



Co-funded by
the European Union



ENGAGING CITIZENS IN COHESION POLICY

DG REGIO and OECD Pilot Project Final Report

OECD Public Governance Working Paper No. 50



OECD Public Governance Working Papers

ENGAGING CITIZENS IN COHESION POLICY

DG REGIO and OECD Pilot Project Final Report



This document was produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

OECD Working Papers should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its member countries. The opinions expressed and arguments employed are those of the authors. Working Papers describe preliminary results or research in progress by the author(s) and are published to stimulate discussion on a broad range of issues on which the OECD works. Comments on Working Papers are welcomed, and may be sent to OECD Directorate for Public Governance, OECD, 2 rue André-Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France; e-mail: gov.contact@oecd.org.

This document, as well as any data and any map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

© OECD (2022)

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.

Photo credits: Cover © Brodie Vissers via Burst.

About

Around one-third of the European Union's budget is dedicated to cohesion policy, which promotes and supports the overall harmonious development of its Member States and regions. The success of this investment relies on effective partnerships among governments, stakeholders, and citizens. Citizens have a key role to play in shaping decisions on public investment, as well as in making public authorities more transparent and accountable.

From July 2020-December 2021, the European Commission and the OECD partnered to explore how five authorities across Europe could place citizens at the centre of their investment decisions. These five selected authorities are the regional government of Cantabria in Spain; the Emilia-Romagna region in Italy; the Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland; the Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme; and the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

This report summarises lessons learned throughout this project and, particularly, the results of applying innovative citizen participation methods to cohesion policy more broadly.

Acknowledgements

This working paper was prepared by the OECD Public Governance Directorate (GOV) under the leadership of Elsa Pilichowski. It was drafted under the strategic direction of Alessandro Bellantoni, Head of the Open Government and Civic Space Unit. The report was written by Ieva Cesnulaityte and Mauricio Mejia Galvan, Policy Analysts in the Unit working on innovative citizen participation. José Sánchez Ruiz provided support throughout the report elaboration. Claudia Chwalisz, Innovative Citizen Participation Lead, provided strategic comments on all chapters.

The report benefited from feedback provided by: European Commission REGIO.E.1 Administrative Capacity Building and Solidarity Instruments Unit, David Sanjuan Escudero (Cantabria Regional Ministry of Economy and Finance), Simona Vatafu (Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria), Edyta Jaszczuk (CEUTP), and Ewa Paderewska (CEUTP).

The report also benefitted from strategic comments by OECD colleagues Mariana Mirabile and Enrico Botta.

Joshua Yeremiyew from the OECD prepared the paper for publication.

Table of contents

Table of contents	4
Reader's guide	5
1 Introduction and context of the project	7
Summary of the European Commission DG REGIO and OECD cooperation	8
Overview of the pilot project: Goals, timeline, and selection process	8
Introducing the five authorities that took part in the pilot	9
Why involve citizens in policy making?	10
Cohesion policy: key reasons for involving citizens	12
2 From initial ideas to concrete actions	14
Citizen participation experience of participating authorities	15
Needs linked to citizen participation identified during initial project stages	18
The final results of the five pilot projects	19
Challenges encountered during the implementation of the pilot projects	22
Lessons learned	26
Benefits and opportunities of involving citizens and taking part in the pilot project	28
3 Recommendations	31
General conclusions and recommendations for public authorities in cohesion policy	32
What is necessary to take citizen participation in cohesion policy forward – for the European Commission	37
4 Conclusion and further resources	40
Conclusion	41
Further information	41
Annex A. Outputs of the project	42
References	43
FIGURES	
Figure 1. Three pillars of stakeholder participation	17
Figure 2. Steps of planning and implementing a citizen participation process	22
TABLES	
Table 1. Only one of the MAs/IBs directly involves individual citizens in their participation activities	15
Table 2. Existing citizen and stakeholder participation experience was limited to providing information and conducting occasional consultations	17

Reader's guide

This brief guide is intended to help readers understand key terms and concepts of innovative citizen participation and the EU cohesion policy.

Key innovative citizen participation terms

- **Representative deliberative process:** a process in which a broadly representative body of people weighs evidence, deliberates to find common ground, and develops detailed recommendations on policy issues for public authorities. For shorthand, representative deliberative processes are often referred to as deliberative processes in this document. Common examples of one-off processes are citizens' assemblies, juries, and panels. (OECD, 2021^[1]).
- **Deliberation:** weighing evidence and considering a wide range of perspectives in pursuit of finding common ground. It is distinct from:
 - **Debate**, where the aim is to persuade others of one's own position and to 'win',
 - **Bargaining**, where people make concessions in exchange for something else,
 - **Dialogue**, which seeks mutual understanding rather than a decision,
 - and "**opinion giving**", where individuals state their opinions in a context that does not first involve learning, or the need to listen to others.

Key EU cohesion policy terms

- **Cohesion policy:** the European Union's strategy to promote and support the 'overall harmonious development' of its Member States and regions. Enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Art. 174), the EU's cohesion policy aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion by reducing disparities in the level of development between regions. The policy focuses on key areas which will help the EU face up to the challenges of the 21st century and remain globally competitive (European Commission, n.d.^[2]).
- **Managing Authority (MA):** responsible for managing national and regional operational programmes as well as European territorial cooperation programmes (Interreg). For national level operational programmes, it is usually a ministry, for regional operational programmes – a regional board or regional ministry. Competences include developing operational programmes, selecting projects, ordering payments, monitoring implementation. Can also issue guidelines, recommendations and handbooks that focus on the implementation of the programme. Carries out promotional and information activities. (European Commission, n.d.^[2])
- **Intermediate Body (IB):** a managing authority can delegate a portion of its tasks to intermediate bodies. Scope of responsibility is established by agreement and can include preparing and carrying out calls for project proposals, selecting projects, concluding contracts. Intermediate bodies often specialise in a specific field (European Commission, n.d.^[2]).
- **Interreg:** series of programmes under the European territorial goal aimed at stimulating cooperation between regions of the European Union and certain third countries. It is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (European Commission, n.d.^[2]).
- **Operational Programme:** operational programmes are detailed plans in which the Member States set out how money from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) will be spent during the programming period. They can be drawn up for a specific region or a country-wide thematic goal (e.g., environment). For the European Territorial Cooperation goal, cross-border or interregional operational programmes are drawn up. Member States submit their operational

programmes on the basis of their Partnership Agreements. Each operational programme specifies which of the thematic/policy objectives that guide cohesion policy in the relevant programming period will be addressed through the funding available under the operational programmes (European Commission, n.d.^[2]).

- **Partnership Principle:** partnership implies close cooperation between public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society at national, regional and local levels throughout the whole programme cycle consisting of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (European Commission, n.d.^[3]).
- **Beneficiaries:** businesses (especially small businesses), public bodies, associations, or individuals that are selected by managing authorities and/or intermediate bodies to receive funding from EU funds for cohesion policy (European Commission, n.d.^[4]).

1 Introduction and context of the project

Summary of the European Commission DG REGIO and OECD cooperation

Cohesion policy promotes the overall harmonious development of all European Union member states and regions. It is one of the concrete expressions of European solidarity, and as such, it occupies a major place in the budget of the EU. For its long-term budget (2021-2027), more than 372 billion euros – or around a third of the budget – is dedicated to this type of investment policy. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) are examples of funds devoted to cohesion policy.

Proper investment decisions stemming from these funds rely on robust administrative capacities and trustworthy institutions. Citizens have a role to play in making administrations more transparent and ensuring that these investments are more efficient and effective. Over the last 30 years of EU cohesion policy, stakeholders have become increasingly diverse while, simultaneously, there has been a drive towards transparency and efficiency.

In this context, in July 2020 the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) began collaborating with the OECD's Open Government and Civic Space Unit in order to explore innovative ways in which five different authorities could better engage with citizens regarding investment decisions. These five selected authorities are the regional government of Cantabria in Spain; the Emilia-Romagna region in Italy; the Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland; the Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme; and the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme.

Overview of the pilot project: Goals, timeline, and selection process

Goals

DG REGIO supports EU Member States in their efforts to strengthen their administrative capacity through a number of tools and concrete actions. In this framework, the DG REGIO's competence centre "Administrative Capacity Building and European Solidarity Fund" is reflecting on how to better support managing authorities (MAs), intermediate bodies (IBs), and urban authorities (UAs) to strengthen their capacities for citizen engagement, particularly that of citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs), in the implementation of cohesion policy. The key objective is to encourage and build good practices that can serve as inspiration for programme authorities responsible of implementation of EU funds for cohesion policy.

To achieve this aim, an EU-wide pilot project was initiated. It consists of supporting five pilot MAs and/or IBs wishing to take advantage of expertise to set-up initiatives for citizen engagement in the implementation of cohesion policy. The managing authorities and intermediate bodies participating in the pilot project were selected by DG REGIO on the basis of a call for expression of interest and benefited from technical support from the OECD to analyse and address their citizen engagement needs and efforts.

The European Commission/DG REGIO has approached the OECD to provide technical support, in particular to guide the MAs/IBs in analysing the state of play, structuring internal discussions with relevant stakeholders, and help preparing an action plan for the selected pilot cases.

The OECD's Open Government and Civic Space Unit then worked collaboratively with the chosen authorities to assist them in the:

- Identification of relevant background information about the authorities, the context in which they are operating, and the way the partnership principle is being implemented.
- Identification and framing of the problem that could be helped through citizen and civil society engagement.
- Assistance in the development of the engagement design that would help achieve the aim of solving a problem or strengthening an outcome in that particular MA or IB.

- Identification of potential civil society partners, and
- Identification of the necessary steps and considerations to take into account and an Action Plan to implement the citizen and civil society engagement activity, including monitoring and evaluation.

