. Sustainable Urban Development strategies should seek to build upon those policies.

a. Air Quality

Access to clean air is vital for the pursuit of a healthy life. Thus, air pollution is a significant problem within the environmental agenda; for example, acid rains and the excessive nitrogen pollution issues are major threats for the ecosystems. Moreover, human activities have greatly impacted air quality and has caused it to plummet. Right now, the state of the air quality can be attributed to factors such as but not limited to general industrial pollution, the use of non-renewable energy sources, domestic heating, agricultural acts, and the use of vehicles that consume non-renewable fuels. The problem of air pollution is the cause of many pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases; this situation constitutes a threat for economic prosperity in the long term since working days are lost and the healthcare costs rise due to those diseases. In

order to achieve its “zero pollution vision for 2050,” the EU has been implementing a policy framework for clean air which comprises the following three pillars:

- ambient air quality standards
- reducing air pollution emissions
- emissions standards for key sources of pollution (European Commission n.d.)

b. Circular Economy

The **European Union Action Plan for the Circular Economy** proposes a resilient action programme with measures that covers the entirety of the economic cycle, from production and consumption to waste management and the market for secondary raw materials. (European Commission n.d.) The New Circular Economy Action Plan is one of the main carriers of the European Green Deal and an important milestone in the way of achieving sustainable growth, especially within the context of cities. The main objectives of this Plan are:

- Manufacturing sustainable products and making this the standard of the EU
- Further supporting the consumers
- Prioritising sectors with a potential for contributing to circular economy
- Building a Europe with less waste
- Ensuring that the system works for everyone, without leaving no one or no place behind
- Leading the global assessments within the circular economy

In 2023, the Commission added some new agendas to the framework, including the topics of material efficiency, consumption footprint and the initiatives on microplastics.

c. Climate Adaptation

The urban dimensions of the climate adaptation processes prove highly crucial for minimizing the negative effects of climate change over cities. **The Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy**, a formation that addresses the urban dimensions of the climate adaptation processes,

functions as a forum in which the measures for minimising the negative effects of climate change are being discussed; the Covenant is supported by the European Union.

The New EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change was drafted by the European Commission and entered into force on 24 February 2021. The strategy's background goes back to 2013 EU Adaptation Strategy and its 2018 evaluation. This strategy focuses on the adaptation of the EU members to the undeniable effects of the climate change and to the process of making Europe a climate resilient continent by the year 2050. The Strategy has four main objectives: making the adaptation period smarter, accelerating the adaptation process, sustaining a more systemic approach toward the adaptation process, and maintaining the adaptation process in a way that would lead the international community as well.

Along with other agendas that have been covered by this document (such as circular economy and energy transition), the issue of climate adaptation is a key factor for promoting the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the urban areas. Therefore, it could be argued that it would be in the benefit of local administrators to proliferate the practices advocated by the European Green Deal in order to achieve sustainable urban development.

d. Culture and Heritage

Since culture is, by definition, a construct that is both highly characterised by the place it is rooted in and that greatly characterises those places, states have been paying close attention to the role of culture while formulating their policies about urban and rural development. Tourism comes as an important economic sector in that regard. In order to further enhance the tourism sector as a major component of the European economy, **cultural and creative industries (CCIs)** play an important role since they help preserve the unique cultural identities of the cities through protecting the cultural heritage while also promoting economic growth based on tourism.

The key themes of the European cultural cooperation are:

- Supporting cultural heritage
- Socio-economic value of culture
- Boosting gender equality and diversity
- Measuring the positive impact of culture

These themes are related with the six political priorities of the Commission which have been mentioned earlier. (*qq v Primary Considerations, the Cohesion Policy*)

In 2018, the Commission adopted the **New European Agenda for Culture** following the **2007 European Agenda for Culture**. The agenda calls for the implementation of improved working methods within the EU member states, civil society organisations and international partners for the purpose promoting cultural elements. The agenda highlights the importance of promoting cultural activity using a tri-dimensional approach that focuses on the social, economic and external dimensions of cultural activities.

