

PUBLIC CONSULTATION - SUMMARY REPORT

The on-line public consultation was structured around a set of open questions regarding the Strategy in the four Alpine languages (French, German, Italian and Slovenian) as well as in English. The results of the consultation were published on the website of DG Regional Policy. A large high-level stakeholder conference took place in Milan on 1-2 December 2014. The event, jointly organised by the Italian Presidency of the Council, the Lombardy Region and the Commission, gathered together some 1,000 participants from the seven participating countries. This conference closed the public consultation and was at the same time the starting point for the drafting of the Action Plan.

Results

Overall, the consultation process emphasised that tackling shared challenges and opportunities in relation to the four themes requires coherent, integrated and coordinated approaches on the part of the countries involved. Neither unilateral national approaches nor sector-based approaches would suffice.

Respondents of different capacities participated in the public consultation of the EUSALP. In particular private persons and representatives from the civil society responded to the survey, followed by public authorities. In total 330 contributions were received of which 198 on the website of the Commission and 129 on the Italian page of the EUSALP-website. The latter as follows: 54 in English, 65 in German, 23 in French, 51 in Italian, and eight in Slovenian. Residents of different countries participated in the consultation, including both residents of the countries in the Alpine Region, as well as other EU member states. All in all, 26 contributions came from Austria, five from Belgium, 38 from France, 43 from Germany, 194 from Italy, one from Latvia, four from Liechtenstein, one from the Netherlands, ten from Slovenia and eight from Switzerland. Most respondents were well informed about the EUSALP. 50% say that they are very well informed.

1st Thematic Policy Area

The public consultation provided insights on which objectives are perceived as most important with regard to driving innovative growth in the Alpine Region. With regard to the three Actions of the 1st Thematic Policy Area, the main objectives highlighted in the consultation are:

- An Alpine Innovation Strategy and better networking of research centres and enterprises are the main objectives for the innovation priority;
- With regard to strengthening SMEs both developing Alpine added-value chains and supporting SMEs have been indicated as important objectives for the Alpine Region.
- Strengthening the skills levels and competences of the workforce in the Alpine Region and to stimulate the Alpine Job Market are important objectives for developing the labour market.

According to the public consultation, a number of barriers to the mobility of labour, students, goods and ideas in the region have been identified. The greatest barrier to labour mobility in the Alpine Region is language differences and barriers concerning transport connections and accessibility. Moreover, the legislative and administrative differences burden the labour mobility in the area. A lack of information - not only regarding the needs of people in the area, but also on exchange and cooperation projects in the area serves to hinder labour mobility. In the area of education and training, there are barriers in terms of training, education possibilities and vocational training, and also the recognition of qualifications across borders remains difficult.

With regard to the challenges for the future competitiveness of the region, the respondents to the public consultation highlight challenges related to the environment and climate change as most important, followed by challenges related to demographic change, tourism development and transportation.

The responses to the public consultation contain many ideas and proposals for concrete actions to be taken in order to improve the Alpine Region labour market and the development of SMEs. The following are some of those ideas that (in different words) have been mentioned more frequently:

Strategic issues:

- Multilingual (online) job-centre for the Alpine Region, including support to employees and potential employers (in particular SMEs, start-ups, entrepreneurs);
- Alpine training centre / activities for joint education and vocational training or standard education (related to languages, entrepreneurship, tourism, agriculture, industry, commerce);
- Alpine mobility programme for secondary school students, but also for workers;
- Alpine brand, label, image enhancement for products and services produced in the Alpine Region;

As for the field of innovation some of the project ideas mentioned more frequently are:

- Alpine innovation strategy;
- Alpine Region think tank promoting innovative process of local and interregional development;
- Creation of networks between scientific institutions to optimise the use of research infrastructure;

2nd Thematic Policy Area

With regard to the policy area "Mobility and Connectivity", the public consultation showed that the first priority is on better overall transport systems for both freight and passenger transport. In particular, inter-modality and inter-operability are key issues. The strategic priority "A better connected society in the Region", including the digital agenda, strengthening the solidarity between people living in different areas and accessibility to services received the second highest support. Finally, the strategic priority "Improve sustainable accessibility for all Alpine areas" was perceived as less important compared to the above mentioned priorities.

