

Memorandum of Understanding among the key YOUTHopia partners

Opportunities for collaboration beyond the project on Cohesion Policy & Youth engagement

Creating the conditions and tools for the project sustainability is a key element in developing the impact of the actions that will resonate beyond the project itself, ensuring a multiplier effect. In this context of expanding the impact of the project and paving the way for future collaboration, project partners shared actionable strategies for long-term sustainability, starting from the collaboration between the YOUTHopia project during its course.

In pursuit of fostering enduring collaboration among the project partners, the regions, regional media, and stakeholders, this Memorandum of Understanding is crafted with the aim of achieving three primary objectives:

- 1. Knowledge Sharing:** To sustain the sharing of positive success stories funded by Cohesion Policy pertaining to job creation and employment, and sustainable development and solutions.
- 2. Policy Discourse:** To continue the multi-stakeholder and multi-level discussion on the future of Cohesion Policy.
- 3. Youth and Citizen Engagement:** To further disseminate Cohesion policy opportunities and benefits within the regions and through the regions, with the objective of making it more accessible and relatable to all citizens, especially young people.

This Memorandum serves as a foundational framework for the collective endeavours that may be undertaken by the stakeholders involved in the YOUTHopia campaign. It also incorporates a calendar of upcoming events where these stakeholders can showcase and discuss Cohesion policy, along with related communication and citizens' engagement aspects.

1) Calendar of events where partners commit to fostering the results of YOUTHopia and the sharing of positive stories and good practices showing the concrete benefits of Cohesion Policy.

- European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC): An annual event that provides a platform for discussing regional policy and showcasing best practices
- AER General Assembly and Bureau Meetings
- European Youth Event: A gathering of young people to engage in discussions on various topics, including regional policy.

- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe: A forum that brings together local and regional leaders to discuss topical European policy areas, with a particular focus on (youth) citizen engagement
- AER Summer Academy Biennial intergenerational forum dedicated to the exchange of experience and good practices in the area of regional development in Europe, with a particular focus on youth involvement.
- YRN General Assembly and YRN capacity-building events: youth-led events by the AER's Youth Regional Network, focused on developing action plans and policy recommendations, based on the exchange of ideas and experiences.
- Events from European Projects of Different Programmes Targeting Youth: Engagement in activities organised by various European projects with a specific focus on the youth demographic.
- Regional Events, such as Europe Day in Košice (yearly event)

2) Involvement in the new AER Task force on Cohesion Policy

In order to concretise the action, the AER taskforce on Cohesion Policy can be used as a tool to maximise the effectiveness of Cohesion policy. The task force on Cohesion Policy gives perspectives on how to tackle the multiple challenges identified in the 8th Cohesion Report published by the European Commission, from the innovation divide to the demographic change, and how the policy will support a fair digital and green transition and regional recovery and growth.

The main goals of the AER Cohesion Policy task force are:

- to maximise the impact of cohesion policy in terms of reducing economic, social and territorial disparities for member regions;
- to contribute to the future orientations of the cohesion policy post 2027;
- to create a community of practice, peer learning and good practice in the field of cohesion policy implementation.

It is paramount to emphasise the critical importance of involving regional stakeholders, youth, and citizens in the discourse surrounding Cohesion Policy. Cohesion Policy directly impacts the daily lives of individuals living in our regions, influencing job opportunities, infrastructure development, and the overall well-being of our communities. Regional stakeholders possess invaluable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that each locality faces, making their participation essential in shaping policies that are not only effective but also tailored to the diverse needs of our regions.

Furthermore, engaging our youth in these discussions is an investment in the future. Empowering the next generation with a profound understanding of Cohesion Policy instils a

sense of ownership and responsibility towards regional development. Their perspectives, creativity, and enthusiasm can inject new vitality into our efforts to drive positive change.

Lastly, citizens, as the ultimate beneficiaries of Cohesion Policy, must be active participants in the dialogue. Their direct involvement ensures that policies align with their aspirations and needs, fostering a sense of inclusivity and trust in the governance process. Inclusivity also bolsters transparency and accountability, which are fundamental principles of democratic societies.

In summary, involving regional stakeholders, youth, and citizens in the discussion around Cohesion Policy is not merely a formality but a strategic imperative. It enriches the policy-making process, making it more relevant, democratic, and sustainable. By actively engaging all relevant stakeholders, we can collectively work towards a more cohesive and prosperous future for our regions and their inhabitants.

3) Further collaboration, projects and mutual learning

The commitment to sustain the collaboration beyond the YOUTHopia project was clearly expressed from all key project partners and coaching event attendees, as the interest and cooperation in the project was high.

Some key areas of interest for future collaborations were identified, such as:

- Taking YOUTHopia to the next level with a further and upgraded project;
- Increasing the interest of the youth generation in their home country to fight “brain drain” through investing in awareness-raising campaigns, matching the employers’ needs with university/high school education programmes, etc.;
- Fostering and sustaining the tourism sector to value the cultural/natural heritage of the regions;
- Building a greater consortium for future and wider project applications, also for programmes such as Horizon Europe and Interreg;
- Fostering and promoting improved social policies targeting gender equality, social inclusion and raising awareness in minorities;
- Investing in environmental sustainability by promoting the green transition strategy, implementing spatial planning in urban areas, building and integrating a sustainable separate waste management plan for the regions’ cities, raising awareness in the local community towards environmentally friendly good practices and behaviours, etc.

Overall, the YOUTHopia project laid the foundation for future promising collaboration among the partners and the flagship regions, while also strengthening the interest of the future generation by raising awareness on the importance of a more cohesive and stronger Europe.

By agreeing to this Memorandum of Understanding, the YOUTHopia partners express their dedication to the objectives of the project and their commitment to advancing the cause of knowledge sharing, policy discourse, and citizen engagement in the realm of regional



YOUTHopia



development and Cohesion policy. Through collaborative efforts, we aim to bring the benefits of Cohesion policy closer to the citizens of our regions and beyond.

Agreed on the 30th October 2023,

Signatories

AER - Assembly of European Regions, representing more than 140 regions from 27 countries

YRN - Youth Regional Network, representing 87 members forming a cross-regional youth platform promoting active youth participation at regional level

Babel International, representing more than 60 active specialised journalists members and publisher of the Cafébabel participative media outlet and founder of ereb, the cross-border membership-based media outlet

Flagship regions:

Development council of Cohesion region Vzhodna Slovenija/Eastern Slovenia

Regional Development Agency of Ljubljana Urban Region, Western Slovenia

Union of Cyprus Municipalities, Cyprus

Donegal County Council, North West Ireland

Košice Self-Governing region, Slovakia