

The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs – Position paper on the multiannual financial framework (MFF)

May 2024

Position

This position paper clarifies the overall position of the Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs regarding the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) as well as a more in-depth analyses based on five policy areas. The position is planned to be used as a basis for future discussions, which will intensify in the coming years at regional, national and European level.

- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs believes that the EU's multiannual financial framework should consider the needs of both stronger and weaker regions and clarify the capacity of public actors in solving the EU's common challenges. Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs wishes to emphasise the importance of ensuring actual needs. This is done by initiating a dialogue at an early stage and carrying it through the entire development process with national, regional and local levels.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs emphasises that excellent innovation and growth regions have an important role in contributing to the EU's global competitiveness. The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs emphasises that budget allocation for a possible enlargement should therefore be distributed so that all EU regions and cities can contribute to the EU's global competitiveness in the best possible way and according to their own circumstances.
- The Stockholm region is one of the EU's most prominent metropolitan regions, contributing to the EU's supply chains and strategic autonomy. The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs believes that the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework should capitalise on the potential of prominent metropolitan regions to take on a greater role as an engine of growth at national and European level.
- In order to secure the potential of prominent innovation and growth regions, metropolitan regions should be given a greater say in the MFF's regional and urban programmes.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs believes that the MFF should continue to support initiatives in research, innovation, life sciences, healthcare, cohesion policy, fair sustainable climate transition, environment and sustainable growth, mobility and digitalisation, and that initiatives in the next financial framework should also focus more on social inclusion,

employment, migration, integration and consistently apply a gender equality and equity perspective.

- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs wishes to emphasise that the next multiannual financial framework should respond to the EU's social challenges with specific initiatives focusing on the perspectives and conditions of capital cities and capital regions.

EU digitalisation policy in the next MFF

- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs stresses that a continued high level of ambition for digitalisation is needed in the next budget period to achieve the digital transition, especially regarding digital public services. The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs also believes that regions and cities need more financial and operational support to manage the intensification of public sector digitalisation, both based on new legislative requirements and for new technology use.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs stresses that the digitalisation of public services is fundamental for the EU to achieve the 2030 digital targets and underlines that the role of public actors in the implementation of the digitalisation legislation should be clarified in the next budgetary period.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs calls for intensified harmonisation efforts to clarify the large amount of EU legislation in the field of digitalisation. Harmonisation of digitisation legislation contributes to a more efficient implementation of the legislation for regions and municipalities.
- EU digitisation legislation underlines the role of regions and cities in the digital transition, including greater responsibility for reporting, implementation and crisis management. The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs therefore stresses that more funding should be directed towards regions and cities as key actors, for example through an extension of the Digital Europe (DIGITAL) programme.

EU research and innovation policy in the next Multiannual Financial Framework

- The EU Research and Innovation Programme is central to the EU's efforts to solve major societal and climate challenges, and as a platform for cooperation between actors from across Europe, the programme provides great added value.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs believes that the role of regions and municipalities in the framework programme should be clarified during the next budget period, with the aim of increasing the participation of public actors and thus more clearly linking research and innovation with regional and urban development.

- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs emphasises that the framework programme needs to more clearly include regions and municipalities as active participants, not just as recipients of results. More active participation leads to more effective application and stronger links to the societal challenges of regions and municipalities.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs calls for proposals that are to contribute to societal challenges could usefully be formulated to require projects to be based more on the real needs of municipalities and regions. This could increase the incentive for public actors to plan participation in externally funded projects as part of their business development. Examples of active roles include acting as test beds or the opportunity to participate in selected parts of the projects. In research projects where the natural role of regions and municipalities is to be recipients, research results should be communicated in a more structured way.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs believes that in the event of an enlargement of EU co-operation, the EU's research and innovation policy should be implemented with greater focus and rigour. In order to strengthen the EU's global competitiveness and strategic position, research and innovation must continue to be a prioritised policy area during the next budget period, where both excellence and breadth are needed.

Cohesion and enlargement policies in the next Multiannual Financial Framework

- The Stockholm region is one of Europe's fastest growing capital regions. It is home to outstanding research in life science, climate and the environment, a large manufacturing industry and prominent clusters of tech companies. Cohesion policy provides the region with the conditions to remain a leading, innovative and sustainable region that can contribute to the EU's global competitiveness as well as independent supply chains.
- EU cohesion policy builds bottom-up capacity at local and regional level, contributing to globally strong EU value chains and a competitive Europe. While we are committed to ensuring that cohesion policy implementation is based on a long-term approach and regional priorities, metropolitan municipalities have been key actors in overcoming several of the crises the EU has faced in recent years (Covid 19, reception of refugees from Ukraine). As a metropolitan region, the Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs therefore stresses the importance of cohesion policy after 2027 retaining a sufficient degree of flexibility to make future programmes more responsive to changing territorial needs and unforeseen circumstances, without compromising its structural and long-term objectives,
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs believes that the EU should continue to simplify cohesion policy to reduce the administrative burden on managing authorities and final beneficiaries of cohesion policy funds after 2027. Future cohesion policy needs to continue to

focus on multi-level governance and the partnership principle, enabling local and regional administration of EU funds to get the best value for money.