Timeline

- Publication of the call: 6 February 2020
- Closing of the call: 30 April 2020
- Results of the selection process: May 2020
- Kick-off work with MA/IB selected through the call: July 2020 (by [videoconference](#))
- Expert assistance to the selected pilot managing authorities and intermediate body: from July 2020 until November 2021
- Final workshop: 25 November 2021
- Final report publication and launch: March 2022

Selection Process

18 expressions of interest were received from Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies (hereafter authorities) across the EU. Based on eligibility and motivation, five authorities were selected to participate in the project.

Introducing the five authorities that took part in the pilot

The selected authorities represent a range of different cohesion policy programmes: regional programmes, cross-border cooperation programmes, and a national sectorial programme. The list below is not a ranking.

The regional government of Cantabria in Spain

[The Cantabria region](#), through its Department of Economy and Finance, was in the process of developing their Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for 2021-2027. Building a 'green' Europe and moving towards a low-carbon economy are key priorities of the programme. The public authority has identified the importance of citizen engagement in achieving those key priorities. They were open to experiment with new and innovative ways of doing so and motivated to create the conditions for citizens to meaningfully engage and help the region tackle its most pressing issues.

Contact point: Paz Diaz Nieto, General director of the department of EU funds, Regional Ministry of Economy and Finance, diaz_mpa@cantabria.es

The Emilia-Romagna region in Italy

[The Emilia-Romagna region](#) was in the process of developing its regional programme for 2021-2027. It is fundamental to involve stakeholders – and CSOs and citizens in particular – in this process, particularly throughout the programming stage. Emilia-Romagna was interested in enhancing the accountability of investments and motivated to better address citizens' needs to implement citizen engagement practices in designing, implementing, and evaluating Territorial Development Strategies under Cohesion Policy (that are part of the ROP for 2021-2027).

Contact points: Daniela Ferrara, coordination of programming and implementation of the ERDF and ESF projects, Regione Emilia-Romagna, Daniela.Ferrara@regione.emilia-romagna.it. Anna Maria Linsalata, Head of Communications, Regione Emilia-Romagna, AnnaMaria.Linsalata@regione.emilia-romagna.it.

The Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme

[The Interreg V-A Flanders-Netherlands](#) Programme brings together companies, NGOs, and public authorities to work on priority topics by learning from each other and tackling common obstacles (for example, in areas like cross-border mobility and healthcare cooperation). The programme's Joint Secretariat was in the process of drawing up the 2021-2027 programme. The aim of the Joint Secretariat was to improve its impact by ensuring that projects funded through the programme reflect and address citizens' most pressing needs. Additionally, it was interested in promoting cross-border cooperation via citizen engagement.

Contact point: Bram de Kort, Interreg V-A Flanders–the Netherlands, Director of Joint Secretariat, Bram.dekort@grensregio.eu

The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

[The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria](#) Programme corresponding for the 2014-2020 programming period funded projects that contribute to the social and economic development of the Romanian-Bulgarian border area. The area is comprised of seven counties in Romania and eight districts in Bulgaria. The Managing Authority is currently in the programming stage of the Interreg's post-2020 programmes. It aims to help ensure that all opportunities to consult the programme with the public are maximised by effectively engaging citizens and stakeholders, and therefore was interested in strengthening their knowledge about essential elements of citizen participation.

Contact point: Simona Vatafu, Managing Authority for Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme, Public manager, Simona.Vatafu@mdlpa.ro

The Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland

[The Centre for EU Transport Projects \(CEUTP\)](#) works directly with beneficiaries on all aspects of transport infrastructure projects: initial formulation of the project, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The CEUTP aims to increase citizen participation in the early stages of decision-making for infrastructure projects in Poland. It worked with the OECD to produce a concrete set of Citizen Participation Guidelines to help identify opportunities and plan for citizen participation in designing, implementing, and evaluating transport infrastructure projects. They are a practical tool for the beneficiaries, investors, and municipalities with which the CEUTP works.

Contact point: Edyta Jaszczuk, CEUTP, Expert in the Department of Transport Analysis and Programming, ejaszczuk@cupt.gov.pl and/or cupt@cupt.gov.pl

Why involve citizens in policy making?

There is a range of benefits that involving citizens in policy making can bring.

Generally, involving citizens in public decision making is beneficial for the following reasons:

- **It is good for democracy:** Citizen participation has **intrinsic benefits**. It leads to a better and more democratic policy-making process, which becomes more transparent, inclusive, legitimate, and accountable. Citizen participation enhances public trust in government and democratic institutions by giving citizens a role in public decision making.
- **It is good for policies, laws, services and projects:** Citizen participation also has **instrumental benefits**. It leads to better policy results that take into account and use citizens' experience and knowledge to address citizens' most pressing needs. The quality of policies, laws, and services is improved, as they were elaborated, implemented and evaluated based on better evidence and on

a more informed choice. They also benefit from the innovative ideas of citizens and can be more cost-effective as a result (OECD, 2016^[6]).

- **It is good for inclusion and diversity:** Citizen participation can make governance and decision making more inclusive by opening the door to more representative groups of people. Through participatory processes, public authorities can include the voice of the “silent majority” and strengthen the representation of often excluded groups like informal workers, migrants, women, indigenous populations, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities etc. Citizen participation in public decision making can answer the concerns of unrepresented groups by addressing inequalities of voice and access, and thus fight exclusion and marginalisation. This in turn can create better policies and services, build a sense of belonging, and foster social cohesion (OECD, 2020^[7]).
- **It is good for legitimacy and facilitates implementation:** Involving citizens in the decision-making process supports the public understanding of the outcome and enhances its uptake. Citizen participation can allow the public to follow, influence, and understand the process leading to a decision, which in turn enhances the legitimacy of hard choices. Empowering citizens through participatory processes is also good for the overall legitimacy of the democratic process as it signals civic respect and builds a relationship based on mutual trust.

It can also support public authorities and institutions, as well as beneficiaries and investors

- **To solve problems or address specific situations, such as:**
 - public problems that require careful consideration from a diversity of perspectives;
 - when there is a vacuum of ideas and solutions;
 - addressing complex issues that require informed public judgment;
 - preparing long-term plans.
- **To understand root causes, take better decisions and prepare and implement projects that respond to citizens’ needs, especially:**
 - As a way **to gather information, data and public opinion.**
 - As an opportunity **to tap into the collective intelligence** to co-create solutions, services or projects.
 - As a mechanism **to collect public feedback** on proposed solutions such as draft legislations or plans.
 - As a tool **to adapt and design public services** that respond the real needs of citizens.
 - As a way **to involve citizens and stakeholders in the implementation** of policies, projects, and research.

Box 1. OECD Recommendation on Open Government

The OECD’s Recommendation on Open Government contains ten provisions that expand upon the four principles of open government: transparency; integrity; accountability, and stakeholder participation. Two of those provisions recommend that Adherents of the recommendation should grant all stakeholders, including citizens, “equal and fair opportunities to be informed and consulted and actively

engage them in all phases of the policy cycle”; and “promote innovative ways to effectively engage with stakeholders to source ideas and co-create solutions”.

Source: (OECD, 2017^[5])

For citizens, getting involved in public decision making can mean:

- **They make decisions that affect their own lives:** Decisions that are taken every day by representatives and public servants on a local, regional and national level directly affect our everyday lives and our futures. Some of those decisions can have a very important personal impact on, for example, our education, neighbourhood or taxes we pay. Those taking these decisions do their best to find best possible solutions and develop ideas, however they do not always have the full picture and do not know how different people will be affected by them. It is important as a citizen to take part in citizen participation opportunities that affect you and your community, especially when you have a lot to contribute. Only working together we can make the best possible decisions for all, as it allows us to tap into our collective intelligence.
- **It is an opportunity to learn new things and develop new skills:** Getting involved in citizen participation activities is a chance to experience something new and meaningful, at the same time meeting other members of your community, learning together about a specific issue from various experts, having a chance experience first-hand how public decisions are taken. It is also an opportunity to learn new skills, especially those that are linked with democratic fitness (the ability to take an active role as a citizen) – such as empathy, active listening, deliberation, and critical thinking.
- **It gives a sense of accomplishment and pride:** Working with others to help generate ideas and take better decisions that will positively impact on your community, city, or country is an important and responsible task. Taking into account the needs of everyone and working to find a common solution is not easy, but it is rewarding when accomplished. Not often we have a chance to be involved in activities so closely linked to the common good. When it happens, it is an experience to cherish.

Cohesion policy: key reasons for involving citizens

Beyond the general benefits and motivations for involving citizens in policy making, there are multiple reasons to involve citizens in cohesion policy in particular.

Citizens can support the process of cohesion policy:

- It contributes to ensuring that projects funded through EU cohesion funds **take into account and use citizens’ experience and knowledge** to address citizens’ most pressing needs.
- It creates opportunities to **enhance the inclusion and diversity** of actors who take part in the planning and implementation of programmes linked to EU cohesion policy funds.
- It **increases awareness and understanding amongst the public** about the implementation of EU cohesion policy in their country, region, and community.
- It can **help pre-empt public conflict or stalemate situations**, which could arise during implementation stages of EU cohesion policy programs.

- It is good for policies, services and projects: the inclusion of citizens in the design, implementation and evaluation of the projects can **support the quality of the outcomes**.

