



# **SOLUTIONS** **JOURNALISM**

**GUIDE FOR THE EU  
COHESION POLICY**

**[YOUTHopia.aer.eu](http://YOUTHopia.aer.eu)**

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This short guide is part of the **YOUTHtopia project**, a media campaign exploring how the methodology of solutions journalism can shed new light on the European Union's (EU) cohesion policy to young Europeans. Led by the Association of European Regions (AER), in collaboration with the media NGO Babel International.

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# WHAT IS SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM?

*This journalistic methodology is an approach to reporting that pushes journalists to go beyond pinpointing societal problems and to investigate how individuals, NGOs, communities and decision-makers are addressing those challenges.*

**Solutions Journalism** aims at providing a more balanced and constructive perspective on the issues our communities and societies are facing, in particular **social justice** and **the environment**.



Nowadays, European citizens feel badly informed about what is happening in their communities and how they can collectively solve societal challenges. Solutions Journalism is (re-)connecting reporters with their audiences and is looking to inspire readers.

**We can use two definitions:**

**Solutions Journalism Network**

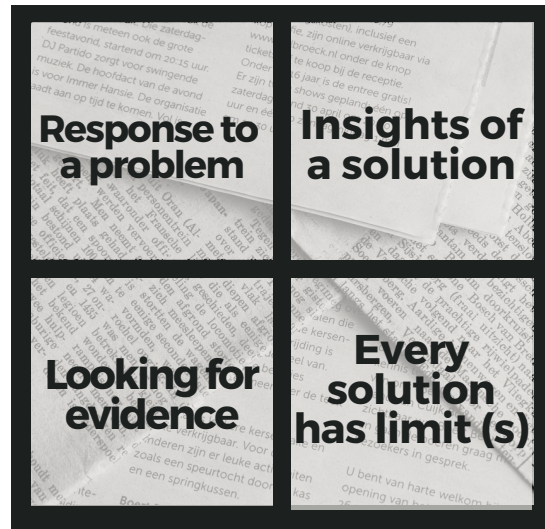
“ Solutions Journalism investigates and explains, in a critical and clear-eyed way, how people try to solve widely shared problems. ”

**Reporters d'Espoirs**

“ Solutions Journalism is here to analyse and to disseminate concrete, ready to be replicated initiatives meant to tackle economic, social and environmental issues. ”

# The different steps of Solutions Journalism

Solutions Journalism is based on four pillars. Those are essential to get the whole story and for journalists to hook their readers, or more broadly, their audience, into a solution that can be implemented by the community.



Looking for a quick tip to get Solutions Journalism? This W.H.O.L.E acronym might help.

**W**  
**H**  
**O**  
**L**  
**E**

What response does the story address?

How does the response work?

Offer insight.

include Limitations.

Evidence of impact



# COHESION POLICY IN A NUTSHELL



Cohesion Policy is the second largest budget of the European Union. Born in the late 1970s, it provides financial support to national and regional authorities to boost economic and social development in European regions and territories. It funds projects partially with the aim to boost job creation, economic development, sustainable development or more broadly improvements to European's quality of life.

**Cohesion Policy is present in all European regions but focuses particularly on the less advantaged European regions and countries. It supports cross-border cooperation (for example, Interreg projects where regions from different countries work together to share good practices and solutions on joint issues like circular economy and environmental projects). Projects funded by the EU Cohesion Policy are mostly managed by local and regional authorities (a city council, a region etc.)**

## **Part of the overall EU's Regional Policy, Cohesion Policy is divided into four main funds:**

- **The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**, which invests in the social and economic development of European regions and cities.
- **The Cohesion Fund**, to fund infrastructure, environmental or transports projects specifically in less developed European regions and cities.
- **The European Social Fund Plus (or ESF+)** which is supporting job creation or more broadly socially inclusive European cities.
- **The Just Transition Fund (JTF)**, which is dedicated to support European regions and cities most affected by the phasing out of coal and the transition to cleaner and less polluting energy sources.



# Why Solutions Journalism Matters

For EU Policies And The EU Cohesion Policy specifically

Projects on the ground funded by the EU Cohesion Policy are meant to improve citizens' daily lives. They are here to do their part to solve local problems (such as unemployment, lack of skills and training, improve the local environment, supporting local NGOs or helping local companies).

One big issue with Cohesion Policy reporting is that it focuses mainly on 'big projects' such as infrastructures). As Solutions Journalism focuses on the people involved in the response to a problem, it can be helpful for journalists to go beyond big projects and focus on smaller projects supported by the EU.

EU funded projects in regions and cities are carried out by many actors: businesses, local authorities, NGOs, universities etc. Therefore, this methodology can be used for many issues and topics from education to the environment, social issues, integration of refugees, projects involving persons with disabilities, etc.

Reporting on evidence is key for Solutions Journalism, as the EU is also actively asking project holders about their concrete impact before, during and after a project. Therefore, it contributes to accountability on the efficiency and impact of projects funded by the EU and the Cohesion Policy, strengthening a sense of European belonging.

Such replicability means also reporting on the limitations. Nothing, including solutions or EU projects are perfect. Reporting on the limits, taking a step back without cynicism, means that Solutions Journalism can go beyond talking points.

