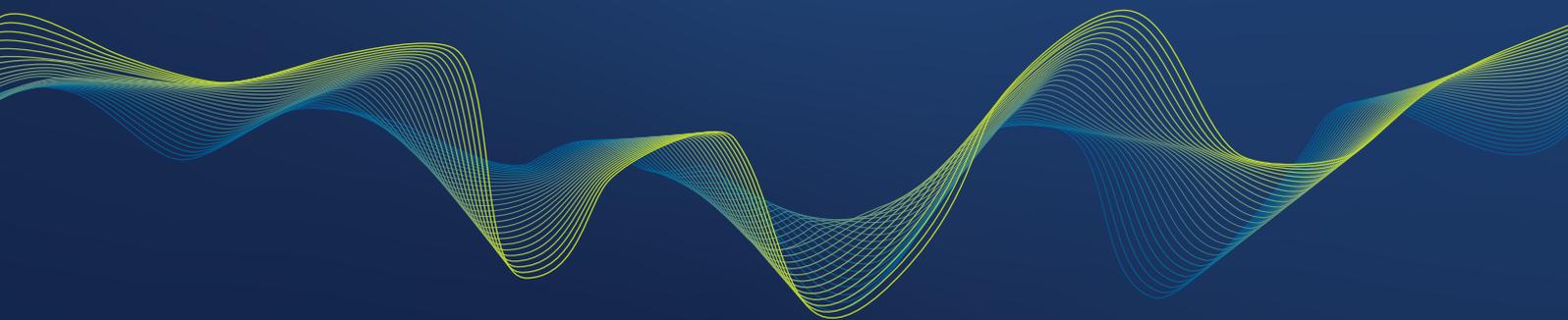


ACTIVITY REPORT 2020/2021

REGIONS BOUNCING BACK



ASSEMBLY OF EUROPEAN REGIONS

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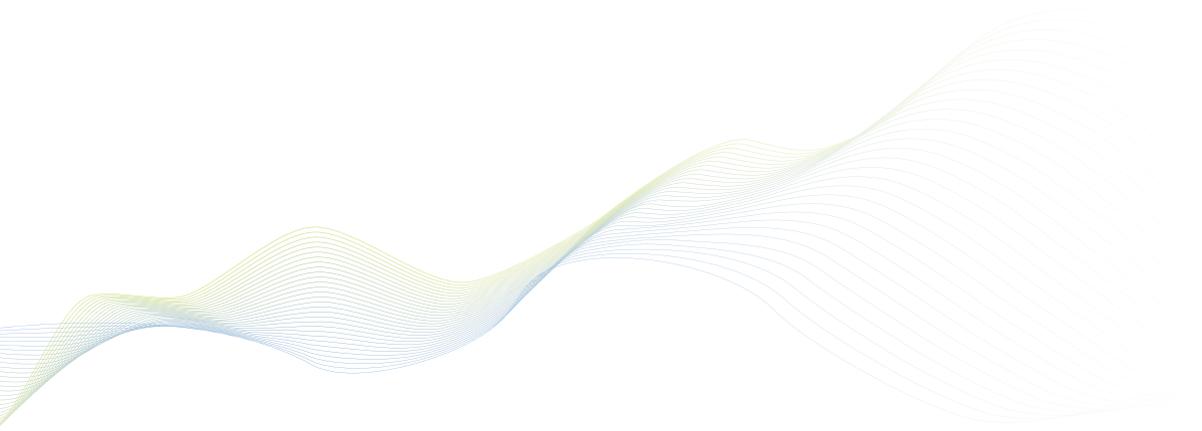
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COVER DATA VISUALISATION

Evolution of employment rate throughout member regions between 2020 and 2021.

FIGURES

Vertical Axis : Employment rate.

Horizontal axis : Countries' ISO codes.



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REGIONS BOUNCING BACK – RESHAPING OUR COMMON FUTURE

President's Vision

The AER of early 2020 and the AER of early 2021 are – to the close observer – two distinctly different organisations. Like so many other parts of our lives, the past twelve months have forced us to reinvent ourselves and how we work; with our plans redrawn, reshaped and sometimes reimaged entirely.

The AER took-on a double challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. We adapted how we work with our nearly 140 members to meet the demands of our new 'virtual reality', while at the same time reshaping the AER's structure to make us an even more bottom-up, member-led organisation. We met these challenges head-on; adapting and strengthening our engagement with members through reducing administrative burdens, and driving faster response times.

2020's 'new normal' brought with it many unforeseen inconveniences, but also unforeseen opportunities. Yes, it was rather complicated to run online sessions with the 149 member-strong regional parliament in Västra Götaland, but on the other hand, I was able to take part in a UN global forum from a remote, uninhabited island on the west coast of Sweden. Indeed, the ease of organising virtual meetings afforded many opportunities for me to build even closer relationships with the EU institutions, and I held several fruitful bilateral meetings with EU Commissioners on the issues that matter to AER members.

Times of crisis allow us to see the true assets of an organisation. Through 2020, the strong sense of community among members, the AER bodies and with our partners was clearly felt by all. Despite the pandemic, the Executive Board and the Secretariat have been working hard to nurture and strengthen these relationships, while creating value for members in an increasingly uncertain future. The AER's biggest assets are our long-standing reputation as a reliable policy partner of the institutions, our non-bureaucratic work approach; our direct exchanges with members; the capability to adapt our workflows, and last but not least the drive and persevering spirit of our employees and elected officials. This double challenge of adapting to new work styles and implementing structural improvements is mirrored by unprecedented efforts our members need to make. Simultaneously, they need to save lives, mitigate economic and social hardship, respond to a variety of new needs citizens have – and set the right course so all changes made under huge time pressure will prove sustainable in the long run.

Our work right now is very much about determining what will be relevant to our members in the future. This is especially true for climate policy. At the regional level, it is important to make the major policy goals for the planet compatible with social and economic realities. We need to ensure that it is worthwhile for citizens and businesses to be part of this change now and in the future. In our Climate Task Force and on the ground in our member regions, excellent ideas for new business models and climate-friendly public services are coming to life.

On the road to Glasgow and the COP 26 climate conference, I will aim to boost this exchange of ideas and success stories. The AER will work hard to highlight the work done at regional level to contribute to a successful outcome in Glasgow, and indeed for our planet. As Europe bounces back from the pandemic, the AER is fully committed to making sure our regions' voices are heard on these and all issues that will define our common future.



I would like to thank our Secretariat and our new Secretary General, Christian Spahr for successfully building on the work we have done, despite the exceptional challenges presented by the pandemic. I also want to thank his predecessor, Mathieu Mori for his dedication to building stronger regions and successfully managing our ambitious and transformative organisation. And finally, a big 'thank you' to all the elected representatives and officials in our member regions, who are charting the path to a brighter future for every village, town and city across Europe.

– Magnus Berntsson, AER President



BEYOND RECOVERY – RENEWING TRUST AND REBUILDING EUROPE

Secretary General's Foreword

Democracy, first and foremost, is built on the trust of citizens. In the midst of the current crisis, preserving the trust of citizens is key for regional governments. Trust in politics is built on providing reliable public services, and authentic, effective channels of communication with all citizens to make sure their needs are met.

Local and regional governments understand the needs of their citizens best, and enjoy high levels of public trust across Europe as a result. A poll commissioned by the AER in seven European countries found that when it comes to responding to the issues that affect their daily lives, citizens trust regional and local governments the most. This is a greater level of trust than enjoyed by national governments, but also more than the European Institutions.

So while our regions can be proud of how they have delivered for citizens through this crisis, there is no room for complacency as our continent bounces back. Citizens' needs and aspirations have been changed by the pandemic, and they are demanding more from their local leaders than ever before. Not only do they expect their politicians to deliver solutions to the health crisis, but to create jobs and long-term strategies for a sustainable recovery in tandem.

Our aim is to equip all of our almost 140 member regions with the political leverage and tools required to meet the high expectations of their citizens.

The AER Secretariat supports the work of regional authorities through advocacy efforts and capacity building. In meetings of the AER President with members of the European Commission, notably Paolo Gentiloni (economy) and Olivér Várhelyi (EU neighbourhood), we have highlighted the need for financial and political support for our member regions at this crucial juncture.

A key message in this context is that we must preserve subsidiarity. We note with concern that in this time of crisis, more decision-making powers are being accumulated at the national level – despite regions being best placed to identify the real needs of Europe's citizens. This is why the AER will continue to act as a driver of relevant advocacy efforts with close partners like the European Committee of the Regions and the Cohesion Alliance 2.0.

Most of our regions are familiar with the EU's established tools, like Cohesion Policy. Less familiar will be the new instruments under the 2021-2027 EU budget and Recovery package. To make the best of these new tools, regions will need more support. That is why a key focus of the AER in 2021 is capacity building for regions, with the help of the best specialists in this subject area. Working in close partnership with the European Commission, we have created new training opportunities to ensure members get the best possible insights, intelligence and expertise on these new instruments.