Citizens can support the outcomes of cohesion policy:

For the 2021-2027 European budget, the European Commission proposed five objectives to guide Cohesion Policy: A smarter, greener, connected, and Social Europe Closer to citizens. In this context, citizen participation in cohesion policy can also directly and indirectly support the European Commission's policy objectives:

- **Smarter Europe:** through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses.
- **Greener Europe:** implementing the Paris Agreement and investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change.
- **Connected Europe:** with strategic transport and digital networks.
- **Social Europe:** delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare.
- **Europe closer to citizens:** by supporting locally led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

2

From initial ideas to concrete actions

Citizen participation experience of participating authorities

Initial project survey results

At the outset of the project, the OECD team conducted a citizen engagement in cohesion policy survey with the five pilot authorities to understand the status quo of citizen participation in each of the five participating organisations. This section describes and discusses the main findings of the survey in terms of: i) room for improvement in involving individual citizens beyond stakeholder groups; and ii) untapped opportunities for implementing innovative citizen participation methods to move from consultation to engagement.

Mostly involving stakeholders rather than citizens

The OECD (2017) defines the actors that public authorities or other categories of investors can involve in their participatory mechanisms:

- **Stakeholders:** any interested and/or affected party, including institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media or the private sector.
- **Citizens:** individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious and political affiliations or special needs in the larger sense ‘an inhabitant of a particular place’, which can be in reference to a village, town, city, region, state, or country depending on the context.

Public authorities can involve different types of participants, such as citizens and stakeholders. The participation of citizens and stakeholders are both equally important, however they should not be treated equally. No value or preference is given to citizens or stakeholders in particular, as both publics can enrich the decisions, projects, policies and services. However, public authorities should first decide on who to engage, then adapt the design and the expectations of the participatory process in accordance to the category of participants. Individuals and stakeholders will not require the same conditions to participate and will not produce the same type of inputs. Stakeholders can provide expertise and more specific input than citizens through mechanisms such as advisory bodies or experts’ panels, whereas citizen participation requires methods that provide the public with the time, information, and resources to produce quality inputs and develop recommendations.

The survey demonstrated that almost none of the MAs/IBs directly involve individual citizens in their participation activities, excluding Regione Emilia-Romagna. This underlined a clear lack of understanding of why and how to engage these different types of groups, in particular individual citizens, which leads to citizens being underrepresented. This is partly due to the different range of activities and responsibilities of individual institutions. However, all institutions highlight the need to understand why and how to engage these different types of groups, particularly individual citizens.

Table 1. Only one of the MAs/IBs directly involves individual citizens in their participation activities

Which stakeholders have been involved in the participation processes you indicated?

	Interreg V-A Flanders – The Netherlands	Interreg V-A Romania- Bulgaria	Regional Ministry, Cantabria	Regione Emilia- Romagna	CEUTP, Poland
NGOs	X	X			X
Trade unions	X		X	X	
Professional associations	X	X	X	X	X
Academia	X	X	X	X	X
Scientific community	X	X	X	X	X

Individual citizens				X	
Companies and businesses	X		X	X	X
Beneficiaries of funds you manage	X	X		X	X
Relevant public authorities	X	X	X	X	X
Politicians			X	X	
Other					

Source: OECD Citizen engagement in cohesion policy project survey (2020)

Note: It is important to note that CEUTP as an Intermediate Body does not have the direct responsibility of citizen participation, but is included for comparative purposes.

A diversity of levels of experience in involving citizens

Participation includes “all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery”. It refers to the efforts by public institutions to hear the views, perspectives, and inputs from citizens and stakeholders. In the context of infrastructure investment projects, participation allows citizens and stakeholders to influence activities and decisions of the public authorities at different stages of the policy cycle.

The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (2017) distinguishes between three levels of citizen and stakeholder participation, which differ according to the level of involvement:

- **Information:** an initial level of participation characterised by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to citizens and stakeholders. It covers both on-demand provision of information and “proactive” measures by the government to disseminate information.
- **Consultation:** a more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa. It is based on the prior definition of the issue for which views are being sought and requires the provision of relevant information, in addition to feedback on the outcomes of the process.
- **Engagement:** when citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g., information, data and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, proposing project or policy options and shaping the dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation in many cases rests with the investor or other authorities.

Figure 1. Three pillars of stakeholder participation



Source: OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (2017)

The survey demonstrated that MAs/IBs are more familiar with traditional practices corresponding to first two pillars of stakeholder participation (information and consultation). Only Regione Emilia-Romagna has experience with co-creation activities and activities oriented towards the engagement of the broader public and citizens, reaching beyond traditional stakeholders. This is also partly due to the different range of activities and responsibilities of individual institutions, but nonetheless highlights opportunities for improvement.

Table 2. Existing citizen and stakeholder participation experience was limited to providing information and conducting occasional consultations

What citizen and stakeholder participation experience has your Managing Authority/Intermediate Body had so far regarding Cohesion Policy?

Type of citizen participation experience	Interreg V-A Flanders – The Netherlands	Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria	Regional Ministry, Cantabria	Regione Emilia-Romagna	CEUTP, Poland
Informing the public about your work in general	X	X		X	X
Public communication campaigns about specific projects	X	X	X	X	X
Organising public consultations	X	X			X
Carrying out a citizen questionnaire				X	
Carrying out a stakeholder questionnaire	X	X	X	X	X
Organising bilateral meetings with stakeholders	X	X	X	X	X
Organising roundtable discussions or workshops targeted at	X	X	X	X	X

stakeholders					
Organising public roundtable discussions or workshops				X	X
Organising co-creation activities				X	
Setting up an online platform for citizen inputs				X	
Other (please explain in the following question)					

Source: Citizen engagement in cohesion policy project survey (2020)

Note: It is important to note that CEUTP as an Intermediate Body does not have the direct responsibility of citizen participation, but is included for comparative purposes.

Needs linked to citizen participation identified during initial project stages

The initial citizen engagement in cohesion policy project survey and conversations with the five selected authorities highlighted three key needs linked to citizen participation in cohesion policy:

1. Meaningfully involving citizens beyond mandatory public consultations.

Occasional mandatory public consultations, although a useful tool to gather citizen and stakeholder input if implemented well, are not enough to build a long-standing relationship between public authorities and the broader public. More innovative and collaborative methods of citizen and stakeholder engagement need to be implemented to tap into the creative capacity of the public. A very good example of the paramount importance of engaging citizens beyond mandatory consultations is the early-stage citizen engagement in transport infrastructure investments, such as the ones supported by CEUTP. Creating opportunities for citizens to participate in the designing of transport infrastructure projects that directly impact their lives can potentially avoid not only conflicts or dissatisfaction, but also protests and uprisings that might slow down or impede those investment projects.

2. Identifying how to involve citizens in different aspects of cohesion policy and on different levels that appreciate the diversity of contexts of cohesion policy programmes.

Cohesion policy programmes have specificities to be considered when identifying how to involve citizens throughout. For example, Interreg programmes are focussed on cross-border cooperation, and therefore any participation method applicable should take into account the opportunities and challenges there might be, such as how to facilitate citizen engagement in several languages and how to build a shared sense of community across the border. Most programmes also have the opportunity to engage citizens and stakeholders on different levels: such as when defining an operational programme, monitoring its implementation, but also enabling and supporting programme beneficiaries to implement citizen engagement processes in their projects. An example of working on both of these layers is the Interreg V-A Flanders-the Netherlands Programme, which aims to set up a citizens' panel that would determine the cross-border studies to be commissioned, and to encourage beneficiaries to identify opportunities to involve citizens by providing them a Citizen Participation Playbook.

3. Carving out the space and securing necessary knowledge, resources, and political support to implement more innovative citizen participation methods that give real power to citizens to make decisions that affect their lives.

In most cases, authorities that work on implementing cohesion policy do not have staff or resources dedicated to citizen participation. Beyond citizen participation expertise, which OECD was there to provide, implementing high-quality citizen participation processes (that are accessible, timely, designed to engage,

reach enough and correct participants and have a meaningful impact) in a sustained way requires significant resources in terms of time and funds, as well as a culture of participation that helps secure political buy-in to take on board citizen input.

The final results of the five pilot projects

Below is a brief summary of co-operation with each authority with links to further information. It describes individual context of each public authority, their expressed needs, and the details of what they have achieved during the pilot project together with the OECD and DG REGIO. A list of links to all the outputs mentioned below is available in Annex A of this document.

The regional government of Cantabria in Spain

Cantabria's ecological transition posed a difficult issue to the public authorities, considering the existing urban-rural divide, the potential higher short-term costs and long-term benefits, and the overall complexity given the multiplicity of factors to consider. Evidence suggests that representative deliberative processes are especially well-suited to give citizens a voice in tackling complex, long-term issues (OECD, 2020^[7]). Tapping into the collective knowledge of citizens and bringing them into the decision making process to help identify common ground by implementing a representative deliberative process can provide an unparalleled opportunity to address this issue. Public authority has decided to implement a citizens' jury. Citizens' juries are one of methods of representative deliberative processes. These are innovative citizen participation processes that bring together a demographically representative group of citizens selected via a civic lottery. Citizens are then given ample time, resources such as facilitation, and access to information to learn, reflect, deliberate and, eventually, develop recommendations on policy questions that consider the complexities and trade-offs of the issue at hand.

The OECD provided guidance to the region of Cantabria in Spain on the design and implementation of a citizens' jury that brought together a group of citizens broadly representative of the Besaya's basin. They identified measures to help Cantabria move towards a low-carbon economy, taking into account the context of a rural-urban divide that this initiative aims to overcome. The Besaya's Citizens' Jury deliberated on the question of "How to take advantage of European green funds in the Besaya basin to create and/or maintain jobs that respect the criteria of a just and inclusive ecological transition?" The jury produced [26 final recommendations](#) that all received at least 80% approval among the members. On 1 October 2021, the jury members were present at the Torrelavega chamber of commerce, where they heard from Economy Minister María Sánchez Ruiz the Cantabrian government's reactions to the recommendations and their plans for implementation.