The EU Member States declare their multi-annual cultural policy agendas in the form of **Work Plans**. The ongoing **Work Plan for Culture covering the period 2023-2026** underlines the four sections into which the process of the coordination of cultural policies within the EU has been divided; these sections are 1) *artists and cultural professionals*, 2) *culture for the people*, 3) *culture for the planet* and 4) *culture for co-creative partnerships*.

e. Digital Transition

Europe's search for digital autonomy and sovereignty is crucial in tandem with the emphasis put on data, technological innovations and infrastructural systems in the contemporary era. The main target of the digital strategy of the European Union is to make the digital transformation of the Europe work for everyone and ensure the digital transition's compatibility with reaching a climate-neutral Europe by the year 2050. An important aim of the digital transition is to render 80% of the EU citizens digitally literate by 2030. The authorities have been pursuing a great

number of initiatives within the framework of digital transformation, some which are listed below:

- Digital Services Act
- Digital Markets Act
- European Chips Act
- European Digital Identity
- Artificial Intelligence
- European Data Strategy
- European Industrial Strategy
- Contributing to European Defense
- Space
- EU-US Trade and Technology Council

f. Energy Transition

The process of energy transition is highly complicated, and it requires breakthrough changes within the existing energy systems. Safe, resilient, sustainable and affordable energy systems are a must for the future welfare of the Europe. The main points of concern for the energy transition agenda are as follows:

- Energy Efficiency
- Renewable Energy
- Markets and Consumers
- Energy Strategy
- Oil, Gas and Coal
- Infrastructure
- Energy Security
- Research and Technology
- Funding and Financing
- International Cooperation
- Nuclear Energy
- Energy Systems Integration

g. Housing

Affordable and sustainable provision of social housing is an issue of growing significance, both in the European and the global context. The **United Nations (UN)**, the **International**

Monetary Fund (IMF) and the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** have all stressed out the shortage of affordable and sustainable housing as a social problem; these remarks parallel the contents of the **Pact of Amsterdam**. The housing agenda also concerns the arrangement surrounding municipal, social, and cooperative housing systems and the debate surrounding affordable renting and house ownership.

h. Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees

The integration of migrants into the society proves important for achieving the sustainability of societies. While the essential responsibility in this area belongs to the member states, the European Union supports the national governments and local authorities with the coordination processes. Accordingly, the **Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027** focuses on the migrants and other EU citizens with migrant backgrounds. The integration agenda revolves around four main policy areas which are housing, education, employment and healthcare; it could be noted that all of those areas have direct connections to urban activities.

i. Jobs and Skills

Many initiatives have been brought forward by the authorities at the EU level in order to enhance jobs and skills and to empower the youth as a part of the workforce. The **New Skills Agenda for Europe** is a five-year long plan that aims to supporting both individuals and businesses through fostering their competitiveness, improving social fairness in tandem with the European Pillar of Social Rights, and forming resilience towards possible crises (guided by the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic).

j. Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-Based Solutions

The sustainable use of land has a direct impact on the life qualities of the citizens living in urban settlements. **Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** of the European Union is strategy that addresses the various predicament faced by the ecological systems within Europe and urban ecosystems

are given an emphasis in this strategy. The strategy underlines the significance of preserving urban green areas for the continuation of healthy urban ecosystems.

k. Urban Mobility and Accessibility

According to the data taken from the European Commission, 70% of EU citizens live in cities and this causes the generation of approximately 23% of all transport greenhouse gas emissions (European Commission n.d.). This data indicates the need for undertaking a transition with regard to transportation systems; sustainable public transport, alternative mobility solutions like walking and cycling, and suitable urban infrastructure systems present themselves as vital tools to be benefited from at the end of this transition. It should be noted that the European Union has already enacted several policy frameworks that promote the sustainability of public transportation networks in pursuit of reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

l. Urban Poverty

In order to ensure social cohesion, the consideration of every citizen (especially those who are materially deprived) is necessary before enacting new policies; this is a crucial point that is compatible with the maxim “leaving no one nor place behind”. In this direction, the implementation of urban renewal projects in certain regions and the encouragement of every segment of the society into participating in the urban public sphere prove to be two important activities that need to be pursued by the authorities.

5) Sector Specific Overview

a. Education and Training

Investing in people is a crucial point for the sake of ensuring the long-term competitiveness of the European Union and ensuring social cohesion. Both the **European Social Fund (ESF)** and the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** endeavour to:

- Contemporise education and training systems
- Prevent the situations of early school leavings
- Provide Access to good quality education for all
- Promote lifelong learning
- Improve vocational education systems

b. Health

Sustainable health systems and health infrastructures are very important for social cohesion. At the present time, there exists large inequalities between countries, regions, and different socio-economic groups. The COVID-19 pandemic has once again shown the significance of building resilient health systems.

c. Tourism

Tourism is a key component of economic development in many regions of Europe. Especially in the less developed areas, tourism sector offers many employment opportunities for the youth.