Internal reforms have made the AER even more agile and responsive to the needs of our members over the past year. Our Executive Board, Bureau, Task Forces on the EU's policy priorities, and our Working Groups are collaborating to build on the achievements of the former Committees. Creating stronger synergies between the bodies of our association and the workstreams of the Secretariat is creating tangible benefits in two directions. We are now better equipped to quickly identify the political priorities of our membership, and at the same time, carry out more AER activities under the roof of EU-funded projects. The net result is an increase in both the number and quality of services we can offer to members.

This agility and the strong commitment of our community are also a great help and inspiration in today's debate on the future of our continent. It has always been clear to the AER that our mission goes beyond administrative competencies and funding for the regions.

Our network is determined to play a key role in ensuring an equitable and sustainable future for wider Europe, based on the needs and direct involvement of the citizens. Citizens put their trust in regional and local governments to support them through the crisis. Now is the time for us to build on that trust as we, Europe's regions, lead Europe's recovery.

– Christian Spahr, AER Secretary General

OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD



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Magnus Berntsson
Västra Götaland
(Sweden)



**VICE PRESIDENT
TREASURER**
Christian Debève
Grand Est (France)



**VP FOR ECONOMIC
TRANSITION**
Kenneth Backgård
Norrbotten (Sweden)



**VP FOR
DEMOCRACY**
Nina Björby
Västerbotten
(Sweden)



**VP FOR CULTURE,
EDUCATION & YOUTH**
Radimir Čačić
Varaždin (Croatia)



VP
Filomena Calenda
Molise (Italy)



**VP FOR
SUSTAINABILITY**
**Albert Castellanos
Maduell**
Catalonia (Spain)



**VP FOR INCLUSION,
DIVERSITY & EQUAL
OPPORTUNITIES**
Andrew Gibson
Hampshire
(United Kingdom)



**VP FOR ENLARGEMENT
& NEIGHBOURHOOD
POLICY**
Lukas Mandl
Lower Austria (Austria)



**VP FOR SOCIAL
POLICY &
PUBLIC HEALTH**
Mihai Ritivoiu
Timiș (Romania)



**VP FOR
COOPERATION
& STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIPS**
Jean-Luc Vanraes
Brussels-Capital
(Belgium)



**VP FOR EMPLOYMENT
& SKILLS**
Alessandra Zedda
Sardegna (Italy)



**VP FOR REGIONAL
ECONOMIC POLICY**
Damir Zobenica
Vojvodina (Serbia)

ADJUNCT MEMBERS



PRESIDENT OF EURODYSSEY
Esther Estany
Catalonia (Spain)



PRESIDENT OF THE SUMMER ACADEMY
Rune Fredriksen
Østfold (Norway)



PRESIDENT OF THE AER YOUTH REGIONAL NETWORK
Gloria Vitaly
Oppland (Norway)

EX OFFICIO MEMBER



HONORARY PRESIDENT
Hande Özsan Bozatli
Istanbul (Turkey)

MONITORING AND EVALUATION GROUP

- ◉ **CHAIR:** Thomas Hartman, Västerbotten (Sweden)
- ◉ **MEMBER:** Andrew Joy, Hampshire (United Kingdom)
- ◉ **MEMBER:** Ana Verushi, Korça (Albania)

ELECTION COMMITTEE

- ◉ **CHAIR:** Monica Gundahl, Värmland (Sweden)
- ◉ **MEMBER:** Natalija Martincevic, Varaždin (Croatia)
- ◉ **MEMBER:** Gloria Vitaly, Oppland (Norway)

RAISING OUR COMMON VOICE: Institutional Relations & Advocacy

This has been an important year for the AER's institutional relations and advocacy work. We have made further progress in strengthening our role as a voice for regions, and in providing opportunities for members to come together to develop common positions and work together to influence policy.

The pandemic presented many challenges. We had to cancel and move our Bureau meetings online and convert all our advocacy work to online engagement. However, looking back on our work over the past twelve months, we see increasing levels of engagement within the network and with key institutional stakeholders.

We are proud of what we have done to ensure a timely agreement on the long-term 2021-2027 EU budget and Recovery package, with new and reinforced instruments and programmes to support regions in tackling the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and in implementing the green and digital transitions.

In the context of recovery, a strong and effective Cohesion Policy is more important than ever for our regions. The authoritative recommendations of the Task Force on Cohesion Policy, chaired by Michiel Rijsberman, Regional Minister of Flevoland (The Netherlands) enabled us to play a full part in Europe-wide advocacy efforts for a reinforced EU Cohesion Policy beyond 2020.

Our position paper, *The Future of Cohesion Policy in Working Towards a Green, Digital and Fair Recovery with the Regions*, adopted in June 2020, provided a clear proposal on the revised legislation governing the use of Cohesion Policy funding for the 2021-2027 period and the EU recovery plan.

In March 2021, we held an online debate, *National Recovery and Resilience Plans: Working Together in Renewed Partnership with Regions*, in collaboration with the Government of Catalonia (Spain). The event reflected on the role of regional authorities in shaping and implementing national investment projects and reforms, and spurred debate on how to more effectively involve regional governments in the design and implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans.

Strengthening our voice and influence, the AER continued to collaborate with the European Committee of the Regions and other European associations of regions and cities in the Cohesion Alliance. In July 2020, we supported the launch of a renewed Declaration of this Alliance for a cohesive, sustainable and resilient Europe. In March 2021, the AER and our Cohesion Alliance partners published a Joint Statement calling on national governments to involve regions and cities in the preparation of post-COVID recovery plans.

We also supported AER members in accessing EU funding with a 26 May training session on the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and its Cohesion and rural development funds. This was the first of a series of such sessions that we will organise in 2021 as part of the Skillnet Project, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission.

Over the past year we have also strengthened our voice in global and European policy processes related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and on climate change more broadly. In June 2020, we held a webinar, *Localising Agenda 2030: How Regions can Help Meet the SDGs*, and in September held another lively online discussion, *The EU Green Deal: Challenges and opportunities for EU Regions in Times of COVID-19*. Rounding out this

informative series was our December debate, *Farm to Fork: the Commitment of Regions to Sustainable Food Policy in the EU*. The AER further mobilised on the SDGs within the framework of the 2020 European Week of Regions and Cities, hosting an online workshop on *Achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through Cohesion Policy* in October.

In November, the AER adopted its position paper, *11 key Messages on the SDGs: Regions delivering Europe 2030*, provided by the Task Force on SDGs chaired by our President.

During the year, we continued our engagement with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on a territorial approach to the SDGs, and participated in its roundtable on the SDGs in November 2020.

The AER also played a pivotal role in local and regional governments' advocacy work on sustainable development and climate. Our collaboration with the Global Task Force was a valuable partnership that helped AER strengthen its voice in advocating for the localisation of the SDGs and the national plans on climate action.

In July 2020, the AER President delivered a speech on behalf of the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments at a Special Event on the 2030 Agenda held during the United Nations (UN) High-Level Political Forum.

President Magnus Berntsson also made contributions to the event, *Reactions of Local and Regional Governments to the UN75 Report*, organised by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). Participants discussed the findings of *Visioning Report UN 75: the Role of Local and Regional*

Governments in the Future Global Governance of the International System, drafted by the Global Taskforce in response to the global consultation run by UN Secretary-General, António Guterres on the occasion of the United Nations' 75th anniversary.

In March 2021, we attended the Regional Forum on a *Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and Action and Delivery on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region*, organised by the United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

In June, as part of EU Green Week 2021, the AER Task Force on Climate organised the debate *Back to Our Future – Regions leading Europe's Green Recovery* to discuss the role of regions in tackling the climate crisis and delivering a green recovery.



While the COVID-19 pandemic meant that we had to postpone our High-level Conference on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to Autumn 2021 in Strasbourg, the AER has continued working closely with partners to design this two-day conference, and position the 2030 Agenda at the centre of the post-pandemic recovery efforts. This event, jointly organised by AER, Grand Est Region (France) and other major international networks of local and regional governments, will gather local and regional stakeholders from around the world to call upon national and global leaders to strengthen multi-level dialogue to facilitate local-global leadership on the 2030 Agenda, and accelerate the implementation of its Sustainable Development Goals.

The AER also had a strong voice in debates on the Conference on the Future of Europe, undertaking initiatives to defend a central role for local and regional authorities in this pan-European public forum for discussion on the future of the Union, its priorities and possible reforms. More broadly, strengthening regional governance and democracy remained at the heart of our advocacy towards building a stronger and more resilient Europe.

The AER showed our commitment to be engaged in the Conference through adopting our own policy recommendations in April 2021. These highlight the essential role that local and regional authorities will play in ensuring that the Conference is an inclusive and democratic process that reaches out to all citizens across European regions, municipalities and communities. To strengthen our impact, we worked in partnership with the European Committee of the Regions and an informal group of civil society organisations.