A two-stage civic lottery was organised to select the 35 jury members. During the first round of invitations, 7,002 households from ten different municipalities in the region around Torrelavega received an invitation by post to participate in the citizens' jury, signed by the Minister of Economy and Finance. A second draw was then carried out among the people who accepted the invitation, this time demographically stratified based on five criteria: gender, age, education, municipality, and values related to environment and participation. In order to enrich the deliberation that would be carried out by the jury members and to engage local stakeholders, a call for proposals was organised before the jury was set to meet. After getting in touch with 200 local organisations, 58 high quality projects were received. The jury used these as examples of local projects that could be developed.

Read [the final report](#) of the [Besaya's Citizens' Jury](#).

The Emilia-Romagna region in Italy

The Emilia-Romagna region in Italy was interested in identifying citizen engagement opportunities and supporting their implementation in the preparation of the local territorial development strategies under cohesion policy. To achieve this goal, the OECD organized a learning workshop for public officials working

on citizen participation across the Emilia Romagna Region. This two-day workshop covered different processes and tools of citizen participation, as well as good practices from across the OECD. This workshop had a particular emphasis on innovative practices such as representative deliberative processes because the Emilia Romagna Region is interested in piloting such methodologies as part of the cohesion policy, in particular during the design of the local territorial development strategies. The use of deliberative processes is not new in the region, as the city of Bologna is currently implementing a Citizen Assembly on climate policies.

Following the workshop, Emilia-Romagna worked with the OECD to create a Citizen Participation Playbook to help identify opportunities and plan for citizen participation in designing, implementing, and evaluating their Territorial Development Strategies under Cohesion Policy (that are part of the ROP for 2021-2027). The Playbook covers the main arguments for and benefits of citizen participation, the different steps that should be taken in order to implement a citizen participation process. It also presents a range of suggested models, specific tips for communication, timing, digital tools, and evaluation, as well as helpful principles of citizen participation. In addition to the Playbook, the OECD provided comments and suggestions on the digital platform for citizen participation based on the open-source software Decidim that the region is setting up.

Read the [Citizen Participation Playbook for Emilia Romagna Region](#).

The Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme

The aim of the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg V-A Flanders- The Netherlands Programme was to improve its impact by ensuring that projects funded through the programme reflect and address citizens' most pressing needs. Additionally, it was interested in promoting cross-border cooperation via citizen engagement

To achieve these aims, together with the OECD, the Joint Secretariat developed a Citizen Participation Playbook, which helps beneficiaries to engage citizens in shaping and implementing programme projects. The questions that lie at the centre of this playbook will be incorporated into the programme's call for proposals and will form part of the decision-making process for allocating funds to projects. Beneficiaries go through a two-step procedure to apply for Interreg programme funds. Step 1 – a call for proposals where beneficiaries fill in an initial broad application form and step 2 – a longer formal application. After step 1, based on the information about the project, the Joint Secretariat will decide which ones from all the projects submitted have the potential capacity and opportunities for citizen participation. During step 2, the formal application will ask these projects to follow the steps outlined in the playbook and develop a more precise idea of how citizens will be involved.

Additionally, as part of this project, the OECD and the Joint Secretariat has developed an action plan for a pilot Citizens' Panel on Addressing Cross-Border Issues and Stimulating Cross-Border Contacts, comprised of a broadly representative group of everyday people from both sides of the border. The Interreg program would first establish a call for proposals on potential studies or projects to tackle border obstacles and stimulate meaningful societal contacts. The panel's responsibility would be to decide which cross-border studies should be funded. The idea is to learn from this pilot panel how to design future citizens' panels that would be established for each periodic call for proposals for cross-border studies during the seven-year programming period.

Read the [Citizen Participation Playbook for Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme](#) beneficiaries and see the [note on Flanders – The Netherlands Citizens' Panel on Addressing Cross-Border Issues and Stimulating Cross-Border Contacts](#).

The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme was interested in strengthening their knowledge about essential elements of citizen participation. This knowledge is needed to support a range of citizen and

stakeholder participation activities that are taking place in all stages of the programming process of the 2021-2027 programme and in particular policy objective 5, A Europe closer to citizens, which involves a close cooperation between stakeholders and citizens in developing together an integrated territorial strategy for the development of the cross-border area. Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme did not have extensive citizen participation experience as most of the consultation processes organised by the management structures were addressed to stakeholders, which is the main target group of the programme. Related to the citizens' consultation processes, these were limited to public consultation on specific topics for receiving feedback of the citizens and registered mainly a low interest and reaction on behalf of the citizens.

To respond to this knowledge need, the OECD organised a learning workshop for the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria programme to cover the foundations of citizen participation. In addition, the OECD has provided feedback and suggestions to the programmes ongoing online public consultations.

Building on the needs identified during the workshop, the OECD together with the programme has developed a checklist for designing and commissioning citizen-participation processes. The checklist will be a tool that the programme can use as a benchmark of quality for the citizen-engagement processes that it either organises themselves or commissions. It also includes a step-by-step guide on implementing a quality public consultation process – as the Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme is looking to strengthen its consultation capacities before moving towards citizen engagement using innovative citizen participation practices. The guidelines were already used by the management bodies in the preparation of the two workshops dedicated to stakeholders that took place in January 2022 and will be used in all future consultation processes planned during all stages of the life cycle of the programme.

Read the [Citizen Participation Checklist for Interreg V-A Romania Bulgaria Programme](#).

The Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland

CEUTP, having as its main task supporting current and future beneficiaries at every stage of preparation and implementation of transport projects financed from EU funds, joined the Pilot to increase its competences in the field of citizen participation, to be able to effectively support cooperating entities. One of the main objectives of CEUTP was to encourage beneficiaries of the EU funds and investors in the transport sector to implement citizen participation processes at the early stages of transport infrastructure investment. CEUTP used various research methods to analyse the current state of citizen participation in programming and planning transport infrastructure projects in Poland and has identified the lack of tailored guidance on citizen participation for linear transport projects.

Supported by the OECD, CEUTP conducted two surveys to gain more insight into the status quo of citizen participation in the planning and designing transport infrastructure investments and public awareness of the opportunities to participate. One was aimed at the general public, the other at investors – beneficiaries of EU funds in the transport sector. To properly interpret the survey results and to understand the views of public administration, stakeholders, and organisations representing various social groups, CEUTP brought together a panel of experts. On 28 October 2021, CEUTP organised a conference "Transport infrastructure financed by the EU funds is socially accepted", to which the representatives of the European Commission DG REGIO and the OECD contributed. The conference aimed to highlight the benefits and the importance of citizen participation in transport infrastructure projects.

Results of these surveys and input from the panel of experts and the conference contributed to the development of a concrete set of Citizen Participation Guidelines to help identify opportunities and plan for citizen participation in designing, implementing, and evaluating transport infrastructure projects, that CEUTP and OECD produced collaboratively. They are a practical tool for the current and future beneficiaries, including municipalities and other investors with which the CEUTP works.

See [Citizen Participation Guidelines for Centre for EU Transport Project \(CEUTP\) beneficiaries/investors](#).

Challenges encountered during the implementation of the pilot projects

This section outlines the main challenges that the OECD and the five authorities have encountered during the implementation of the pilot projects. It has two parts – one that details challenges observed by the OECD, and another with challenges identified by the participating authorities. Challenges include difficulty navigating the complexity of the process of involving citizens, limited understanding of the benefits of citizen participation, challenges to secure political buy-in, and adapting to rigid timelines and structures authorities operate within that sometimes limit possibilities to engage citizens.

OECD observations

Difficulty navigating the complexity of the process of involving citizens meaningfully

Implementing meaningful citizen participation in the policy making process is a valuable but complex task. Rather than being something that can just be added to the existing process of making decisions, it changes the nature of it, opening up policy making to citizen input, enhancing its transparency and accountability. Throughout the project it became clear that authorities understandably had difficulty navigating the process of involving citizens and would benefit from a clear framework to facilitate their citizen participation practices. For guidance, the OECD has designed an eight-step process of planning and implementing citizen participation.

Figure 2. Steps of planning and implementing a citizen participation process

1. Identifying the moment of participation and the problem to solve
2. Defining the expected outcome
3. Identifying available resources
4. Identifying the relevant public to be involved and the recruitment process
5. Choosing the participatory method
6. Tips for implementation
7. Keeping your promise
8. Evaluating the participatory process

Note: Further details about each step can be found in the OECD's *Citizen Participation Guidelines* (forthcoming, 2022) and in various guidelines and playbooks linked in Annex A of this report.

Source: Developed by the authors, drawing on Faulkner, W. & Bynner, C. (2020) *How to Design and Plan Public Engagement Processes: A Handbook*, Glasgow: What Works Scotland and Involve (2005) *People & Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making*, London: Beacon Press.

Limited understanding of the benefits of citizen participation in the public sector

Public authorities taking part in the project were convinced of the broader benefits of citizen participation, such as enhancing accountability and transparency of how cohesion funds are spent and giving citizens a

say in making decisions that affect their lives. Although they also raised some fears about the risks of implementing citizen engagement initiatives and some had difficulties getting their colleagues and stakeholders on board. Better knowledge and examples of concrete benefits of citizen participation were needed not only to clarify any doubts and strengthen the motivations of participating counterparts, but also to equip them with key facts about citizen participation, its benefits and other considerations to help them spread the culture of participation in their respective organisations and communities. Key arguments for citizen participation are outlined in the first part of this report. Some of the central myths and misconceptions about citizen participation encountered are addressed below:

1. Myth: Citizens are not capable of understanding the complexity of an issue or project.

Often people who are experts in a specific field have spent many years gaining experience and knowledge to understand a complex issue. While citizens cannot be as knowledgeable about a subject as experts, there is a large amount of evidence which shows that citizens are able to grapple with complexity if the process has been designed to give them time and resources for learning. Experts should be involved in helping select, prepare, and present a broad and diverse information for citizens to be able to develop informed recommendations.