The main challenges for the Alpine Region in terms of connectivity coming out of the consultation process can be grouped around major themes:

- Logistics-freight: Macro-regional coordination of infrastructure investments; Missing links of the TEN-T corridors, particularly cross-border ; Improve the intermodal transport supply; Promoting modal shift with taxes and incentives ; Harmonise toll and tax systems; Improve all transport modes rather than restricting the trucks ; Last mile logistics need to be considered;
- Passengers: Reduce individual traffic with a sustainable transport of better quality; Connecting the existing lines cross border in remote areas like IT-FR, IT-CH ; Maintain or redevelop public transport in remote areas; Invest in local railways instead of roads and high speed train; Improve the inner-alpine accessibility by all transport systems; Integrate practical information on timetables and tariffs in the region; common management of transport operators;
- Digital agenda: Increase the ICT connectivity and awareness; Develop the Physical/temporal accessibility of Services of general interest; Integrate the information sites for tourism and culture.

3rd Thematic Policy Area

The public consultation shows that environment is among the most important areas where macro-regional cooperation is needed. In response to question 1 of the public consultation which asks respondents to identify the main topics where environmental cooperation should be fostered, approximately two thirds of respondents mentioned either environment or sustainable development in general, or specific environmental issues which they think warrant attention.

Based on the results of the public consultation, and in particular the responses given to the open-ended question regarding the main topics to be addressed by the strategy, the five most relevant environmental topics identified by the public consultation are nature and biodiversity, cultural heritage, climate change, water and energy.

The question regarding the main objectives on which the EUSALP should focus yielded less clear-cut responses in terms of identifying themes to be addressed by the strategy.

The cross-cutting issue of ‘unlocking creative potential’ received the most support, followed by objectives relating to energy, preservation of ecosystems, and climate change. However, these responses also support the prioritisation of the 5 environmental topics identified through the analysis of responses provided to question 1, as the most popular objectives relate to the topics of natural and cultural resources, energy, ecosystems, and climate change.

The respondents to the public consultation identified ideas for projects or actions to be taken under the EUSALP. Only about 60.3% of respondents provided one or more examples of projects or actions related to the 3rd Policy Area, almost 40% of respondents provided no examples of projects or actions for this Policy Area. The responses also varied in terms of depth and scope, with some focusing on specific examples of existing projects and their description, and others on wider actions under which several projects can potentially be implemented.

Governance

The public consultation has revealed a number of barriers to cooperation which the macro-regional strategy should seek to overcome. Existing cooperation mechanisms across the national borders need to be improved in the Alpine Region.

Bureaucratic and formalised structures burden the cooperation of the regions. The existing bureaucratic administration structures in the region have been mentioned as cooperation barriers. The existing structures appear as too complicated, technocratic and according to the public consultation they would benefit from simplification.

Moreover, cultural and language differences are also regarded as barriers. Such differences complicate the communication in the region and fragment the skills of the labour market. The lack of coordination of existing mechanisms is another barrier. A stronger involvement of the regional level, the coordination between the regions, but also the involvement of NGOs, civil society the private sector, the Chambers of Commerce is seen as necessary. Last but not least, the lack of information as concerns people's needs as well as cooperation programmes has been mentioned as cooperation barrier.

In the public consultation different governance structures for the Region have been suggested to ensure an effective coordination between the actors involved. These structures range from the creation of new bodies to the strengthening of the existing ones, as for instance the Alpine Convention, which has been frequently mentioned. The respondents suggested the creation of new working groups, task forces, joint offices, agencies, networks, EGTCs, committees and regional councils. The envisaged governance structure should also allow the full participation of all levels of governance. The respondents also suggest the stronger involvement and participation of citizens, civil society and NGOs, but also the need for stronger participation of the local level and a stronger coordination between the regions. Moreover, the commitment of higher political levels, such as the European and national level is necessary, according to the consultation.

The responses vary when it comes to the key actors for a better cooperation and coordination in the Alpine Region, as well as on who should have the ultimate responsibility for achieving result and be the key decision-makers. A strong emphasis is given to the lower governance levels. Enlarge, it is stressed that the EU, national and regional level should share responsibilities.

Public bodies and authorities, the regional and local level, but also citizens and civil society should play a strong role in the EUSALP. Therefore, representatives from regions, NGOs, mayors, regional councils and communities, NGO representatives, associations, institutions, provinces, municipalities, citizens' representatives in general, but also citizens themselves should have an active role in the in decision-making and in the implementation of the Strategy.

A stronger participation in the implementation of the Strategy is suggested for private actors, especially of sectors as transport, tourism and energy. Chambers of Commerce, Economic Interest Groupings, association and tourist offices, SMEs, regional banks have been suggested as actors.