Led by Irén Lejegren from Region Örebro (Sweden), the Task Force on Democracy kicked off its work with a Bureau debate, *Democracy: Putting Citizens back at the Heart of Decision-Making* in May 2021. On this occasion, representatives from AER regional authorities, the youth sector, civil society organisations, and European representatives came together to share their views and perspectives on how to strengthen democracy at regional level, as well as to discuss the opportunities that the Conference on the Future of Europe will offer in this regard.

This year, we continued working closely with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to promote further development of good governance and democracy at local and regional level, and to advance the priorities of regions in Europe. To this end, our President took part in several sessions and debates of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and its Chamber of Regions.

In addition, AER has deepened its commitment to promoting the development of comprehensive intercultural strategies to manage diversity and migration at regional level. Over the past year, we have convened members of the Intercultural Regions Network (IRN) and enabled them to engage in dialogue with EU decision-makers.

To build-up the understanding of intercultural integration as an approach to public policy, we partnered with the Council of Europe and the IRN to organise *The Intercultural Regions Academy: Building Capacity for Intercultural Policies – Competence, Skills & Knowledge* in June 2021.

We further led efforts to engage with the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions in the framework of *The Cities and Regions for Integration of Migrants Initiative*, and responded to the Commission's consultation in preparation of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.



Over the last year, the AER also advanced substantial advocacy initiatives on digitalisation through the Task Force led by Martin Eichinger, Minister of Housing, Labour, and International Relations of the Government of Lower Austria (Austria). Following the adoption of a joint position on how to accelerate the digital transition in European regions, in November 2020, we held a dialogue with the European Commission to shape the debate on the EU Digital Strategy and future Digital Policy Programme.

This year, the AER stepped-up its engagement in the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. We underlined the need to recognise the key role played by regional authorities in building more effective partnerships in our neighbourhood and supporting the enlargement process. In April 2021, the AER responded to the consultation on the preparation of the Commission's 2021 Enlargement Package, and agreed on working together with the Commission's department for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations in the field of capacity building.

All of our advocacy work involved high-level meetings with a number of key institutional stakeholders. Notably, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reform, Elisa Ferreira, Commissioner for Budget and Administration, Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Economy, Paulo Gentiloni, and Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi. The AER also held digital meetings with the Cabinets of European Commission Executive Vice-President for A Europe Fit for the Digital Age and Competition, Margrethe Vestager and Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, Dubravka Šuica, as well as with the members of the European Parliament and the countries holding the rotating Presidency of the EU.

SHARING PERSPECTIVES & SHAPING SOLUTIONS:

Mutual Learning

*Inventing spaces for experience exchange
& policy learning*

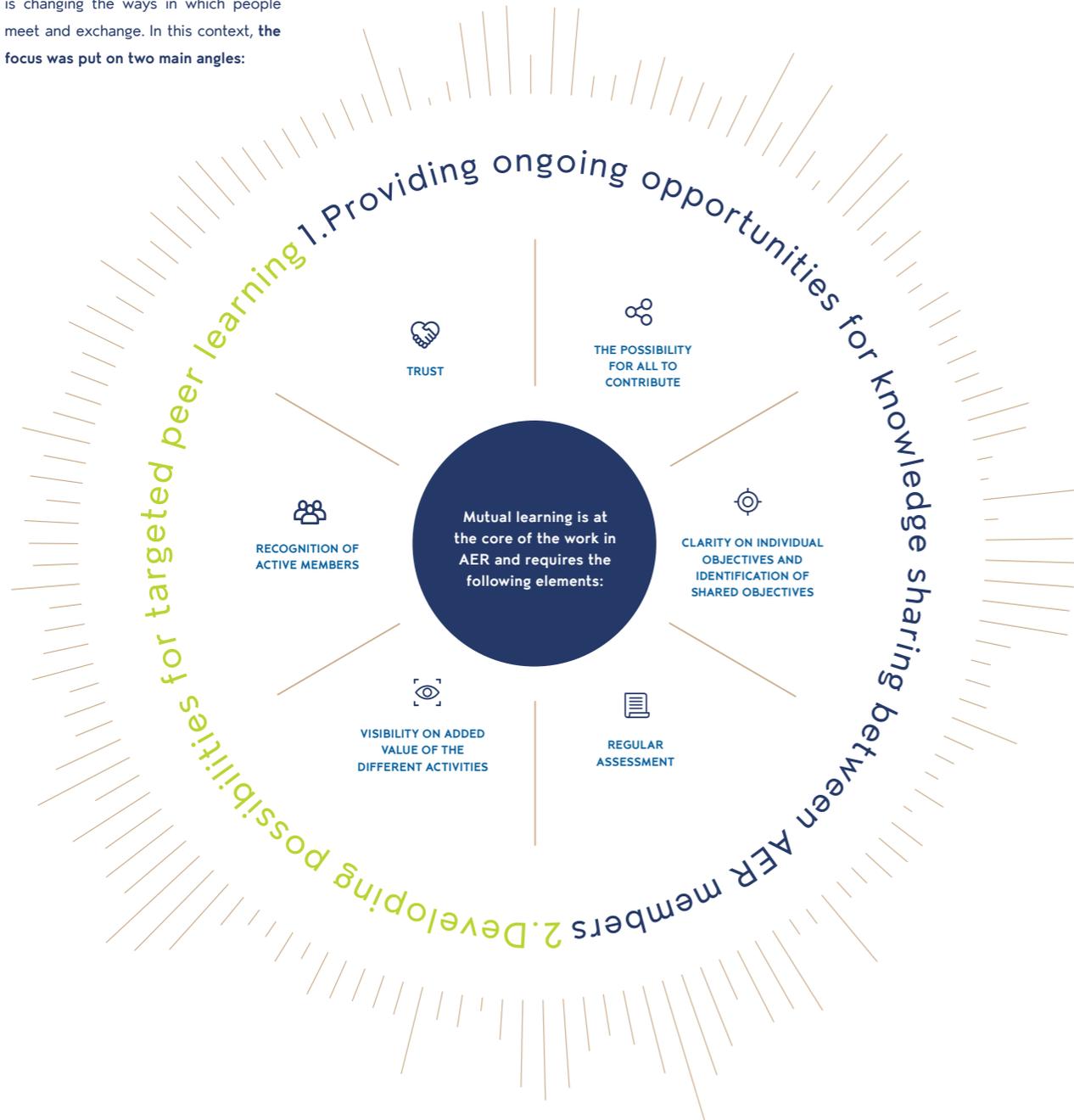
Change is the only constant, and the pandemic has reinforced this aspect of the work in the AER network.

Since its inception in 1985, the AER has always at its core provided a space for experience exchange and policy learning. The shape of this space has changed several times over the past 35 years, and has continued to evolve to meet the needs of our members and create value.

The 2020 General Assembly adopted a new structure for experience and knowledge exchange. Working Groups gained more autonomy, and are no longer affiliated to another structure.



The current global COVID-19 related crisis has had a far-reaching impact, and is changing the ways in which people meet and exchange. In this context, the focus was put on two main angles:



1. Providing continuous opportunities for knowledge sharing between AER members

The AER uses projects it is involved in to address the needs and requests expressed by members. In terms of knowledge sharing, the idea with projects is to provide a framework, where regions can go deeper into mutual learning and exchange good practices, while being co-financed by the EU. At a time where face-to-face events were cancelled, projects offered unparalleled opportunities for online knowledge and experience exchange, as well as a space for innovation.

In particular, three projects are providing a variety of activities on topics relevant to the portfolios of the different Working Groups, creating spaces to:



SKILLNET

The AER joined the Skillnet project in Spring 2020. The aim is to offer opportunities for members to share their experiences, and build shared knowledge on barriers and enablers for the development of innovation and territorial cohesion in AER member regions. The webinars also provide insights on EU funding and support initiatives.

INCLUD-EU

AER is facilitating the exchange of policies and practices aimed at building inclusive societies and improving the integration of third-country nationals. In the context of the pandemic, we decided to organise webinars together with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Council of Europe and the AER's Intercultural Regions Network (IRN). The knowledge shared is also useful for policymakers who are not directly working on migration or integration. Topics addressed include improving access to services, improving labour market integration, active participation and inclusion.

One of the IRN co-chairs (Catalonia, Värmland, Västra Götaland) chaired each webinar. The activities organised in the context of the Includ-EU project are part of the IRN work plan. Over the coming months, the AER will facilitate several peer learning workshops with extensive exchanges with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).

SCIROCCO EXCHANGE

The AER leads the knowledge transfer activities in this project focused on the integration of health and care. The project helps to reach objectives set within the AER Digital Health Network. While the knowledge transfer process is very specific, the activities themselves are developed in an organic and adaptive way to make it possible for COVID-19 frontline workers to benefit.

The Scirocco Exchange project provided the main lab for testing knowledge exchange formats and carrying out online activities. Indeed, because of its closeness to frontline workers, the project consortium quickly became aware that there would not be a 'back to before COVID-19' anytime soon, and there was a need to adapt activities immediately instead of waiting for a better future. This also demonstrates how projects are a way for an interregional organisation like AER to access real-time information on challenges in the regions.