climate, environment and energy policy in the next Multiannual Financial Framework

- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs welcomes the establishment of a 2040 climate target and continued work in the next budget period. The 2040 climate target clearly sets out the way forward in order not to lose momentum in the transition and to ensure that the EU becomes climate neutral by 2050.
- A legally binding target for 2040, well in line with the science-based recommendations of the EU Advisory Committee on Climate Change, is a necessity to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement. The upcoming EU long-term budget therefore needs to have an ambitious agenda for Europe's equitable sustainable development.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs emphasises that municipalities and regions are responsible for a crucial part of the efforts needed to reduce emissions. To ensure that the EU successfully manages a far-reaching just, green, digital and societal transition, closer cooperation between European, national, regional and local levels is needed.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs welcomes an increase in calls for proposals from EU financial instruments in the next budgetary period targeting regions and cities as key actors in contributing to the EU's 2040 climate targets and specifically the design of innovative solutions in the work on climate adaptation to protect and restore biodiversity in EU metropolitan regions.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs welcomes an ambitious common line for increased investment, clarity and predictability from the EU level linked to the development of net-zero technologies and supports scaled-up production of CCUS technologies and stronger industrial symbiosis to secure the Union's carbon storage and infrastructure capacity and resource efficiency that combines climate benefits with profitability in the work to achieve the 2030 and 2040 targets and ultimately climate neutrality in 2050.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs supports the acceleration and development of innovative financing mechanisms, funds and calls for projects at EU level that promote a sustainable and competitive blue economy and policies in line with the Green Deal. It also encourages closer cooperation between the European, national, regional and local levels in the context of developing a sustainable and equitable European Blue Deal that protects and restores marine ecosystems and habitats and the world's oceans.

- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs emphasises the Baltic Sea cooperation as an important part of the work for a living marine environment and a functioning sustainable blue economy. The archipelago and the water are among Stockholm's greatest assets and are of crucial importance to many of the region's residents and visitors. To restore and preserve the marine environment in the Baltic Sea, while increasing infrastructure and development at sea and in coastal areas is expected to meet the growing needs of the region, increased cross-border cooperation is needed within the framework of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy and a clearer emphasis on the sustainable blue economy as part of the EU Green Deal.

EU transport and mobility policy in the next Multiannual Financial Framework

- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs supports the acceleration and development of innovative financing mechanisms, funds and calls for projects at EU level that promote a sustainable and competitive blue economy and policies in line with the Green Deal. It also encourages closer cooperation between the European, national, regional and local levels in the context of developing a sustainable and equitable European Blue Deal that protects and restores marine ecosystems and habitats and the world's oceans.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs welcomes an increase in calls for proposals from EU financial instruments in the next budget period, targeting regions and cities that a) are key actors in contributing to the EU's 2040 climate targets and b) key actors in the implementation of the European Green Deal, the development of sustainable and smart transport linked to the implementation of the revised TEN-T regulation and the integration of urban nodes, the 55% package as well as the greening freight transport package to reach the target of 90% decarbonisation of the European transport sector by 2050.
- Regions and municipalities have a key role in the transport system and coastal cities and maritime transport play an important role in the overall transition of society. Within the Ten-T framework, a stronger role for inland shipping should also be emphasised, as there is great potential to reduce emissions from the transport sector. It is crucial that short sea shipping is integrated and valued as much as other infrastructure. The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs encourages working to ensure that the core port status within Ten-T is also reflected in both regional and national planning.
- The Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs emphasises that the local and regional level is responsible for a decisive part of the efforts that need to be implemented within the EU's transport and mobility policy in order to achieve the targets for 2040 and 2050 and climate negativity. Thus, climate adaptation, environmental risks, sustainable security, crisis preparedness and total defence should be addressed in a holistic way so that synergies between them are a) made visible and b) proactively exploited through a combination of net-

zero technology solutions, smart and efficient carbon management and an intelligently interconnected multimodal transport system for freight and passengers.

- It is desirable to create even better conditions for the implementation of the already adopted regulations and decisions. An excessive gap between the desired state of play and clear implementation efforts risks delaying, preventing and hampering an EU connected to seamless and sustainable transport and mobility solutions. Therefore, the Stockholm Region Association for European Affairs calls for action to remove barriers that prevent solutions from stalling or failing to materialise.