

Joint civil society reaction to the European Parliament report on the national and regional partnership plans

As the European Parliament prepares to adopt its joint report from the Committees on Budgets, Regional Development, and Agriculture and Rural Development on the national and regional partnership plans, it is essential to ensure that the future EU budget delivers a just, green and accountable transition.

While the proposed framework aims to simplify EU funding, its strong focus on consolidation, flexibility and centralised planning risks undermining core EU principles, including partnership, transparency, cohesion and environmental integrity.

Partnership must be binding, not optional

Preparation and implementation of the national and regional partnership plans must be based on genuine and enforceable partnership. Experience with existing EU funds shows that stakeholder involvement is too often limited, late or purely formal – an approach that risks being replicated under the plans.

The Regulation must therefore require:

- **Early and continuous involvement:** Civil society, local authorities and social partners must be involved from the start, including a ‘civil society dialogue’ to ensure continuous feedback loops between Commission country desk officers and national civil society organisations.
- **Full transparency:** Both draft and final plans must be fully accessible.
- **Clear accountability:** Definitive reporting on how input is reflected in final decisions.
- **Access to information:** Measures to ensure transparent, timely access to relevant documents.
- **Support for stakeholders:** Availability of support and capacity-building initiatives for those involved in monitoring committees.
- **Enforcement mechanisms:** A system to ensure corrective measures by the Commission when the partnership principle is not fully implemented or respected.

Without binding requirements, partnership risks becoming a procedural exercise rather than a democratic safeguard.

Centralisation risks weakening cohesion and excluding territories

The consolidation of funds into a single national plan risks concentrating decision-making at the central level and sidelining regional and local stakeholders. This approach would weaken the place-based nature of EU funding and reduce its effectiveness on the ground.

Particular attention must be given to just transition regions. These territories face the greatest socio-economic challenges from decarbonisation and require predictable, targeted and territorially anchored support. The national and regional partnership plans must therefore:

- **Include mandatory just transition chapters:** These must be built on updated and strengthened territorial just transition plans.
- **Establish minimum allocations for affected regions:** Funding must be ring-fenced to prevent the excessive centralisation of funds in capitals and economic hubs.
- **Ensure adequate support for the LEADER programme.**
- **Enable access for diverse groups:** Ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises social economy leaders (such as energy communities) can easily access funds.
- **Prevent diversion of resources:** Ensure that resources are not moved away from territories most in need, while continuing to strengthen local capacities for successful fund design and absorption.
- **Ensure inclusive participation and benefits from the clean transition:** Target relevant EU funding towards priority areas and, at a minimum, proportionally support lowest-income households and vulnerable groups.

Failure to act would undermine the EU's just transition, directly affecting citizens in these regions.

Flexibility must not dilute climate and biodiversity ambition

Increased flexibility in EU spending creates a clear risk of weakening environmental safeguards and redirecting funds away from climate and biodiversity priorities. Current proposals provide insufficient guarantees that biodiversity will receive adequate funding, leaving key investment decisions to Member States. This approach is unlikely to deliver the scale of investment required for nature restoration and ecosystem resilience.

The framework must therefore:

- **Introduce binding and separate earmarking for biodiversity and climate.**
- **Significantly increase investments in nature protection and restoration.**
- **Ensure strict and enforceable application of the 'do no significant harm' principle.**
- **Introduce clear roadmaps for an economy-wide fossil fuel phase-out to hedge against ongoing geopolitical crises.**

Public funding must not support activities that undermine climate neutrality or biodiversity objectives.

Accountability, oversight and coordination must be strengthened

The proposed governance model risks weakening transparency and democratic scrutiny. Stronger safeguards are needed to ensure that EU funds are used effectively and align with EU objectives, including improved strategic prioritisation in the use of funds and coordination with other budget programmes to build synergies.

This requires:

- **Clear monitoring, reporting and corrective mechanisms.**
- **Full public access to information on spending and outcomes.**
- **Establishment of structured dialogues** between the Commission, Member States, regions, civil society and social partners, and the expert governance bodies of the European Competitiveness Fund. This coordination is essential to translate EU-level strategic priorities, such as cross-sectoral decarbonisation and clean technologies – into national and regional investment planning, while reflecting territorial needs and implementation realities.

Conclusion

The national and regional partnership plans have the potential to improve the coordination of EU funding. However, in their current form, they risk centralising decision-making, weakening environmental safeguards, and failing the regions and communities most in need.

The European Parliament must strengthen its position to ensure that the future EU budget remains anchored in partnership, while strengthening cohesion and environmental integrity, and delivering a just transition for all regions.

List of signatories:

