

Cohesion Policy has to remain a priority: West Finland emphasises growth, innovation, expertise, and employment

Regions in West Finland emphasise:

A strong and stable European Union creating added value is beneficial to West Finnish regions. Therefore, it is necessary that the cohesion policy is further developed to strongly support growth and economic stability within the regions. **It is necessary to reform the criteria of structural funding.** The criteria need to actively support growth and development instead of focusing only on tackling vulnerabilities. West Finnish regions also support Finland's EU policy, which takes Finland's unique position, such as the remote location, sparse population, and Arctic dimension, into account.

The cohesion policy should support regional renewal and support regions to diversify their sources of funding. The cohesion policy has been a major resource for regional growth, innovation, and development. It has allowed, for example, the development of regional business environment and strengthening of competences, expertise, employment, and social justice within our regions

Sufficient level of cohesion funding secures the continuity of regional development in all European regions. Regions are experts when it comes to the operability of the EU programmes, and therefore they should be included/involved throughout the programme planning process. **The programmes should be modernised, simplified, and made more flexible.** Flexibility increases resilience. Different EU programmes should be compatible and complementary to one another. Especially structural funds should be better compatible with the EU's RDI programmes.

Smart specialisation is a suitable instrument for West Finland, where it is utilized to create innovations and growth. Smart specialisation strategies and recognising regional strengths allow the development of Finland's abilities to compete in global markets. Regional development and equality among regions are long-term processes supported by cohesion policy. Cooperation among regions should be encouraged by connecting European regions through different programmes.

The role of national and international cooperation of regions should be emphasised in the future cohesion policy. It is important to strengthen cross-border cooperation on the EU's internal and external borders. There is a genuine need for the three stands of territorial cooperation, i.e. cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. The cooperation should include the possibility for cross-border programs over maritime borders. Collaboration of cohesion policy, EU programmes, and Finland's Baltic Sea Strategy is worth pursuing. The Arctic plays an increasingly important role for the European Union. Promoting the Arctic dimension in MFF negotiations is essential, due to its strategic advantages.