Decision makers, whether elected representatives or appointed officials, are not experts on all topics on which they are required to take decisions either. A member of parliament cannot be a specialist on every single policy issue covered by legislation. They have access to technical experts that guide them in understanding complex problems. This can, and should, also be the case for citizens.

2. Myth: Citizens are unreliable and will not commit fully to the participation process.

Another common misconception is that citizens will either not participate or will drop out partway through a process. Sometimes there is a sense that we ask too much of people, however, more often than not we ask too little. Evidence shows that people are more than willing to participate if they see that the process is worth their time and effort, with a clear link to impact.

To make it worthwhile, there has to be a clear link to the decision-making process, meaning that citizens' recommendations, ideas, and proposals will be considered by a public authority or another actor in charge of making decisions within a project. It should be clear how and when the public authority will use those inputs and will provide a direct response to citizens.

Citizen participation levels are also affected by the design of a participation exercise. A good design will help overcome barriers to participation by giving citizens a clear task, being transparent about the process and its intended impact, providing opportunity for learning; giving enough information for people to come to an informed point of view, being well-moderated dialogue and deliberation, and providing compensation for time/travel/other costs.

3. Myth: Citizens will develop either a wish list or a list of grievances.

This myth is based on the negative past experiences of interacting with citizens in participatory processes. Often public servants face citizens in situations such as a town hall meeting or a public consultation about a specific decision that was already taken. In such circumstances usually citizens with something negative to say show up, to express a complaint or disagree with a public decision, because the process is designed this way. Whereas participation can be designed to elicit constructive contributions towards finding solutions rather than producing a list of grievances. If a citizen participation process is designed to gather ideas, co-develop solutions or co-implement activities or policies, citizens will do just that – they will work in a constructive, substantial way.

Challenges to secure political buy-in

Securing political buy-in of key players is arguably the most important element of success when implementing citizen participation. Commitment to seriously consider citizens' input and respond to their

suggestions, ideas or recommendations is what motivates citizens to participate and helps build a relationship of mutual trust. Success to establish the support for Besaya's Citizens' Jury across political parties in the region of Cantabria enabled a smooth implementation of the representative deliberative process. Difficulty in establishing such support for the Interreg Flanders-The Netherlands Cross-Border Citizens' Jury put the implementation of it on hold. Aiding these ambitious early adopters to garner political support to implement innovative citizen participation processes is essential in further efforts to facilitate their uptake.

Rigid timelines and structures authorities operate within

Involving citizens and stakeholders meaningfully requires enough time and clarity to plan and stick to the participation timeline communicated to citizens. What was observed during this pilot project is that implementation of cohesion policy, especially the process of developing operational programmes, can have a specific cycle and architecture, that can set rigid timelines that might make it difficult to implement more advanced citizen participation methods. At the same time, regional plans depend on agreements and processes on the national level, which can have a tendency to change unpredictably, especially in case of changes in political power, which adds further complications to plan and carry out participation activities.

Implementing citizen participation also requires some flexibility to give citizens a certain degree of decision-making power. Strictly defined roles of who takes what kind of decisions in shaping strategic priorities of cohesion policy in a specific country or region as well as what will be included in operational programmes and how they are implemented can cause difficulties when trying to give some of those mandates to citizens.

These are important considerations that affected some of the pilot activities implemented during the project. Even though most of the time it is possible to adapt to such circumstances, further proliferation and increased uptake of innovative citizen participation methods might be impeded by some of these structural features.

Challenges identified by authorities

At the end of the process, the OECD asked each of the five authorities to identify the main benefits and challenges they have experienced. Below are the context-specific challenges they have identified.

Cantabria

- The regulatory framework in Cantabria lacks a reference on involving citizens in deliberative process, which caused difficulties to commission various complex services needed to implement the Besaya deliberative process.
- Implementing a representative deliberative process method has required a clear understanding about what exactly this process involves, the methodological stages, such as the civic lottery or the role of the facilitators.
- Clear commitment was needed from various political stakeholders involved in the deliberative process, such as the ten municipalities of the Besaya Basin that were part of the citizens' jury.
- Citizen willingness to engage and interest in the deliberative process was not clear in advance. This required an effort to do more personal and direct contact with citizens in order to ensure that potential participants would trust the process and choose to participate actively.
- Lack of public skills and resources to move away from classic participation (surveys, polls, etc.) to citizen engagement, in this case representative deliberative processes.

Emilia-Romagna

- Delay in the preparation and submission to EC of 2021-2027 Partnership Agreement made the planning of citizen participation activities quite difficult. This aspect also affected the possibility to experience on the field processes for citizen participation in the drafting of new programmes.
- The choice to focus on citizen participation to support the preparation of territorial strategies in two very different areas (urban and internal) determined the more theoretical nature of the project.
- Switching from information and communication practices to more collaborative levels of citizen participation is a challenge that requires time and effort. It also means broadening the number of individuals and organisations to involve, trying to reach not only the usual stakeholders but also other organizations, individual citizens, and under-represented associations.
- Involving young populations in events and participatory processes can be complicated. A way to appeal to younger audiences can be to improve the digital participation platforms.
- As more participatory processes are implemented, with higher degrees of complexity, it becomes more complex to oversee their implementation.

The Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme

- Addressing the fears of civil servants that participation will result in an uncontrollable process is challenging.
- Difficulty to address concerns of civil servants that the genuine citizen engagement process will be too complex to carry out strengthened unwillingness to try.
- Addressing the fears of civil servants that citizens will not be able to see the real priorities and participation will result in unusable outputs is complex, as it requires a culture change.

The Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland

- Ensuring efficient access to information is a complex challenge. It involves reaching all potential interested parties with the information about participation activities and inviting them to take part. Developing a detailed consultation plan, which includes an approach how to reach target groups and underrepresented individuals, is one way to address it. This is especially important when implementing participation in planning investments at the supra-regional or national level.
- Ensuring openness to implement citizen recommendations is another consideration. Often, designers of infrastructure projects develop a draft of a strategic document in the context of strictly technical analysis. It is not easy to convince them to make certain changes to the document to take into account citizens' recommendations, because such changes may affect the cost and schedule of the project on the investors.
- Ensuring that there is enough time to prepare a citizen participation process and analyse comments and conclusions in the timeline of the project is not always easy, as transport infrastructure projects are large scale and strictly regulated.

The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria programme

- Conducting a citizen participation process that involves more than a public consultation can be challenging, as citizen participation is a complex process that implies planning, organisation, allocation of significant time and human resources that in many cases a Managing Authority may lack. MA's usually have limited human and financial resources allocated (the organisational chart and the budget is set up in advance for a 7-year period), as well as strict time constraints.
- Capturing and maintaining the interest of citizens to participate is a challenge, as citizens sometimes are not defined as a specific target group in the strategy of an EU funded programme

and therefore are not necessarily seen as having a direct interest in participation, in contrast to the stakeholders, especially in countries where there is not a well-developed culture of citizen participation.

- Collecting data needed for organising a citizen participation process is not straightforward. Each citizen participation process must be adjusted to the specific needs, expectations and specific characteristics of each target group of citizens (for example, a campaign designed for involving youth must take into consideration the needs of this category of citizens, the communication channels that young people prefer etc). It is very important that the MA knows well the specific target group of citizens well, but there might be a need of additional resources to do such research.

Lessons learned

This section outlines the main lessons that the OECD and the five authorities have learned during the implementation of the pilot projects. It has two parts – one that details lessons drawn by the OECD, and another with learnings by the participating authorities. Learnings include the obtained evidence that innovative citizen participation methods are valuable and instrumental in the context of cohesion policy and that there are always ways to overcome inevitable implementation challenges.

OECD observations

Innovative citizen participation methods – valuable and instrumental in the context of cohesion policy

One of the main achievements of this pilot project is the implementation of the Besaya's Citizens' Jury - a representative deliberative process which brought together a representative group of citizens selected via civic lottery to first learn about and deliberate over how to make the most of European Green Funds in the Besaya basin to create and/or maintain jobs that respect the criteria of a fair and inclusive ecological transition. Although the 2020 OECD Report *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions Catching the Deliberative Wave* (OECD, 2020^[7]) has found that public authorities from all levels of government increasingly turn to Citizens' Assemblies, Juries, Panels and other representative deliberative processes to tackle complex policy problems, the Besaya Jury was one of first concrete applications of such methods in the decision making of how cohesion funds will be spent in a specific region.

The Besaya's Citizens' Jury demonstrated that innovative citizen participation methods can be successfully applied to make investment decisions more democratic and efficient in the context of EU cohesion policy. Citizens were deeply engaged in complex discussions, fully capable of understanding the information materials provided to them and, as anticipated, were focused on working for the common good. The recommendations they came up with were thoughtful and complex, ranging from industrial transformation to circular economy and education.

There are always ways to overcome implementation challenges

For policy makers who are applying innovative citizen participation methods the process requires new, more collaborative ways of working with colleagues, as well as new skills. For example, how to conduct or commission a civic lottery to randomly select citizens to take part in a citizens' jury. **Commissioning or implementing new elements requires creativity and problem-solving to pave the way, as government procedures might not be designed to accommodate them**, but with patience and support solutions were found every time. Even the complicated circumstances of the Besaya's Citizens' Jury taking place during a global Covid-19 pandemic did not impede citizen deliberation. When face-to-face meetings

of citizens were not possible, online deliberation was implemented and ways were found to support citizens and ensure that everyone had the digital equipment and knowledge needed to join and be active in online sessions (such as by providing computers from local libraries as well as IT support).

