
Challenges of EU Cohesion Policy and the Evaluation of Its Effects

The Institute of Economics, Zagreb

Trg J. F. Kennedyja 7, Zagreb

November 6, 2025, 10:00 – 14:00

Reducing disparities in development among EU regions and building a unified European market have long been the widely accepted main objectives of EU cohesion policy. However, profound changes in the global economy—including climate change, the transition toward a green economy, the COVID-19 pandemic, and geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and China—pose entirely new challenges. The EU has yet to provide comprehensive and clear responses to these issues. Recent strategic reports (e.g., the **EU Competitiveness Compass**) and a few new sectoral strategies (e.g., in the areas of energy, automotive industry, defense, etc.) suggest changes in cohesion policy structure and objectives.

For Croatia, as a significant EU funds beneficiary, cohesion policy changes are of major importance. They affect not only the objectives of national policy programs but also the way in which available instruments are used—such as interregional cooperation, innovation value chains, and Smart Specialization Strategies (S3). All of this can substantially impact the economy, research institutions, the civil sector, and other stakeholders.

The issues outlined above call for action from decision-makers, policy implementers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and all relevant actors to prepare in time and assess what these changes may mean for their future activities.

The goal of the workshop is to analyze potential changes in cohesion policy and other key EU policies by the end of the current financial period (2021–2027), as well as to outline their development in the next planning period. The focus will be on understanding their potential effects on Croatia and developing possible strategic responses.

Thematic Focus of the Workshop:

1. **Implementation of cohesion policy** in innovation and industrial policy, with an emphasis on adapting to new priorities—including territorial goals, industrial transition, innovation, and the EU's strategic autonomy.
2. **Strengthening the absorptive, administrative, research, and strategic capacities** of Croatian stakeholders to enhance the innovation capacities of the national and regional innovation systems.
3. **Assessing the impact** of anticipated changes in EU policies on Croatia and discussing possible national strategic responses and adaptations.

Workshop Participants

The workshop brings together policymakers, analysts, researchers, professional evaluators, representatives of civil society, and entrepreneurs. This diversity of stakeholders enables a high-quality, open, and critical discussion from which new insights, proposals, and ideas for the future may emerge.

Programme

10:00 – 10:10: Introduction

Introduction to the Event – Ivana Rašić

Introduction to the Programme – Zoran Aralica

10:10 – 11:00: Cohesion policy (including S3) as a coordination system – round table

Moderator: Ljiljana Božić

Dominique Foray – Three questions on smart specialisation (*online*)

Mario Munta – Lessons learned from the EU's Pandemic Fund: A model for future cohesion policy?

11:00 – 11:45: Analysis of the current implementation and effects of cohesion policy – round table

Moderator: Domagoj Račić

Ivana Crnić Duplančić – S3 monitoring in Croatia: What the data reveal

Jakša Puljiz – Cohesion policy and the promotion of private investment in research and development in Croatia

Deni Nurkić – What does (not) work when supporting deep-tech startups and spinouts: ICENT/Nuqleus case study

11:45 – 12:45: What does the Draghi Report mean for Croatia's industrial/innovation policy? – round table

Moderator: Jelena Budak

Domagoj Račić – Implications of Draghi's sectoral policy proposals for Croatia's Smart Specialisation Strategy

Zoran Aralica, Ljiljana Božić, Marija Ježovit – What does the Draghi Report mean for Croatia – Analysis of specific themes

Slavo Radošević – Interplay of EU and national innovation/industrial policy

12:45 – 13:00: Break

13:00 – 14:00: Outlook on cohesion policy in Croatia – round table

Moderator: Zoran Aralica

Jakša Puljiz – Director of the Institute for Development and International Relations

Iva Novak – Head of Directorate for Strategic Planning and Coordination of EU Funds, Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds

Slavo Radošević – University College London

Željko Krevzelj – Director General for Energy at the Ministry of Economy

Stipe Župan – State Secretary at the Ministry of Finance