

DCRN Meeting on the Cohesion Policy and the regions with demographic challenges

On **February 22**, a meeting of the **Demographic Change Regions Network (DCRN)** took place at the Regional Office of Extremadura in Brussels concerning the effects that possible budget reductions in Cohesion funds could have on underpopulated areas.

The Permanent Delegation of Castilla y León to the European Union (EU) and the Representation of Saxony-Anhalt to the EU coordinated the event, and some representatives of the members comprising this network of 40 regions, such as Castilla y León (ES), Saxony-Anhalt (DE), Aragón (ES), Extremadura (ES), La Rioja (ES), Galicia (ES), Andalusia (ES), Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (DE), Thuringia (DE), Achterhoek (NL), Silesia (PL), among others, attended the session.

On this occasion, the meeting was devoted to the analysis of the impact of Cohesion Policy in the European regions facing demographic challenges and the future prospects of this policy in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of the EU. To this end, Mr **Lewis Dijkstra**, Head of the Economic Analysis Sector Unit of the Directorate General for Regional Policy of the European Commission (DG REGIO), and Mr **Thomas Wobben**, Director for legislative work at the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), were invited to participate as speakers.

Mr Lewis Dijkstra analysed demographic change in EU Regions and spoke on behalf of the position of DG REGIO facing the negotiations of the next MFF on Cohesion Policy. The Head of the Economic Analysis Sector Unit of DG REGIO assured that they will focus on two aspects: on the one hand, **international flows**, in order to respond to the challenges of immigration; and on the other hand, demographic changes in those areas where there has been a **rapid increase or loss of population in recent years**.

Mr Dijkstra explained that the trends in terms of population loss in the EU are still due to the exodus from the countryside to the cities, and mobility because of migration. **Unemployment** is another factor, especially the lack of employment opportunities for the younger population.

Mr Dijkstra highlighted that in Europe, around 50% of the population of **rural areas suffer exclusion problems** and, in large part, this is due to the lack of services and infrastructure. "It is easier for the population to move to places where there are better services," he said.

For his part, Mr Thomas Wobben talked about the state of play of the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy within the CoR. Mr Wobben assured that the political dialogue in the negotiations about the MFF takes place mainly in financial terms and that the **immediate needs of people should be taken into account** as well.

In view of the possible cuts on the budget line allocated to the Cohesion Policy funds, the Director for the Legislative Work Unit of the CoR considered that **the structural funds are a fundamental tool for the development of the regions** and should continue to be so during the next period 2021-2027.

The meeting ended with the presentation of two examples of best practices **on how the regions invest the cohesion funds** to deal with demographic change. **Galicia's** representative, Mrs Vanessa Lobo Casas, presented the [Symbios Project](#), which brings services to the inhabitants of the most depopulated Galician rural areas as a chance to exchange and learn about the challenges of demographic change and the consequences for the welfare and social inclusion in the most vulnerable territories.

Finally, the representative from **Saxony-Anhalt**, Mr Andreas Schweitzer, presented the [Center of excellence \(CoE\) of Social Innovation](#), a multidisciplinary centre that the German region uses to consolidate lines of technological and social development and improve working and living conditions of its inhabitants through the collaboration of social and technical sciences.