Some project activities are open to policymakers involved in the transformation of health and care, as well as health and care specialists from AER regions:

- ◉ **8 September 2020** webinar on *Delivering Integrated Care in Remote and Rural Areas: Sharing the Experience* with perspectives from the Basque Country and Slovenia
- ◉ **21 January 2021** a webinar on goal oriented care provided insights on a new approach which is being tested in Flanders. A second webinar on this topic will be organised in the coming months
- ◉ **26 May 2021** webinar on how to effectively communicate the need for change
- ◉ **16 June 2021** webinar on the mental health of healthcare workers

TOPICS ADDRESSED SO FAR INCLUDE:



2. Developing possibilities for targeted peer learning

AER INNOVATION EVENT

This year, the province of Gelderland (the Netherlands) hosted our annual 'AER Innovation event', which brings together diverse stakeholders on a current and transversal topic. The events always aim to highlight very different perspectives and experiences, showcase examples of innovative products and services, and explore the related societal challenges and changes they imply for policymaking and governance.

This year's event, *How Smart is Your Food?* focused on innovation in the food value chain. It was organised in a panel show format, filmed in the Gelderland studio in Arnhem. AER members and other participants enjoyed this innovative format, which included contributions from Murcia (Spain), Gelderland, Västra Götaland (Sweden) and Örebro (Sweden) and was an opportunity to create links between the activities of Task Forces and knowledge sharing activities.



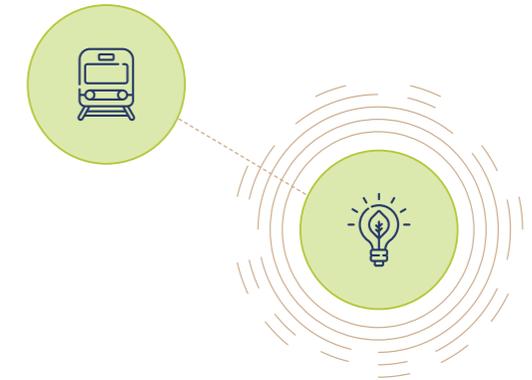
DIGITAL HEALTH

The Digital Health Network, chaired by Donna Henderson, Scotland (United Kingdom) builds links between the Scirocco Exchange project on integrated care systems and AER members interested in digital health. On top of the activities organised in the context of Scirocco Exchange, the Digital Health network also organised a webinar, *Digital Health & Smart Specialisation* on 18 November 2020 together with Värmland (Sweden).



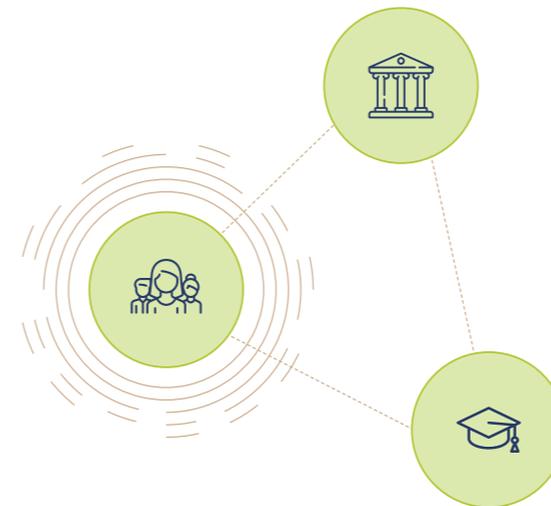
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ENERGY, TRANSPORTS & MOBILITY

- ◉ The Chair of the Working Group on Energy & Climate Change, Eva Hallström, Värmland (Sweden), organised a webinar on energy efficiency and the energy transition in the industry together with Viken (Norway) on 19 May 2021.
- ◉ Another peer learning event was organised on 17 June 2021 by the Chair of the Working Group on Transports and Mobility, Martin Tollén, Östergötland (Sweden) on the topic of *Mobility as a Service (MAAS)* with contributions from Grand Est (France), Sardinia (Italy), Ljubljana (Slovenia), Östergötland (Sweden), Nordland (Norway), and Noord Brabant (the Netherlands).
- ◉ More such online events will be developed depending on proposals from members and connection requests between AER regions.



CAPACITY BUILDING, THE EUROPEAN PROJECT & INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION

This AER training seminar at the European College of Cluny, which is part of the programme for civil servants exchange and capacity building initiated by the AER VP for Education, Culture and Youth, Radimir Čačić, Varaždin (Croatia) took place as an online pilot seminar in collaboration with French university Sciences Po Dijon from 27-29 April 2021. The online seminar focused on European identity and Eurosceptic trends, and the role of local democracy in constructing European identity and citizenship. Speakers from Alba Iulia (Romania), Varaždin (Croatia), Bourgogne-Franche-Comté (France) and Trento (Italy) shared experiences on making Cohesion Policy tangible for citizens and involving youth in the debate around the EU and its future. Links were created between this event and other AER initiatives in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.





REINFORCING ACTIONS, SEIZING NEW OPPORTUNITIES: Projects & Funding

ABOUT THE PROJECT UNIT

Our members' priorities drive the work of the AER Project Unit. Based on their wishes, we disseminate knowledge on funding opportunities, facilitate consortium-building, and make sure AER and its members get the most out of project opportunities. Due to the expansion of our projects portfolio the AER has reinforced the Project Unit. We can now count on five people as we strengthen our synergies with other AER workstreams.

Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis, the EU funded projects in the AER's portfolio created significant opportunities for member regions; offering knowledge sharing experiences, co-financing activities, and creating partnership-building opportunities for regions within and beyond our network. To offer a more comprehensive range of services to member regions on topics aligned with the AER's political priorities, the Project Unit also worked to build stronger links between project activities and other AER workstreams.

Implementing our seven EU projects has allowed us to create engaging content, build strong partnerships, and run meaningful activities on key topics like Cohesion Policy, integration, education and skills, cultural resources and sustainability, the future of Europe and youth, digital health and integrated care.

PROJECTS & KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The AER has built a reputation as a key partner for knowledge sharing activities within the consortia coordinating Work Packages. In 2020-21, the majority of these took place in an online format, notably:

- ⦿ **Eleven Skillnet webinars on Vocational Educational & Training (VET)** related topics to exchange knowledge and good practices, find funding opportunities, and create connections between relevant experts for future partnerships and projects.
- ⦿ **Three Includ-EU webinars** to exchange ideas on policy and practices related to the key priorities of the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion.
- ⦿ **The design of the Scirocco Exchange Project's Knowledge Transfer Programme**, and the implementation of eleven personalised knowledge transfer activities among nine regional healthcare systems across Europe.

PROJECTS & ADVOCACY

EU projects have contributed to the AER's advocacy work by providing inputs, collaborating with key thematic organisations, and contributing funds for specific activities. This has been done in two main areas:

⦿ **The Conference on the Future of Europe:**

In the framework of Y-FED project, the AER and the Young European Federalists (JEF Europe) organised an online advocacy training session for 24 young European activists to amplify their voices at regional and EU level. This was followed-up through the development of eight advocacy actions in eight European countries aimed at promoting the European Youth Goals; particularly youth participation and better dialogue with policymakers. The AER enabled this dialogue to take place during our Bureau Debate on Democracy. In an open discussion with regional politicians, youth representatives shared perspectives and insights on young people's needs and aspirations for the future of Europe.

⦿ **The Intercultural Regions Network (IRN):**

Linking Includ-EU activities with the IRN and vice-versa has been mutually beneficial for both initiatives. It has built-up a multi-stakeholder model for intercultural integration at the regional level, strengthened collaboration with key partners like the Council of Europe (CoE) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and embedded some of the Includ-EU thematic webinars in the IRN roadmap of activities by providing mutual learning experiences to IRN members.

EU projects as a way to create opportunities for member regions, foster engagement and build partnerships

PROJECTS & INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

EU projects are also a way to strengthen relations with the EU Institutions. This has been the case with several of the European Commission's Directorates General: DG HOME, who actively participated in Includ-EU events and meetings, DG REGIO, who collaborated within the communication campaign 'Together4Cohesion', and DG EMPL in relation to the initiative on Centres for Vocational Excellence linked to the Skillnet project. Of particular note were the following activities:

- ◉ In the context of Skillnet, the AER launched a series of webinars for regions and their stakeholders on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2017, providing training sessions with experts from the Commission on the main funds and how to access them. The first webinar, held on 26 May 2021, focused on Cohesion and rural development funds, and was attended by over 140 participants. Two more such sessions on other funding streams are currently being planned.

- ◉ Our ongoing work on skills also caught the attention of the Commission. The AER was asked to contribute to a publication on the work we carry out in that context to co-create a skills ecosystem among regional actors.