Lessons identified by authorities

Below are the context-specific lessons learned by the five public authorities that they have identified.

Cantabria

- A representative deliberative process proved to be a valuable tool for public engagement and accountability.
- There is a need to urgently adapt the public procurement process to make it possible to commission new innovative services, such as the civic lottery. The project highlighted numerous barriers that exist.
- Citizens' right to be heard and being able to speak up in a decision-making process is important. The participants of the Besaya's Citizens' Jury have demonstrated an undeniable foresight enriching their recommendations by their diverse demographic, economic, and educational backgrounds.

“The participants of the Besaya's Citizens' Jury have demonstrated an undeniable foresight enriching their recommendations by their diverse demographic, economic, and educational backgrounds.”

Besaya's Citizens' Jury team, The regional government of Cantabria in Spain

Emilia-Romagna

- Participation processes require significant effort in terms of funds, time and dedicated human resources. Furthermore, staff should be trained to acquire specific new skills.
- It's essential to have a strong commitment of the decision makers to implement participation processes. It was an important asset during the project implementation phase, ensuring the required flexibility to quickly adapt its scope moving the focus on the territorial strategies due to the delay in the start of the new programmes.
- Having established regional networks of stakeholders within cities that can be involved in all the stages of the programme cycle is important.

The Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme

- It is essential to involve decision makers in the process of promoting citizen engagement, help them understand how it works, in order to help address any potential fears or concerns they might have.

The Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland

- To ensure equal opportunities for all to participate and to reach the target audience, it is worth sharing the invitation to participate through websites of different partners, associations, industry players etc. Effort should be put to adapt any materials needed for participation for people with special needs. For example, online documents should be digitally adjusted to be readable by dedicated computer programs, sign interpretation, subtitles, and induction loop should be provided during events.
- To make sure that there is openness to make changes based on citizens' recommendations, all stakeholders involved, such as policy makers and project designers (in case of transport infrastructure projects), should be from the very start continuously kept in the loop about the participation process and the possibility of introducing changes to the draft document.
- It is essential to provide feedback to citizens after a participation process. All participants, interested stakeholders, and the public should be informed about the outcome of the public participation process. This builds trust between parties and encourages participation in subsequent participatory processes.
- Citizens must be treated as partners and communicated to as equals, that is, they should be provided complete information at every stage of consultations or other participation activities.

“Citizens must be treated as partners and communicated to as equals, that is, they should be provided complete information at every stage of consultations or other participation activities.”

CEUTP team

The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

- Involving citizens and stakeholders is not the same.
- There is a range of methods and tools that can be used to involve citizens, as well as many examples of citizen participation that can be helpful.

Benefits and opportunities of involving citizens and taking part in the pilot project

This section outlines the main benefits and opportunities of involving citizens and taking part in the pilot project that the five participating authorities have identified. These are based on the end-of-project questionnaire they were asked to fill in as well as on discussions during an end-of project hybrid workshop, which took place 25 November 2021.

Benefits and opportunities identified by authorities

Cantabria

- Implementing a citizen participation initiative was an opportunity to strengthen interregional and international cooperation in relation to open government policies.

- Citizens who took part in the representative deliberative process showed an example how different communities can create a common vision going beyond their initial differences and focusing on finding commonalities and reawakening understanding of connections between people living in the same area.
- The deliberative process provided confidence to the regional government and demonstrated that the public authority was quite in tune with citizens' needs and demands. There was no huge gap between the perspective of the managing authority and the citizens' demands and recommendations.

Emilia-Romagna

- One of the main benefits was discovering the importance and the public value of representative deliberative processes. Experiences and practices from different countries have been very helpful to increase the knowledge about implementing such processes, from securing buy-in from decision makers, to participant selection, preparing information, and facilitating deliberation.
- Empowering citizens through participatory processes is a key factor for the overall legitimacy of the democratic process. At the same time citizens taking up the responsibility to participate in decision making and designing public services is crucial, as well as the strong efforts of public institutions to be accountable to citizens on their policies and actions.
- Being part of a project coordinated by the OECD was very useful. It opened the possibility to exchange and learn from experiences from other countries, which are sometimes more experienced in implementing citizen participation.

“Empowering citizens through participatory processes is a key factor for the overall legitimacy of the democratic process.”

Emilia-Romagna team

The Interreg V-A Flanders - The Netherlands Programme

- Often policies are improved because of citizen engagement.
- Citizens do not purely look after their own interests when participating but are in fact capable of working for the common good.

The Centre for EU Transport Projects in Poland

- For public authorities it is important to increase the knowledge about citizen participation to conduct their job well – in the case of CEUTP, to more comprehensively evaluate projects submitted for co-financing and support beneficiaries.
- It is important to establish close cooperation with various stakeholders, NGO's and beneficiaries around the topic of citizen participation, to create an ecosystem that can support citizen participation activities in the future.
- Involving citizens is beneficial to the investment process to better shape the scope of the investment to ensure best outcomes for the public money spent.
- Citizens have the willingness to go beyond their personal interests and work for the common good.
- It is worth developing knowledge about citizen participation to be able to improve the current situation.

The Interreg V-A Romania-Bulgaria Programme

- There are ways to collaborate with various projects and initiatives that focus on involving citizens.
- New methods of citizen participation can be applied in our programme. These can be used to encourage our potential beneficiaries to think about designing projects involving citizen participation in specific domains of interest.

3 Recommendations

This chapter has two sections. The first one provides general conclusions and recommendations for managing authorities and intermediate bodies to better involve citizens in cohesion policy. The second part provides recommendations to the European Commission (DG REGIO) to increase the impact of citizen participation in cohesion policy, and to better implement all policy objectives of EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, in particular Objective 5: “Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories”.

General conclusions and recommendations for public authorities in cohesion policy

This section provides actionable recommendations to managing authorities, urban authorities, intermediate bodies, beneficiaries and other actors to better involve citizens in cohesion policy. The conclusions and recommendations build upon the results of this pilot project and the evidence gathered by the OECD as part of the cooperation with the five public authorities.

1. Differentiate between citizen and stakeholder participation and choose the appropriate methods for each

Whereas all five participating managing authorities and intermediate bodies had previously involved stakeholders through participatory methods, only the Emilia-Romagna Region had directly involved individual citizens. Both stakeholder and citizen participation are equally important but should not be treated the same way. Both types of publics, because of their contrasting natures, require different participation methodologies to be able to meaningfully contribute to policy making.

Stakeholders have time and resources to get informed about issues, resulting in a low participation threshold. They also have a clear interest and incentives to participate, in addition to previous experience dealing with public authorities and playing a role in decision-making. They can provide expertise and specific input through advisory committees and experts’ panels, for example.

On the other hand, citizens have a comparatively higher participation threshold, as they do not have the time nor the sufficient resources to stay informed about issues beforehand. Also, they often lack incentives to participate because, in many cases, they do not have a strong sense that they can have an impact on decision making. Nevertheless, evidence shows that citizens are indeed able to provide quality input and recommendations if they are afforded the necessary time and information and given a genuine opportunity to influence public decisions.

This is especially true when dealing with cohesion policy, which has traditionally been seen as a technical policy area. It is therefore vital to be conscious of the challenges faced by citizens and to design participating methods appropriately. There is real potential to tap into collective intelligence and meaningful input when methods are designed in a way that is inclusive, lowering barriers to participation, igniting interest among participants, and providing clear links to decision-making.

2. Move from citizen consultation to citizen engagement

Participating authorities already had a good understanding and experience of involving stakeholders by traditional participation methods, such as publishing up to date information online about the cohesion policy process and conducting public consultations. Emilia Romagna was the only authority that had experience involving citizens, mainly through consultations in a digital platform. While some of the authorities were interested in strengthening their knowledge about how to conduct inclusive and attractive public consultations which could yield better results, most of the authorities felt the need to take their citizen participation efforts to the next level – towards engagement. The OECD Recommendation on Open

Government (2017) invites adherents to move towards more engaging practices, such as participatory budgets or representative deliberative processes.

The OECD has gathered evidence on the benefits of citizen engagement practices, which are detailed in chapter 1 of this report. For example, the OECD has found that in 76 per cent of examples of representative deliberative processes collected, at least half of participants' recommendations are accepted by public authorities to be implemented, and often much more (OECD, 2020^[7]). This demonstrates that citizen input, generated via engagement processes which provide citizens with the necessary time, information and resources to meaningfully participate, is of high value and can help tackle complex problems public authorities are facing. In addition, implementing representative deliberative processes also extends the privilege of representation to a much larger group of people (OECD, 2021^[11]), and can strengthen people's agency, harness collective capacity, and awaken a collective consciousness that connects people to one another and to something bigger than themselves. Besides deliberation, other engagement practices such as participatory budgets have proven to have direct benefits for the population. For example, in Brazil, these engagement processes have had positive results in reducing infant mortality and corruption (OECD, forthcoming).

Public authorities could consider enriching their toolbox of participatory methodologies to increase the impact of citizen participation in cohesion policy. There is a range of citizen engagement methods available for implementation, depending on specific needs, including:

- **Open innovation** - tapping into the collective intelligence of the public to co-create solutions to specific public challenges via crowdsourcing or hackathons.
- **Civic monitoring** - involving the public in the evaluation and monitoring of public decisions, policies, and services.
- **Citizen science** - involving citizens in one or many stages of a scientific investigation, including the identification of research questions, conducting observations, analysing data, and using the resulting knowledge.
- **Participatory budgeting** - mechanisms that allow citizens and stakeholders to influence public decisions through the direct allocation of public resources to priorities or projects.
- **Representative deliberative process** - a process in which a broadly representative body of people weighs evidence, deliberates to find common ground, and develops detailed recommendations on policy issues for public authorities. Common examples of such processes are Citizens' Assemblies, Juries, and Panels.