6) Rural Development

Although rural areas form approximately the 30% of the total population of the European Union, their gross domestic product per person is drastically below the European average. (Patachanova 2012, 1). It is because of such rifts that the EU has decided to act in an attempt to support rural development across Europe. The three main pillars of the EU's rural development policy are:

- *Enforcing agriculture*
- *Sustaining a coherent management of natural resources and climate action*
- *Balanced regional development of the rural areas*

The rural areas in the EU do not have homogenous characteristics either. While rural areas that are close to urban settlements have more dynamic economic systems, remote and sparsely populated ones show the features of weaker economies in general. (Matthews 2007, 2)

By its very definition, rural areas are the homeland of European agriculture. Although some agricultural practices have negative impacts for the environment, agriculture and forestry provide many environmental benefits such as but not limited to:

- Agricultural landscapes
- Farmland Biodiversity
- Water Quality and Regulation
- Soil Functionality
- Climate Stability
- Air Quality
- Resilience to Flooding and Fire

In addition, rural areas offer social public goods like food security, rural vitality, recreational activities and cultural heritage.

However, along with many advantages, rural areas are also subject to some challenges due to structural weakness problems. Depopulation and the aging of the population, low-income rates, unemployment problems, lack of fundamental infrastructural services are some of the main unfavourable conditions that persist across rural areas. Below, a comparison of urban areas, towns and suburbs and rural areas are shown in the table:

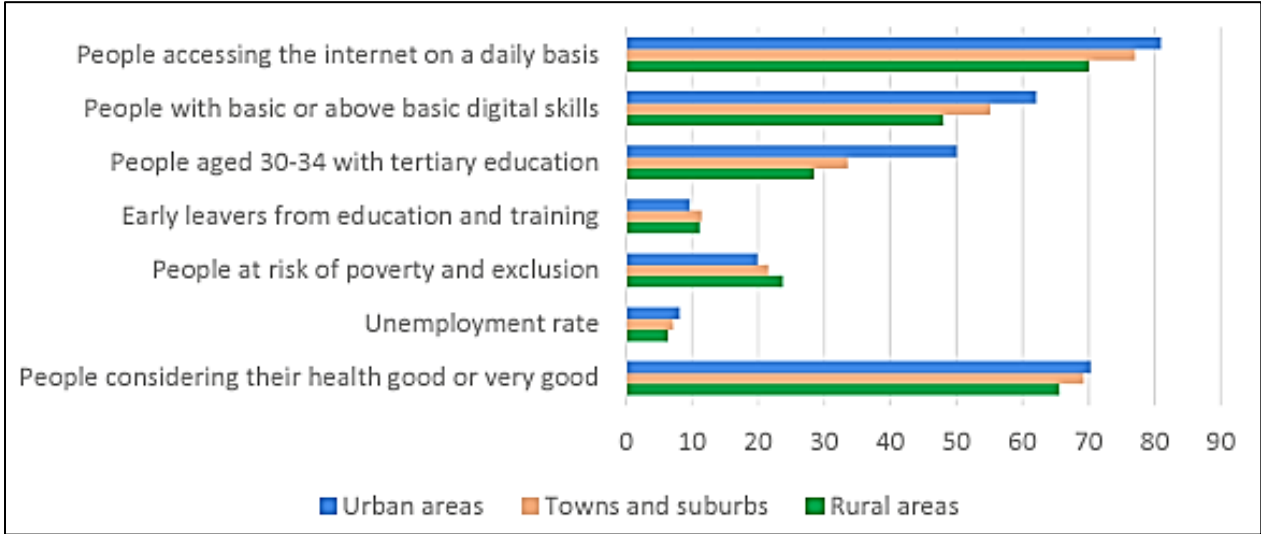


Figure 8. Digital skills, education, poverty, employment and health by rural / urban typology (Eurostat 2018)

 Depopulation / abandonment and rural repopulation / in-migration, role of rural areas as shock absorber in times of crisis.	 Evolution of social rights and systems (e.g. occupational safety, pension schemes and transfers).
 Generational renewal, ageing, gender disparities.	 Availability of and access to research, innovation, training, advice, education.
 Income, growth poverty, jobs, business creation / maintenance / diversification, investment, labour market.	 Quality of life, behaviour / cultural aspects of 'feeling left behind' / 'discontent'.
 Remoteness, commuting, housing availability, access to broadband and services such as hospitals.	 Promoting cultural and natural (including landscape) heritage.
 Social capital / fabric, building local governance capacities and bottom-up participation / approaches e.g. cooperation.	 Social inclusion issues – specific focus on vulnerable population.