PROJECTS & MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Member regions can avail of our European Project Unit's services in two ways; by coming to us with specific requests in terms of partner searches, consortium building or project development, and/or by taking advantage of the activities AER negotiates for members when we join projects. Over the past twelve months, the AER has organised more than 20 knowledge sharing, capacity building and engagement initiatives for members that were co-financed by EU projects. These initiatives became crucial at a time where opportunities to meet and cooperate were few and far between.

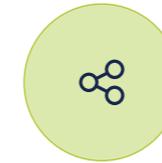
2020 also marked the successful conclusion of the campaign 'Together4Cohesion', a project on communicating Cohesion Policy and the benefits it brings to citizens and other stakeholders. Six AER member regions took an active part in this campaign; Alba and Timiș County (Romania), Csongrád (Hungary), Catalonia (Spain), Trentino (Italy) and Varaždin (Croatia). With 500+ diversified initiatives, the campaign reached almost 20 million citizens, and has been a source of inspiration to other regions within AER and beyond.

Services

FOR MEMBERS ONLY, WE PROVIDE



FUNDING RESEARCH
TAILORED TO SPECIFIC
TOPICS



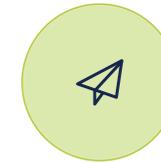
SUPPORT WITH
CONSORTIUM-BUILDING



SUPPORT WITH PARTNER
ACQUISITION



SUPPORT ON PROJECT
WRITING, SUBMISSION AND
REPORTING



ASSISTANCE WITH
ACTIVITIES FOR PROJECT
DELIVERY

FOR EVERYONE, WE PROVIDE



FILTERED INFORMATION
ON OPEN CALLS FOR
REGIONS IN EUROPEAN
PROGRAMMES



INFORMATION ON
PARTNER RESEARCH

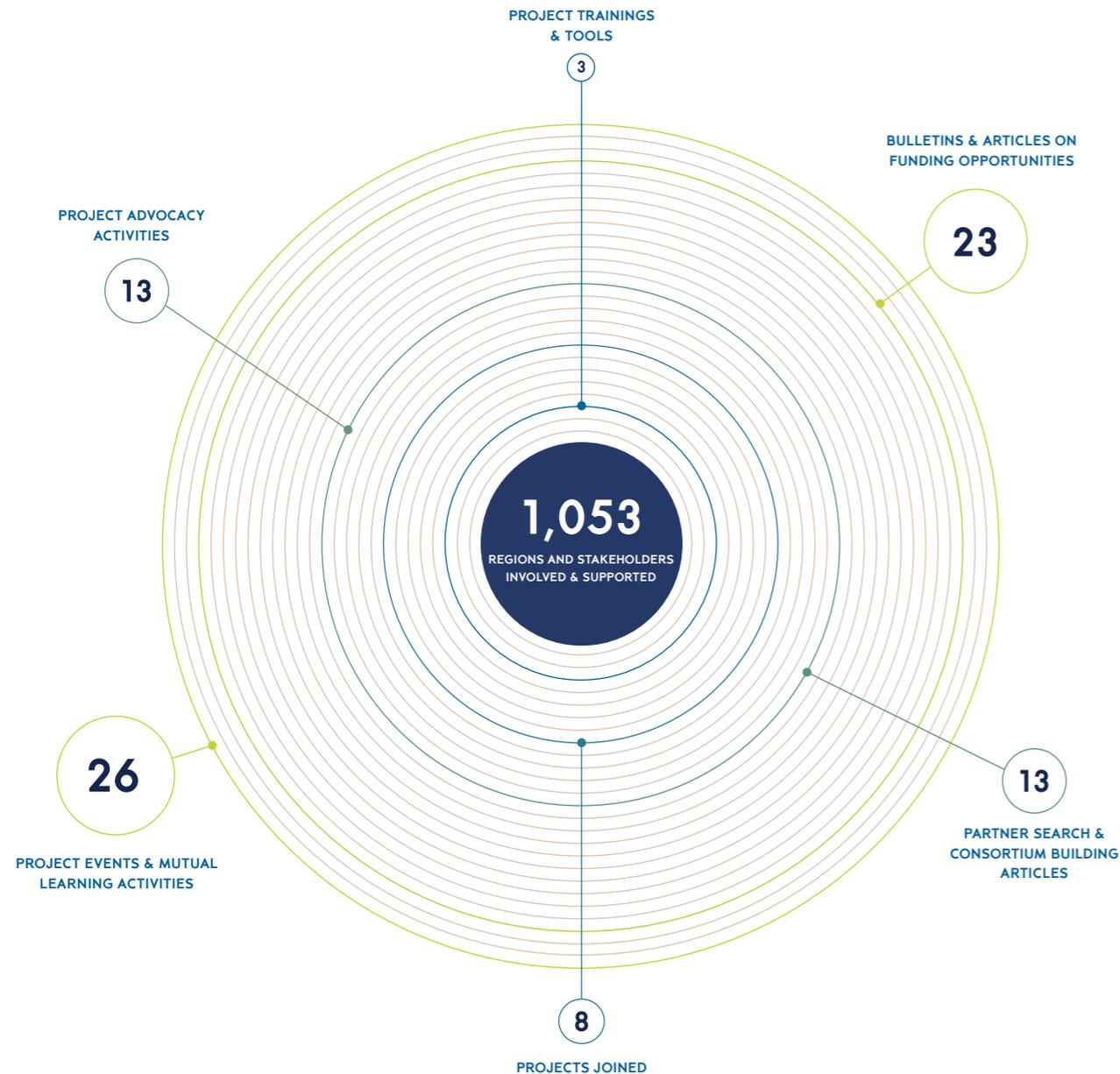


REGULAR UPDATES
ON KEY EVENTS



NEWS UPDATES
ON FUNDING
OPPORTUNITIES

Project Statistics 2020-2021



CUBES

Cultural Administration Boosting with the Engagement of Sustainability for Local Communities

- ◉ **Topic:** Governance of culture in a sustainable way
- ◉ **Role:** Partner
- ◉ **Programme:** Erasmus+
- ◉ **Outcome:** Online training programme divided into four subjects (project management, community involvement and networking, marketing, cultural work and fundraising for culture) and available in six languages (English, Romanian, Portuguese, Greek, Lithuanian and Bosnian) aiming to create and disseminate know-how on sustainable administration of tangible and intangible cultural resources. Policy paper on cultural administration and sustainability.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 25,495.00 (100% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** <http://cubesproject.eu/>

INCLUD-EU

Regional and Local Expertise, Exchange and Engagement for Enhanced Social Cohesion in Europe

- ◉ **Topic:** Integration of Migrants
- ◉ **Role:** Partner
- ◉ **Partner member regions:** Catalonia (Spain), with involvement of Intercultural Regions Network (IRN) members and partners
- ◉ **Programme:** AMIF – Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds
- ◉ **Outcome:** Mapping of existing integration practices at local and regional level in six European countries (Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Romania and the Netherlands), systematised in thematic briefings followed up with six training sessions based on needs assessments, as well as up to ten study visits. Implementation and assessment of five pilot integration projects. Regional exchanges on integration policy and practice through five workshops and five webinars aimed at fostering a more coherent approach to integration on EU-wide scale.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 249,442.25 (90% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** under construction



SCIROCCO EXCHANGE

Personalised Knowledge Transfer and Access to Tailored Evidence-Based Assets on Integrated Care

- ◉ **Topic:** Integrated Care
- ◉ **Role:** Partner
- ◉ **Partner member regions:** Scottish Government (Lead Partner), with involvement of the AER Digital Health Network
- ◉ **Programme:** EU Health Programme
- ◉ **Outcome:** Personalised Knowledge Transfer Programme provided to nine national and regional healthcare authorities across Europe, each with diverse maturity and organisation of integrated care. Knowledge Management Hub web tool to act as an integrator and facilitator for accessing personalised learning and supports for integrated care.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 163,068.00 (60% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** www.sciroccoexchange.eu



TOGETHER FOR COHESION

Let's Reunite!