Public authorities should take into account that moving from citizen consultation to citizen engagement requires acquiring new skills, investing in time and resources, and providing the adequate space for citizens to shape and influence public decisions.

3. Involve citizens at all stages of the cohesion policy cycle

Citizens can be involved in cohesion policy at different stages of the cohesion policy cycle:

- Managing authorities can involve citizens in the development of the national or regional operational programmes as well as territorial cooperation programmes.
- Intermediate bodies can involve citizens in the process of evaluation of the programme implementation.
- Beneficiaries of cohesion policy programmes can involve citizens in the definition, implementation, and evaluation of their projects.

As for any public policy or project, both above mentioned levels of cohesion policy have defined stages where citizens can participate. The policy or project cycle is usually composed of five stages: issue identification; policy or project formulation; decision making; implementation; and evaluation.

- In the **issue identification stage**, citizens can be involved via systemic tools to help identify the most pressing problems to solve, map the real needs of the public, or gather inputs or ideas to tackle the problem.
- During the policy or project **formulation stage**, citizens can be involved to enrich a proposed solution, prototype or test solutions, or collaboratively draft a policy, a project plan or legislation.
- In the **decision-making stage**, citizens can be involved to collectively decide on the solution to be implemented, the budget to be allocated, or the projects that will be selected.
- During the **implementation stage**, citizens can provide help in deploying the solutions or projects decided in the previous stage.
- In the **evaluation stage**, citizens can be engaged to evaluate or monitor the implementation of the solution and to measure its outcomes and results.

As detailed in the different Citizen Participation Playbooks developed as part of this project (see Annex A), the first step in planning and implementing citizen participation is to identify the moment where the inputs will be integrated, meaning the stage of the policy cycle. Clarity about the timing will then help define the type of input that it is needed, the type of participant that should be involved, and the most appropriate method to engage them.

The OECD observed that most participating authorities had experience involving citizens in the early stages to define the issue and formulate proposals. However, none of the authorities had involved citizens in the later stages of decision-making, implementation and only one authority had done so during the evaluation phase.

Public authorities should make efforts to involve citizens throughout the policy cycle, especially in the decision making and implementation stages. In addition, they could increase the opportunities for citizens to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes and projects.

In the context of cohesion policy, public authorities could include citizens in the decision-making stage by:

- Providing citizens the opportunity to decide on priorities or objectives to be included in the operational programmes through for example, deliberative processes.
- Involving citizens in deciding how the funds will be distributed through, for example, participatory budgets.
- Allowing citizens to influence the selection of the projects to be implemented by beneficiaries through, for example, online or in-person voting mechanisms.

In the context of cohesion policy, public authorities could include citizens in the implementation phase by:

- Engaging citizens in the creation of solutions or prototypes for services or projects, through hackathons, collaborative workshops, or maker spaces.
- Creating spaces for co-creation between public authorities and citizens as a way to continuously involve them in the implementation of projects or services. For example, open innovation labs, open spaces, recurrent public meetings, etc.
- Allowing citizens to be involved throughout the implementation phase, by publishing information and data about the progress of implementation and by providing opportunities to provide feedback on the implementation through digital platforms or in-person mechanisms.

4. Secure required resources

Every participatory process requires dedicated resources and systemic tools to be successfully implemented and result in useful outputs for decision makers. The necessary resources vary depending on the design and implementation of the process.

- **Human resources:** Participatory processes (even when completely virtual), require sufficient staff to organise the process, recruit participants, develop information resources, facilitate interactions, answer requests, communicate, analyse and synthesise the inputs, etc.
- **Financial resources:** As with every democratic process, participatory processes need dedicated financial resources to cover the cost of human resources, meeting venues and catering, digital platform licenses, public communication, honorarium payments to participants (recommended for some methods of participation), costs of participants' childcare/transport, etc.
- **Technical resources:** the use of digital tools for communication, receiving participants' inputs, and/or processing/analysing the inputs received is continuously increasing. Technical resources can encompass staff with digital skills, software licenses, computers, tablets, cloud services, etc.
- **Time:** simpler participation processes such as public consultations might take a couple of months to implement – from preparing necessary materials, to communicating and inviting citizens to participate and giving them enough time to provide their contributions. More complex processes, such as participatory budgets, citizen science projects or deliberative processes can take much longer, depending on their scale. For example, for a deliberative process several months are required to get stakeholders and decision makers on board, around two months to conduct a process of random selection of participants, and several months of learning and deliberation of participants (as they meet every or every other weekend).

As the budgets of managing authorities and intermediate bodies are planned and allocated seven years in advance, to ensure the possibility of implementing citizen participation throughout the programming cycle it is essential to plan for resources dedicated to participation as well. Allowing enough time and flexibility for public authorities to implement more advanced citizen engagement processes in all stages of the policy cycle would also contribute to their uptake.

5. Create the conditions for beneficiaries to involve citizens in the programming projects

Beneficiaries are in charge of implementing projects that correspond to the objectives and priorities defined in the operational programmes. These projects are usually the most concrete aspect of cohesion policy, as they translate the high-level national or regional priorities into tangible results. Therefore, managing authorities should promote the inclusion of citizens in the definition, implementation and evaluation of these projects.

To create the conditions for beneficiaries to involve citizens in the projects, public authorities could use the different leverages at their disposal, for example:

- Including citizen participation as a criteria to select projects;
- Promoting participatory practices through recommendations or guidelines;
- Supporting beneficiaries in implementing citizen participation mechanisms through trainings or handbooks;
- Raising awareness about the importance and benefits of citizen participation in cohesion policy through promotional or information activities.

For example, the Citizen Participation Playbook developed by the OECD and the Emilia-Romagna Region, will be included in the guidelines for all beneficiaries, helping the managing authority promote the uptake of participatory practices. The Guidelines developed by the OECD and CEUTP will be at the disposal of beneficiaries and other investors to support their citizen participation activities.

6. Ensure impact and political buy-in

Securing political buy-in for innovative citizen participation processes is one of the main challenges encountered during this project. It is also one of the main elements of success when implementing citizen participation and key to ensuring its impact on the policy making process.

Securing the support of relevant decision makers before a citizen participation process is started should be prioritised. Investing time and energy to meet with relevant people and organisations, as well as stakeholders, discussing proposed citizen participation plans, answering their questions and keeping them in the loop from the very beginning can be powerful tools. It is recommended to only go forward with implementation after key decision makers agree to review, consider and provide a response to citizens' input that participation processes will produce.

7. Close the feedback loop

Getting back to participants and the broader public about the results of the citizen participation process is an essential step. It is also one that is often neglected. Without proper acknowledgement of the hard work and inputs received, citizens might get a wrong message that their participation was not important or will not be taken into account, discouraging them from engaging in similar activities in the future. Citizens should also know which of their recommendations will be taken into account and how, and why some of them might not be used. This increases transparency and accountability of the participation process.

The OECD found that public authorities do not always provide feedback to participants, or do not have dedicated resources to effectively inform participants about the results of the participatory process or the impact of their inputs. By not properly closing the feedback loop they risk discouraging people from participating another time and potentially diminishing the benefits of participation, such as the increased sense of trust, efficacy, and agency.

Managing authorities and beneficiaries could take into account the following considerations to close the feedback loop:

- After the participation process, getting back to participants as well as the broader public with the acknowledgement of their participation, their inputs, recommendations, or help in enriching the decision or the implementation of the project.
- Explaining, how exactly the received contributions will feed into the bigger picture of a decision or project, and when can participants expect any concrete results.
- If some of the proposals cannot be taken into account, be transparent about the decision or reasons to reject the inputs received. This demonstrates respect to participants' and reduces ambiguity or potential misunderstandings.
- Thanking participants for their time and effort and keeping them updated on the progress of the project to ensure they feel valued and appreciated.

8. Lower barriers to ensure inclusive participation

Citizen participation – online or in-person - should always aim at providing an equal opportunity to all citizens to be able to participate. Equality and inclusion are essential to ensure that the inputs received as part of the process are representative of the community. Public authorities should lower barriers to participation, and promote the engagement of traditionally excluded groups such as women, youth, migrants, LGBTI+ populations, people with disabilities etc.

Cohesion policy is an inherently highly technical subject, with specific terminology, and thus remains inaccessible to most. This contributes to the detriment of efforts for citizen participation in this area. Public authorities could increase their efforts to communicate about cohesion policy in a more accessible, simpler

language.

In addition, managing authorities could consider the following elements to lower the barriers of participation and grant all citizens an equal opportunity to participate:

- giving citizens a clear task, with a direct link to decision making, using simple language;
- providing compensation for time, travel, and other costs to encourage demographics that generally do not participate otherwise, like young people and those with lower incomes (newDemocracy Foundation and United Nations Democracy Fund, 2019^[8]);
- taking the digital gap into consideration when organising digital processes;
- communicating with and reach out to traditionally excluded groups of society;
- and providing opportunity for learning by giving enough information for people to come to an informed point of view.

9. Conduct evaluations and learn from experience

Evaluation of citizen participation processes is often neglected, but has substantial potential. It allows to measure and demonstrate the quality and neutrality of a participation process to the broader public. This can increase trust and legitimacy in the use of participation processes for public decision making and implementing projects. Evaluation also creates an opportunity for learning by providing evidence and lessons for public authorities, beneficiaries and practitioners about what went well, and what did not. It gives a basis for the iteration and improvement of the design and implementation of a participation process (OECD, 2021^[9]).

Two types of evaluation are most helpful for those implementing citizen participation: process evaluations and impact evaluations (Nabatchi, 2012^[10])

- **Process evaluations** can help managers better understand and improve the implementation and management of a citizen participation program/process.
- **Impact evaluations** can help managers determine whether the citizen participation program/process reached its intended audience and produced its intended effects.