Figure 9. Social inclusion and socio-economic issues in EU rural areas (European Parliament 2020)

7) European Economic and Social Committee Groups

a. Employers' Group (Group I)

The essential motivation of the Employers' Group is to make the voices of the businesses heard at European level (EESC n.d.). The group gathers more than 100 entrepreneurs and representatives of business associations from every European Union country. More than 20 million companies are represented within the European level at a wide range spectrum that included business of various sizes and from various sectors. The Employers' Group prioritizes the necessities of the businesses within the European Union member states. The ongoing priorities mainly concentrate on enabling a business sector that is resilient and economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable within both Europe and global network. According to the data obtained from EESC, these priorities could be summarized as (EESC n.d.):

- competitive access to resources
- open markets with equal rules
- business friendly regulation and taxation

Also, the group has been cooperation with Europe's leading business-based establishments. **BusinessEurope, Copa-Cogeca, EUROCHAMBRES, EuroCommerce, SGI Europe** and **SMEunited** are six of these organisations which are being worked with at both European and international level.

b. Workers' Group (Group II)

The Workers' Group involves the representatives of trade associations, professional chambers, unions, confederations and sectoral federations. The Workers' Group represents more than 80 trade unions and the majority of these unions are connected to the **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**. While Europe is a model for the success with regard to its social cohesion compared to the rest of the world, there are still many challenges to overcome and many steps to take in this direction. The main target of the Workers' Group is to improve the conditions which the workers of Europe live under, along with the welfare of all European Union citizens.

c. Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III)

The Civil Society Organisations' Group ensures that the various interests (that emerge as a result of different economic, social, and cultural backgrounds) spread across Europe can be represented in an organised manner. The members of the Third Group originate from a wide range of fields such as but not limited to academic circles, liberal professions, and enterprises.

The three main priorities of the group:

- Diversity in democracy
- Consensus building
- European civic engagement - local action

8) Questions to be Answered.

1- Which are the most affected groups by the processes of urbanisation in Europe?

- 2- How should the urban-rural linkage be tackled amidst the process of urbanisation? What are the possible outcomes of the regional disparities?
- 3- How could sustainable urbanisation be achieved with respect to ecological, economic and social dimensions?
- 4- What are the roles of Von der Leyen's priorities within the agenda of rural development and how can they be further integrated into the said agenda?
- 5- What are the roles of medium-sized cities in the efforts to build urban-rural cohesion within Europe?
- 6- How can cultural heritage be preserved during rapid urbanization? What are the roles of cultural identities within this context?
- 7- How did the global pandemic affect urban and rural development in Europe?
- 8- How could the interrelation between global community and European Union be handled within this context?
- 9- How can agricultural development support the empowerment of rural areas?
- 10- What is the role of the European Single Market for urban and rural development?
- 11- The solution of which issues should be prioritised in cities for achieving sustainable urbanism?

9) Recommendations from the Under-Secretary-General

The issue of urban and rural development is a complex agenda and the concept of “urban and rural linkage” should be kept in mind while examining the problems related to that issue.

This study guide has briefly mentioned all the possible discussion topics that can be debated on during the conference. However, there might still be some points that need to be further analysed by the honourable members of the European Economic and Social Committee. At this point, my humble recommendation for you would be to benefit from the resources of the European Commission (the executive body of the European Union) and from the information

provided by the European Economic and Social Committee itself. I believe that taking a detailed look at the following webpages, which focus on the EESC's general approach towards different policy field and its approach towards our agenda item, would assist you greatly in your preparations.

- https://commission.europa.eu/eu-regional-and-urban-development_en
- <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/policies>
- <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/policies/policy-areas/cohesion-regional-and-urban-policy>

In addition to these links, it is very crucial for you to make your own research about the topics you would like to focus on during the discussions in the committee. Do not forget, a good idea only works if we get it right.

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