- ◉ **Topic:** Cohesion Policy
- ◉ **Role:** Lead Partner
- ◉ **Partner member regions:** Alba and Timiș County (Romania), Csongrád (Hungary), Catalonia (Spain), Trentino (Italy), Varaždin (Croatia)
- ◉ **Programme:** DG REGIO
- ◉ **Outcome:** European communication campaign 'Together4Cohesion' centred on stories of citizens and stakeholders in the regions of each of the five selected countries - Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Italy and Spain. The campaign raised awareness of the benefits of Cohesion Policy among citizens, including young people, entrepreneurs, representatives from the tourism sector, farmers and researchers.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 186,698.03 (80% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** www.together4cohesion.eu



Y-FED

Europe is what we make of it

- ◉ **Topic:** European Youth Goals within the new EU Institutions, the Conference on the Future of Europe
- ◉ **Role:** Partner
- ◉ **Programme:** Erasmus+
- ◉ **Outcome:** Development and testing of a model for a reformed EU closer to its citizens, and one that effectively implements the European Youth Goals; achieved through hackathons and a youth simulation event. Advocating for the developed model of the EU at the local, regional, and European level; achieved through an advocacy training session for 24 young activists, the implementation of eight advocacy actions at regional and local level, and contributions to the AER's Bureau Debate on Democracy.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 73,568.00 (85% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** www.linktr.ee/yfed



SKILLNET

Sector Skills Network of VET Centres in Advanced Manufacturing

- ◉ **Topic:** Skill development, employment and training
- ◉ **Role:** Partner
- ◉ **Partner member regions:** Involvement of the AER Working Groups (ex Committee 1 and 3)
- ◉ **Programme:** Erasmus+
- ◉ **Outcome:** Set-up and running of four Peer Learning Clubs as virtual spaces of mutual learning on the advanced manufacturing sector, advocacy and policy influencing, work-based learning and standards, training the trainers. Mutual learning webinars and informative training sessions on EU funding opportunities. Informing and influencing the Vocational Education and Training (VET) agenda through advocacy actions at EU level.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 100,718.00 (80% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** www.skillman.eu

EUROPA-FORUM WACHAU

AER joined the Erasmus+ project led by Lower Austria aimed to co-finance the organisation of the Europa-Forum Wachau 2020, which had been postponed until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 edition took place in Stift Göttweig (Austria) on 10-12 June as a hybrid event under the theme of "Heading for new Horizons". The AER President took part on the first day to give a speech on regions and a greener Europe. The following day, our Secretary General made contributions to a virtual workshop on communication and citizens' involvement related to the Conference on the Future of Europe.



Chair of the AER Task Force on Digitalisation, Martin Eichinger (Lower Austria) speaks at the Europa-Forum Wachau



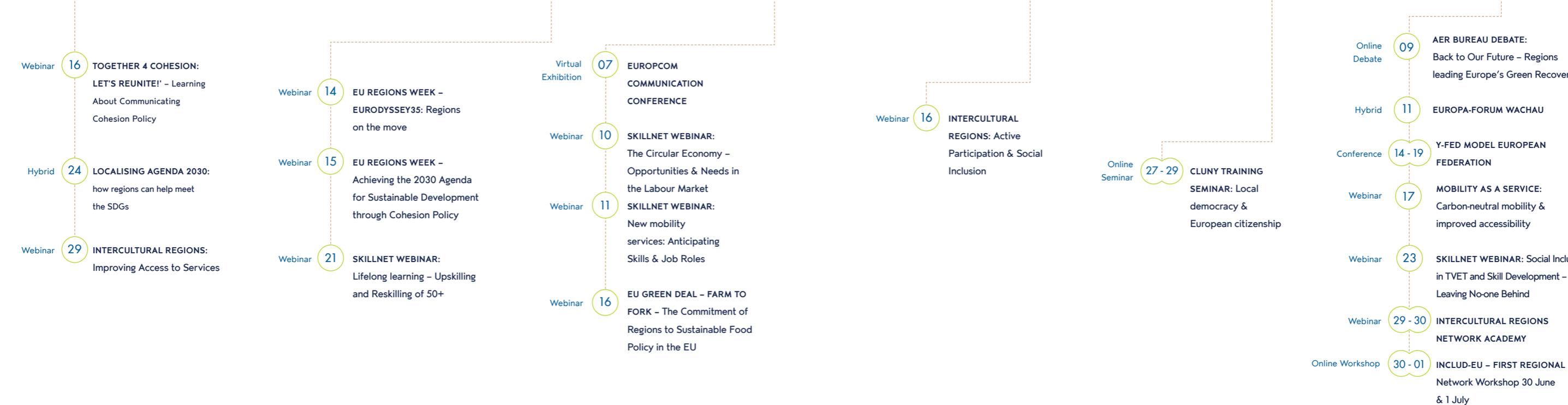
COMING TOGETHER, APART: AER Events Gone Digital

'Online talkshow', 'hybrid conference', 'virtual summit'... this was the year events went truly digital. While it was a real challenge moving all of AER's events and meetings online, over the last twelve months, we have held a record 35 online and hybrid events, with thousands tuning in from across Europe and further afield.

The high-quality of all these events is testament to our commitment to embrace fresh, innovative formats to bring regions, policymakers and other stakeholders 'together apart', and hold meaningful conversations on the issues that matter to our members.

Events

2020



NEW CHALLENGES & NEW HORIZONS: Programmes



“Taking stock; looking forward – Eurodyssey at 35 and beyond”

Ever since it was unanimously decided in March 2020 to suspend all mobility exchanges within Eurodyssey, a monitoring group, made of more than 15 regions, has been operating to contain the spread of the virus and coordinate a solidarity response to protect Eurodyssey trainees. These actions included contract extensions, offers of free accommodation and travel assistance, social and psychological support, and financial aid for those most affected.

In June 2020, after three months of suspension, the programme reopened its doors. Regions put the new concept of “blended mobility” in place to allow for safe and mobile professional training through greater use of online learning tools. Since then, the monitoring group has continued meeting regularly to enforce the new protocols and sanitary measures, while at the same time upholding the quality standards of learning mobility expected within Eurodyssey.

Despite these serious setbacks, in 2020, Eurodyssey was able to celebrate its 35th anniversary having achieved new milestones. In October, AER’s flagship programme was featured in the European Week of Regions and Cities for the very first time with its own participatory lab. Alongside the European Commission and European Youth

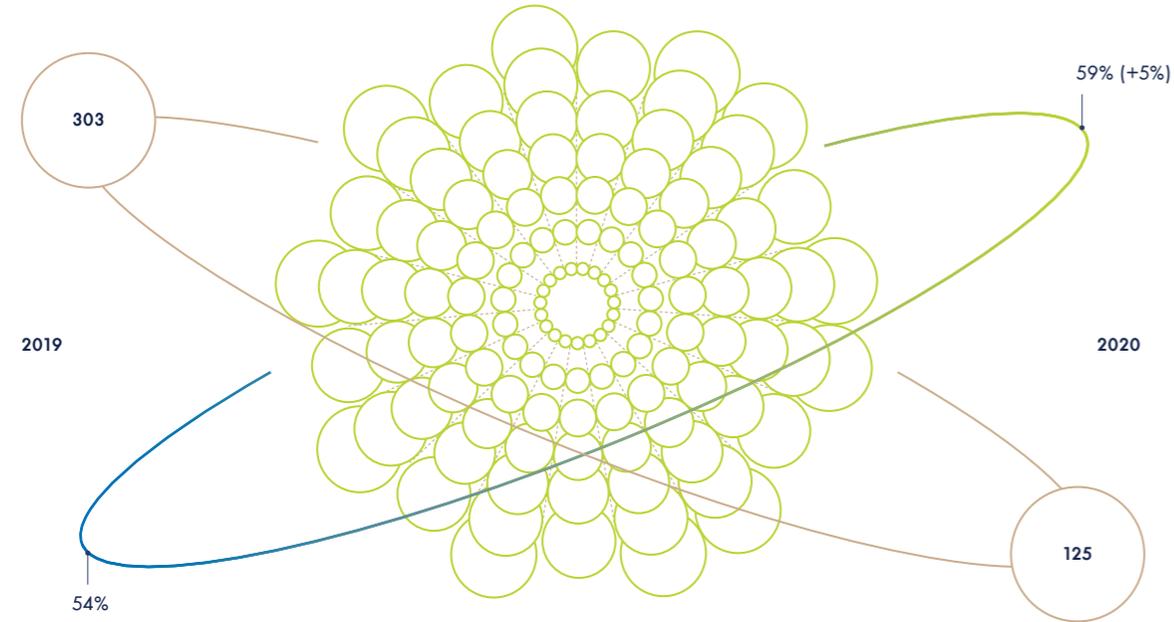
Forum, participants discussed the instrumental role of youth mobility in fostering social cohesion and European citizenship. The first-ever virtual Eurodyssey Forum was held in November as part of the celebratory events. This was the occasion where the special Eurodyssey 35th anniversary movie was premiered – and has since been watched by over 1,800 people across the AER’s social media channels. Guest partners, regions, host companies and young people took this opportunity to share experiences and best practices to adapt learning mobility to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eurodyssey has now started to bounce back from the pandemic. Through 2021, the programme is making a robust recovery; gearing-up to once again support young people across Europe in making education-to-work transitions. In addition, AER and Eurodyssey are deepening relations with the EU-CoE Youth Partnership through their involvement in the European Platform on Learning Mobility, and keep disseminating the benefits and outcomes of the programme at online events to expand its membership and reach even more youth beneficiaries. So despite travelling a difficult path in 2020, the road ahead for Eurodyssey looks very promising.