Evaluation should be planned for from the very start of designing a participation process. Depending on the method of participation and scale of the participation process, different types of evaluation can be chosen. For a short, small scale process, such as a public consultation, a participant questionnaire administered by the organisers would be an appropriate evaluation. Whereas for participatory budgeting or representative deliberative processes it is recommended to commission independent evaluation. In principle, the evaluation should be carried out by people who are not involved in the participatory process, and thus able to objectively indicate what went according to the plan and what did not work. Although the initiators of the participatory process should also reflect on the activities carried out.

What is necessary to take citizen participation in cohesion policy forward – for the European Commission

This section provides recommendations to the European Commission (DG REGIO) to increase the impact of citizen participation in cohesion policy.

1. Encourage behavioural changes for the development of a culture of participation

The OECD Recommendation on Open Government (2017) understands open government as a culture of governance, meaning a new paradigm to think public service and public action in a transparent,

accountable and participatory manner. An open government requires transforming the entire culture of governance so that citizens are enabled and empowered to understand how governments work, to scrutinise their action and to participate in the decisions that matter the most to them.

As part of an open government, citizen participation requires a change of behaviour and mindset to put citizens at the heart of any public action and decision. This involves changes in individual and institutional values, skills, beliefs, norms of conduct, and expectations, which are materialised in new policies, practices, services, among others. At the institutional level, it requires a new set of processes to transform the internal ways of working, and new norms and values that integrate citizen participation as recurrent and ongoing practice. At the individual level, it means new ways of thinking public service and adapted skills to deliver public action in a participatory manner. At all levels, the cultural change requires an adapted mind-set that understands the benefit of citizens' inputs.

Cohesion policy could benefit from developing a stronger culture of participation, at all levels of responsibility, from the managing authorities to the intermediate bodies and the beneficiaries implementing the programming projects. The European Commission could support these behavioural and cultural changes by:

- Making the cohesion policy process and language more open and accessible to facilitate citizen participation throughout the different stages.
- Promoting simplification of the administrative processes for public authorities for them to have more time and resources to involve citizens, as such processes create additional administrative tasks.
- Promoting citizen participation as a core principle of cohesion policy.
- Encouraging managing authorities and intermediate bodies to develop skills and literacy in support of citizen participation.

2. Foster communities of practice / networks to share experiences and good practices

Communities of practice and/or networks can be useful tools to exchange good practices and facilitate the sharing of resources and experiences. These informal or formal groups can gather virtually or in-person, on a regular or ad-hoc basis, for participants to share experiences, learn and get inspiration from peers. These spaces allow public authorities to share successes as well as failures and can provide support to authorities that are thinking of implementing participatory processes.

The OECD set up virtual learning calls between the different public authorities involved in this project as well as with practitioners and experts on participatory practices. This exercise was greatly appreciated by participants as “it opened the possibility to exchange and know experiences from other countries, which are sometimes more experienced in the implementation of citizen participation practices” (Emilia-Romagna).

The European Commission could consider setting up a dedicated community of practice or network on citizen participation in cohesion policy, bringing together managing authorities, intermediate bodies and beneficiaries that are interested or have experience implementing participatory processes.

3. Encourage institutionalisation and establishment of participation infrastructure

To support the use of innovative citizen participation practices in cohesion policy and make sure it goes beyond one-off initiatives that are often dependent on political will, efforts should be made to institutionalise them in a structural way. Structural changes to make participation an integral part of countries' democratic architecture is a way to effectively promote true transformation, as institutionalisation anchors follow-up and response mechanisms in regulations. Creating regular opportunities for more people to have a say of public decision making not only improves policies and services, it also scales the positive impact that

participation has on people's perception of themselves and others, strengthening societal trust and cohesion (OECD, 2021^[1]).

There can be different ways of institutionalising the use of innovative citizen participation practices to support the implementation of the partnership principle – from setting up ongoing participation mechanisms, to providing citizens a right to demand a participatory process under certain circumstances or making decisions attached to a specific policy area or amount of public funds subject to citizen engagement by law. For example, in Australia, state of Victoria, representative deliberative processes are embedded in local strategic planning. According to the Local Government Victoria Act 2020, all local councils must engage the community through deliberative practices to develop four strategic documents: the planning and financial management plan; the community vision; the council plan, and the financial plan (Victoria Local Government, 2020^[1]).

Institutionalising innovative citizen participation practices would also contribute to the creation of participation infrastructure available for public authorities. Consolidated networks of public servants and practitioners with expertise in citizen participation could be easier mobilised when needed. Innovative participation methods would become easier and less expensive to implement, as costs and resources are saved by not starting from scratch every time. Building institutional know-how about how to commission or conduct innovative citizen participation methods would enable to implement more such processes, opening up cohesion policy to citizens in a genuine and sustained way.

4

Conclusion and further resources

Conclusion

Citizens have a central role to play in cohesion policy of the European Union. From shaping decisions on public investment to ensure they reflect the needs of the public, to making public authorities more transparent and accountable – they are partners who should hold a permanent seat at the table.

The results of the pilot project that the European Commission and the OECD have implemented together with five public authorities across Europe to explore how they could place citizens at the centre of their investment decisions has demonstrated that there is room to take citizen participation efforts further. At the moment, authorities are focused on involving stakeholders rather than citizens, and prioritise traditional citizen participation methods, such as public consultations. Piloting innovative citizen participation methods, like the Besaya's Citizens' Jury in Cantabria, has showed the value and the opportunities they bring to the decision making in cohesion policy. Given enough time and necessary information resources, citizens can help tackle complex policy problems and provide helpful recommendations via methods like representative deliberative processes, participatory budgets, and others.

However, the pilots have also highlighted the difficulties in implementing these more innovative approaches – in terms of the necessary political will, human and budgetary resources, as well as time needed for meaningful engagement.

The transition to citizen engagement requires efforts from all actors of the cohesion policy ecosystem - Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, and the European Commission.

Public authorities should focus on differentiating between stakeholder and citizen participation and choosing appropriate models to engage both groups; involving citizens at all stages of the cohesion policy cycle; securing and planning for resources dedicated to participatory processes; creating conditions for beneficiaries to involve citizens in the programming projects; ensuring impact and political buy-in of participation processes they implement; closing the information feedback loop by providing a response to citizens; lowering barriers to ensure an inclusive participation; and evaluating participation processes they conduct to learn from their experiences.

The European Commission can support their efforts by facilitating the development of a stronger culture of participation; setting up a dedicated community of practice or network on citizen participation in cohesion policy; and making structural changes to institutionalise the use of innovative citizen participation practices.

Further information

European Commission DG REGIO

- More on citizen participation in the governance of EU cohesion policy: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/fr/policy/how/improving-investment/citizens-participation/

OECD

- More on OECD's work on Open Government: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/>
- More on OECD's work on Innovative Citizen Participation: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/innovative-citizen-participation.htm>
- OECD's blog on Innovative Citizen Participation: <https://medium.com/participo>

Annex A. Outputs of the project

Final report of the Besaya's Citizens' Jury

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/besayas-citizens-jury-process-report-by-deliberativa.pdf>

Citizen Participation Playbook for Emilia Romagna Region

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/emilia-romagna-citizen-participation-playbook.pdf>

Citizen Participation Playbook for Interreg V-A Flanders-The Netherlands Programme beneficiaries

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/interreg-flanders-the-netherlands-citizen-participation-playbook.pdf>

A note on Flanders – The Netherlands Citizens' Panel on Addressing Cross-Border Issues and Stimulating Cross-Border Contacts

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/fl-nl-cross-border-citizens-panel.pdf>

Citizen Participation Checklist for Interreg V-A Romania Bulgaria Programme

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/interreg-romania-bulgaria-citizen-participation-checklist.pdf>

Citizen Participation Guidelines for Centre for EU Transport Projects (CEUTP) beneficiaries/investors

<https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/ceutp-citizen-participation-guidelines-for-transport-infrastructure-projects.pdf>

References

- European Commission (n.d.), *Regional Policy Glossary*, [2]
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/.
- European Commission (n.d.), *Cohesion policy Frequently Asked Questions*, [4]
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/faq/#4.
- European Commission (n.d.), *Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds*, http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2014/240/oj. [3]
- European Commission (n.d.), *Regional Policy Priorities for 2021-2027*, [12]
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/how/priorities.
- Nabatchi, T. (2012), *A Manager's Guide to Evaluating Citizen Participation*. [10]
- newDemocracy Foundation and United Nations Democracy Fund (2019), *Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections*, <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/New-Democracy-Handbook-FINAL-LAYOUT-reduced.pdf>. [8]
- OECD (2021), *Eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy*, [1]
<https://doi.org/10.1787/4fcf1da5-en>.
- OECD (2021), *Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes*, [9]
<https://doi.org/10.1787/10ccbfcb-en>.
- OECD (2020), *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>. [7]
- OECD (2017), *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, [5]
<https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0438>.
- OECD (2016), *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, [6]
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268104-en>.
- Victoria Local Government (2020), *Local Government Act 2020*, [11]
<https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/council-governance/local-government-act-2020>.

For further information:

Alessandro Bellantoni
alessandro.bellantoni@oecd.org

Claudia Chwalisz
claudia.chwalisz@oecd.org

Ieva Cesnulaityte
ieva.cesnulaityte@oecd.org



[@OECDgov](https://twitter.com/OECDgov)

[#delibWave](https://twitter.com/delibWave)

[@EUinMyRegion](https://twitter.com/EUinMyRegion)

oe.cd/delib-wave

medium.com/participo

[#EUinMyRegion](https://twitter.com/EUinMyRegion)