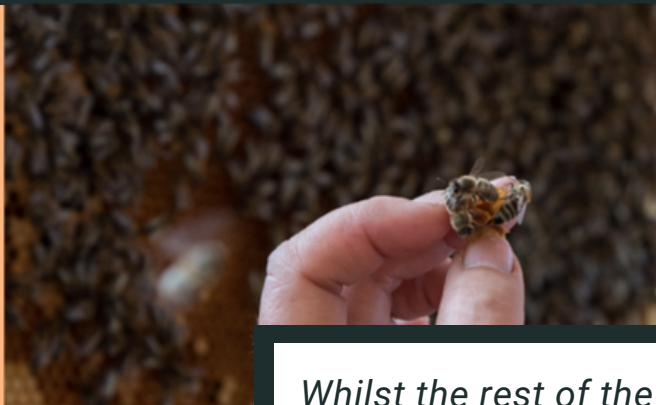
Cohesion Policy projects are also meant to inspire other regions or stakeholders to be inspired by a local solution in a region and how it could be translated in other regions and countries. As replicability is key for Solutions Journalism, this journalistic methodology can help spread good practices across borders.

## PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Let's imagine that a local authority is actively looking to solve youth unemployment. It provides funding to a local NGO that helps young people with no degrees to receive training for green jobs. This solution must be explained: the nature of the programme, how the participants were selected, how the training programmes were implemented, who was involved, etc.

For the evidence phase, the journalist will also ask participants in the programme about the impact it had on them. The reporter will also ask for concrete data, facts and figures. And if the reporter finds limits or challenges (for instance, lack of financial support), they would then naturally mention it in the piece, thereby providing evidence to policy-makers on how to improve their solution.

# Slovenia: in bee heaven



.ereb

*Whilst the rest of the world worries about the decline in bees and the impact on food production, Slovenia has succeeded in reversing the trend over the past few years. Today, the country has become a veritable paradise for the yellow and black insects, cared for by more than 11,000 passionate beekeepers like Andreja Stankovič. As well as looking after the queens and their colonies, she teaches others the ins and outs of beekeeping and the secrets of the Slovenian model.*





# Reporting Tips

## When You Report On EU Policies:

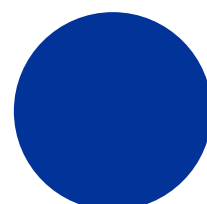
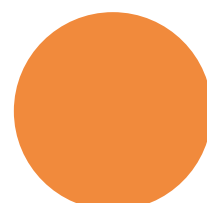
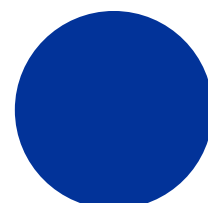
**Understand The Core Concept:** When you start reporting on an EU-funded project, think of what problems or challenges it is trying to solve. Why does an organisation, whether public, private or a group of volunteers, decide to apply to EU funding ?

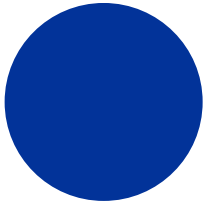
**Think About What Issue/need the EU Funds Are Trying To Solve:** When you see that a project is receiving support from Cohesion Policy, check the relevant website of the European Commission. Here you will have all the priorities and rules of EU funding. Bear also in mind that most European funds are co-funding a project.

**Really Think Feeply About The problem(s) and How To Formulate Them:** To hook readers, you should have at the top of your story, regardless of the format, a data, a statistic or a quote that is grasping the problem(s) and why this solution is being proposed and implemented.

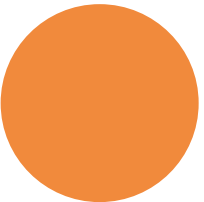
**Solutions Need To Be Explained Fully:** Solutions Journalism is a methodology that loves details! Audience want to know how the solution works, and very often, it cannot be summarised in a short sentence. Feel free to ask the people you interview (either a person leading a response or the public of this solution to go into the details). If you do not get the logic, your audience won't either!

**Evidence-Based Reporting:** When someone is developing an EU project, it is ok to ask for evidence. Did their solutions work? Do they have statistics? Do they have a key moment, a key data proving that the project in their minds worked or served even partially its purpose(s)? Luckily for you, all EU funded projects need to report their results to the EU or to national/regional authorities. Therefore, they should have evidence on the table for a reporter.

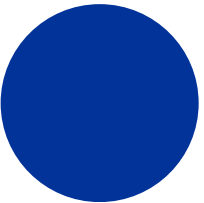




**Highlight Challenges And Trade-offs:** Present a balanced view. While showcasing positive outcomes, don't shy away from discussing challenges, limitations, and potential trade-offs associated with the solutions. There is no magic solution and very often, people leading a solution or involved in an EU funded project can be introspective about their own work and other challenges they faced or are still facing.



**Avoid Oversimplification But Also Exposés About The European Union:** Avoid portraying solutions as a one-size-fits-all fix. Emphasise the complexities, nuances, and variations within different contexts. Nevertheless, don't feel obligated to explain how the EU or EU funds are working in detail. If the angle of the story is about a solution which received EU funding, then readers want to know about the solutions!



**Engage With Communities:** Involve the communities affected by the issues in your reporting. Understand their perspectives, experiences, and opinions regarding the solutions being implemented.

**European Cohesion Policy Is Also About Solidarity:** The European Union is funding local projects to serve a community but also to inspire other communities across the bloc. Even if you work for a regional or national media, remember that other Europeans might be interested in your piece and might even be inspired to take action, all thanks to your reporting!

**Don't forget to Have Fun!** Being a journalist is an honour and it is a vocation. Solutions Journalism is also a tool for journalists to have fun at their job and to serve their readers and community. If you believe a solution is news-worthy, jump straight into the rabbit hole! After all, you might find some ideas for follow-ups or other stories you believe will be interesting for your audience!

# USEFUL RESOURCES

(Click on the link or if you have a printed version, google them!):

- [The Solutions Journalism Network](#)
- [The Solutions Stories Tracker](#)
- [Reporters d'Espoirs \(in French\)](#)
- [A guide of Solutions Journalism by the European Journalism Centre](#)
- [KOESIO](#)
- [#EUInMyRegion](#)



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