2020 STATISTICS

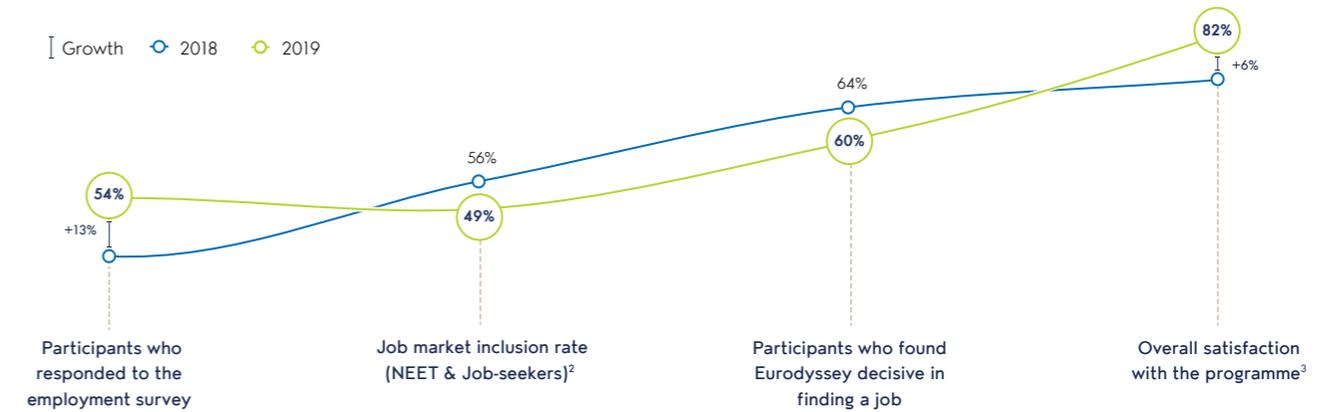
The pandemic hit the programme very hard in 2020: the number of participants decreased by almost 60% compared to 2019.



○ Participant
— Participants matched with a traineeship
○ Region
— Total of participants

2019 EMPLOYMENT RESULTS

54% of the overall 2019 participants belonging to 16 regions responded to the employment survey – 13% improvement over the previous year.



1. "Trainees who found employment within 4 months after Eurodysey"
 2. "Cohort of NEET persons and job-seekers employed within 4 months after Eurodysey"
 3. "Participants who stated that Eurodysey lived up to their professional and personal expectations"

“Envisioning a post-pandemic Summer Academy”

Despite the fact that the AER Summer Academy could not be held in 2020 due to COVID-19, the members of the Organising Committee have continued to make plans over 2020-2021 in view of future editions.

In October 2020, the region of Viken (Norway) was unanimously elected as the new chair of the Summer Academy Organising Committee. What is more, a number of amendments to the Statutes have been agreed to encourage membership, clarify financing and practical aspects and, ultimately, add further flexibility for those AER regions outside the programme who are expressing interest in hosting one of AER’s most insightful and engaging policy conferences.

In 2021, the Summer Academy joined forces with other AER bodies to provide input into discussions on the Conference on the Future of Europe. In cooperation with the AER Task Force on Democracy and the Working Groups, Summer Academy members participated in May’s debate on democracy, and joined the call for a greater role of regions and their young citizens in shaping the future of Europe. In this context, the AER Summer Academy will organise a workshop as a partner of the upcoming SDGs Conference. This will be an opportunity to exchange good practices on how to bring the voices of the most under-represented communities to policy deliberations and decision-making processes, and build social and environmental resilience in the aftermath of the pandemic.



Looking ahead to a brighter future beyond the pandemic, plans are already in motion for the 2022 edition of the Summer Academy event. Here, we will review the conclusions and recommendations on the Conference on the Future of Europe. This will be a welcome opportunity to hold in-person discussions with young people, and inspire regional-level ideas to build social resilience in a post-pandemic Europe.



Who We Are

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe, providing political representation to 134 public authorities at European and international level. With members across 30 EU and non-EU countries, the AER promotes regions as key players in the European project, as well as in strengthening democracy and good governance.

Diversity is our strength, and the AER strives to build bridges between all our regions – urban and rural, EU and non-EU. Through our dedicated Task Forces and thematic Working Groups, we facilitate best practice sharing and enhance capacities across our membership; working together to overcome the common challenges facing European regions.

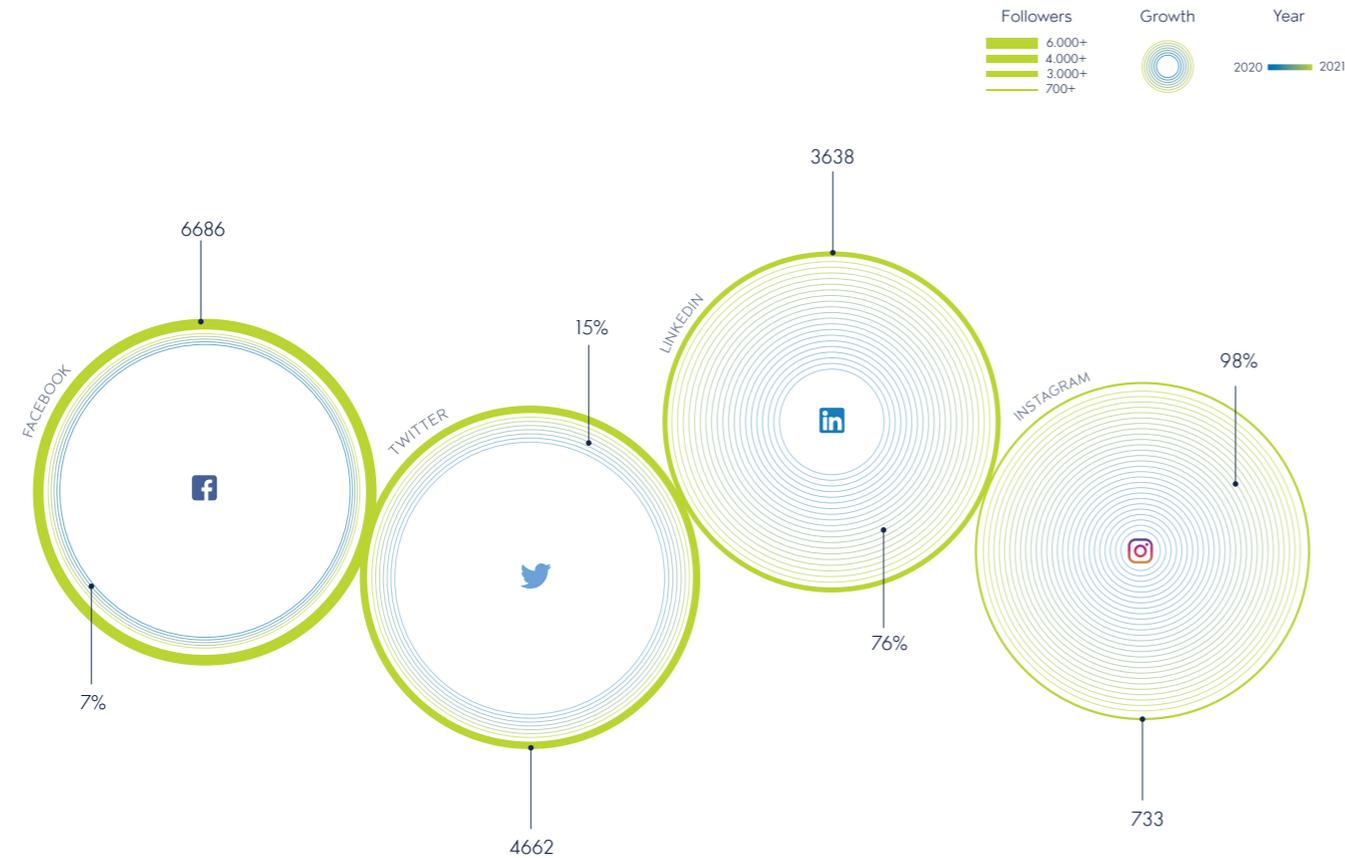
Reflecting the diversity of our membership, these Working Groups cover a broad range of policy areas: encompassing economic and regional development, social policy and public health, culture, education and youth. We further act

as an interlocutor between regions looking to take part in European projects; helping them to find partners and secure EU funding, as well as providing guidance in all aspects of project implementation and management.

The AER is the leading political voice for European regions; acting as a channel through which regional governments can have a direct impact on decisions taken at EU level. Since 1985, the AER has lobbied to ensure that regional perspectives are meaningfully embedded in decision-making processes and that the principle of subsidiarity is respected.

Our political priorities are defined by our members through our Bureau, whose current priorities include Cohesion Policy, migration, digitalisation, climate, democracy and migration.

Social Stats



Our Members

- ⦿ Berat - AL
- ⦿ Dibër - AL
- ⦿ Durrës - AL
- ⦿ Elbasan - AL
- ⦿ Fier - AL
- ⦿ Gjirokaster - AL
- ⦿ Korçë - AL
- ⦿ Kukes - AL
- ⦿ Lezhë - AL
- ⦿ Shkodër - AL
- ⦿ Vlorë - AL
- ⦿ Tiranë - AL
- ⦿ Lori - AM
- ⦿ Tavush - AM
- ⦿ Burgenland - AT
- ⦿ Lower Austria - AT
- ⦿ Upper Austria - AT
- ⦿ Tirol - AT
- ⦿ Vienna - AT
- ⦿ Brussels-Capital Region - BE
- ⦿ German Speaking Community - BE
- ⦿ Wallonia - BE
- ⦿ Bosna-Podrinje - BA
- ⦿ Brcko Distrikt - BA
- ⦿ Republika Srpska - BA
- ⦿ Sarajevo - BA
- ⦿ Zenica-Doboj - BA
- ⦿ Brod-Posavina - HR
- ⦿ Istria - HR
- ⦿ Krapina-Zagorje - HR
- ⦿ Osijek-Baranja - HR
- ⦿ Primorje-Gorski Kotar - HR
- ⦿ Sibenik-Knin - HR
- ⦿ Split-Dalmatia - HR
- ⦿ Varaždin - HR
- ⦿ Zagreb County - HR
- ⦿ Union of CY Municipalities - CY
- ⦿ Bourgogne-Franche Comté - FR
- ⦿ Corse - FR
- ⦿ Grand Est - FR
- ⦿ Guadeloupe - FR
- ⦿ Guyane - FR
- ⦿ Martinique - FR
- ⦿ Ajara - GE
- ⦿ Imereti - GE
- ⦿ Csongrad - HU
- ⦿ Údarás na Gaeltachta - IE
- ⦿ Donegal - IE
- ⦿ Abruzzo - IT
- ⦿ Sardinia - IT
- ⦿ Molise - IT
- ⦿ Trentino-Alto Adige - IT
- ⦿ Umbria - IT
- ⦿ Valle d'Aosta - IT
- ⦿ Municipality of Budva - ME
- ⦿ Flevoland - NL
- ⦿ Gelderland - NL
- ⦿ Nordland - NO
- ⦿ Innlandet - NO
- ⦿ Viken - NO
- ⦿ Açores - PT
- ⦿ Madeira - PT
- ⦿ Alba - RO
- ⦿ Arad - RO
- ⦿ Arges - RO
- ⦿ Bihor - RO
- ⦿ Bistrita-Nasaud - RO
- ⦿ Brasov - RO
- ⦿ Buzau - RO
- ⦿ Calarasi - RO
- ⦿ Caras-Severin - RO
- ⦿ Cluj - RO
- ⦿ Covasna - RO
- ⦿ Dambovita - RO
- ⦿ Dolj - RO
- ⦿ Galati - RO
- ⦿ Gorj - RO
- ⦿ Harghita - RO
- ⦿ Hunedoara - RO
- ⦿ Iasi - RO
- ⦿ Ilfov - RO
- ⦿ Maramures - RO
- ⦿ Mehedinti - RO
- ⦿ Mures - RO
- ⦿ Neamt - RO
- ⦿ Olt - RO
- ⦿ Prahova - RO
- ⦿ Sala - RO
- ⦿ Satu Mare - RO
- ⦿ Sibiu - RO
- ⦿ Timis - RO
- ⦿ Tulcea - RO
- ⦿ Vaslui - RO
- ⦿ Vrancea - RO
- ⦿ Republic of Mordovia - RU
- ⦿ Tatarstan - RU
- ⦿ Sumadija and Pomoravlje - RS
- ⦿ Vojvodina - RS
- ⦿ Kosice Self-Governing Region - SK
- ⦿ East Slovenia - SI
- ⦿ West Slovenia - SI
- ⦿ Catalonia - ES
- ⦿ Valencia - ES
- ⦿ Murcia - ES
- ⦿ Gävleborg - SE
- ⦿ Jönköping - SE
- ⦿ Norrbotten - SE
- ⦿ Örebro - SE
- ⦿ Östergötland - SE
- ⦿ Värmland - SE
- ⦿ Västerbotten - SE
- ⦿ Västernorrland - SE
- ⦿ Västra Götaland - SE
- ⦿ Basel-Stadt - CH
- ⦿ Fribourg - CH
- ⦿ Jura - CH
- ⦿ Zürich - CH
- ⦿ Adana - TR
- ⦿ Antalya - TR
- ⦿ Denizli - TR
- ⦿ Edirne - TR
- ⦿ Erzurum - TR
- ⦿ Gaziantep - TR
- ⦿ Izmir - TR
- ⦿ Kirsehir - TR
- ⦿ Mus - TR
- ⦿ Sakarya - TR
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- ⦿ Pavlohrad - UA
- ⦿ Hampshire - GB
- ⦿ NHS NSS - GB

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- ⊙ Gisela Guari Cañada

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- ⊙ Johanna Pacevicius

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- ⊙ Birgit Sandu
- ⊙ Anna Comacchio
- ⊙ Luca Magri
- ⊙ Mathilde Perrier

PROGRAMMES

- ⊙ Andrés Muñoz Rojo

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- ⊙ Justin Sammon

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Alba office:

- ⊙ Cornelia Carmen Madaras
- ⊙ Georgia Sinca

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- ⊙ Espen Holtan

SO for Thomas Hartman, chair of the Monitoring and Evaluation Group

- ⊙ Kurt-Åke Hammarstedt

SO for Monica Gundahl, acting-chair of the Election Committee

- ⊙ Ulla-Britt Höglund

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ISBN 978-2-9579590

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2021 Assembly of European Regions

Design Credits:

Habile Studio

Compilation & Editing:

Justin Sammon, Communications & Events Manager

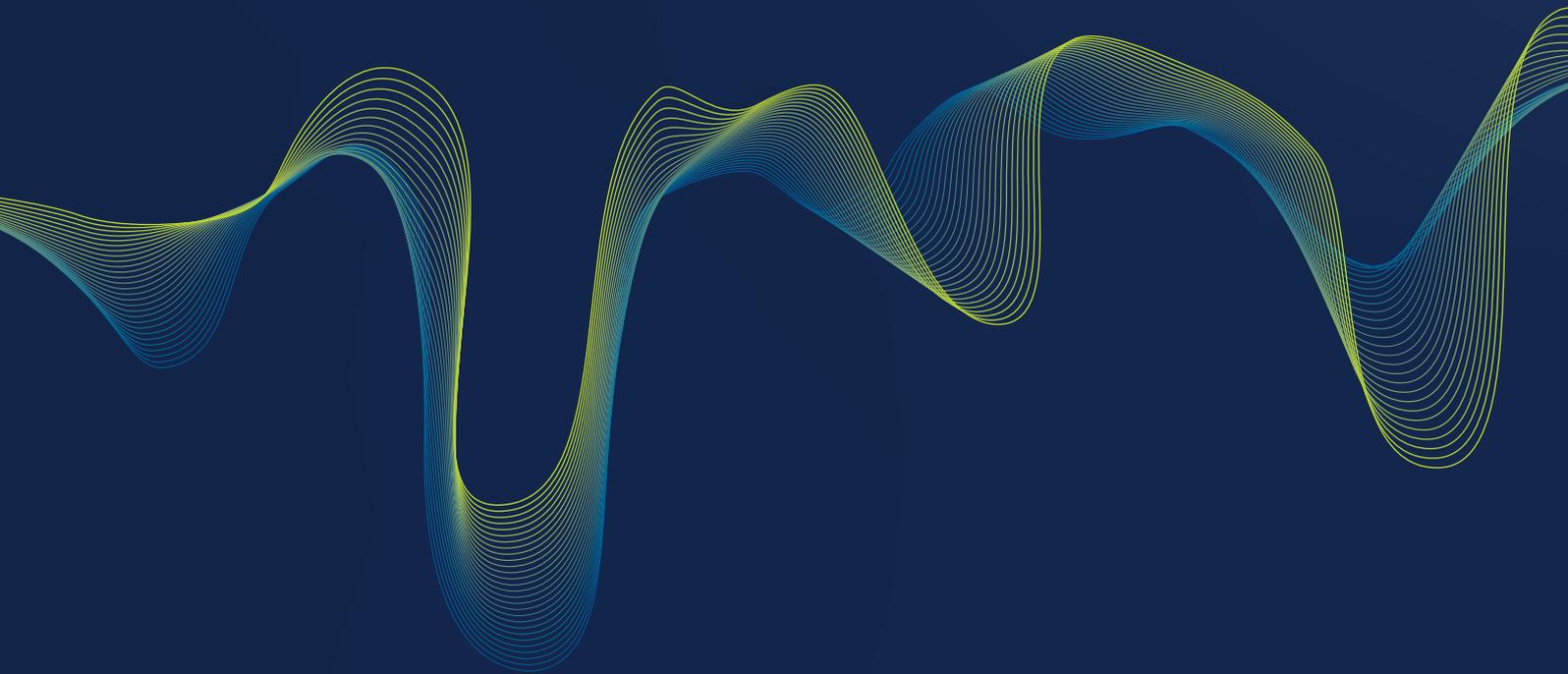


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