



**FINAL DRAFT**  
**ECOPP STATEMENT ON THE FUTURE OF THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE**  
**April 1, 2025**

*Partnership implies close cooperation between public authorities, economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society at national, regional and local levels throughout the whole programme cycle consisting of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.*

**Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014**

The European Union is at a crossroads. A growingly unstable global order and various internal challenges require fundamental changes to the way the European Union acts within and outside of its borders.

In the Communication published on 11 February 2025<sup>1</sup>, the Commission announced that it would propose significant changes to the way that European funds are structured and disbursed. This would include setting up a central plan for every member state which would be at least partially managed by national governments, and the linking of the disbursement of funds to reforms which the European Commission will suggest to member states.

While the Commission has stressed the national plans will be established in strong partnership with national, regional and local governments, the ECoPP discussions at the February 2025 Plenary expressed significant concern that the involvement of economic and social partners, and bodies representing civil society at national, regional and local levels is not guaranteed, and that the new centralised structure will weaken the long-established Partnership Principle and the effective implementation of Cohesion Policy.

With regard to the experience of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and more recently the Social Climate Fund, the overall sentiment among ECoPP members is that only a comprehensive application of the Partnership Principle and the incorporation of multi-level governance and bottom-up approaches can ensure the maximum impact of funds, making investments more targeted, accountable and sustainable while empowering all relevant stakeholders to contribute together to the reforms needed to meet EU goals.

To this end, we call for the Partnership Principle to be linked to the European Semester and more integrated policies and funds after 2027, and for European institutions, in particular the European Commission, to actively support its application and endorse its legally binding nature through a revised European Code of Conduct on Partnership. In this way, managing authorities *and* partners can contribute in a meaningful and integrated manner to the economic, social and environmental transformations necessary for the future of the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - The road to the next multiannual financial framework, COM(2025) 46 final

**ECOPP members believe that universal application of the Partnership Principle is essential for the future of the EU and its Cohesion Policy because it:**

- 1. Serves as an established blueprint for the EU** demonstrating that complex challenges cannot be addressed by a single actor alone and that strong partnership assists policy implementation, reduction of territorial disparities and development across all EU regions.
- 2. Reinforces common EU values** by endorsing the principles of inclusion, fairness, transparency and reciprocity which contribute to the promotion of peace and security, and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms.
- 3. Ensures effective implementation of EU funds** by providing focus and coordination across the planning, programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of investments.
- 4. Provides a solid legal framework for long-term investment** with linkages to reform agendas in member states that respond in a resilient, adaptable and flexible manner to the changing needs of stakeholders at all levels of governance.
- 5. Endorses a transversal approach** that consolidates connections across funds, sectors, actors, focus areas and levels of administration across members states so that stronger possibilities for much needed economic, environmental and social transformations are enhanced.
- 6. Generates innovative and sustainable solutions** by combining diverse resources, perspectives and expertise to address complex challenges such as climate change, digital transformation and social inequality.
- 7. Strengthens democratic processes, stability and unity** by enhancing trust between institutions and citizens through clear and established avenues for stakeholder involvement in decision-making.
- 8. Positions co-creation as a goal and guiding principle** so that all stakeholders can participate in a timely, open and active manner in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of funds.
- 9. Promotes inclusion and empowers partners** by building capacity and strengthening institutions, through equitable involvement in decision-making and access to information and communication channels that enable all voices to be heard.
- 10. Informs and guides EU policies and funds** through platforms, networks and forums that share partnership knowledge and learning in order to improve processes and practices that enhance multi-level governance.

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## THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON PARTNERSHIP (ECOPP)

Partnership is a key pillar of cohesion policy funds, fostering close cooperation throughout the programme cycle between public authorities, economic and social partners, and civil society organizations at national, regional, and local levels.

Working in partnership ensures inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability for EU funding under shared management. This collaborative approach enables a deeper understanding of the needs and challenges of diverse stakeholder groups, allowing for more effective and targeted policy design.

To further improve the quality of partnership and promote the exchange of good practices, the European Commission established in 2022 the [European Community of Practice on Partnership \(ECOPP\)](#) for the programming period 2021-2027.

### OBJECTIVES

- To facilitate exchange of experience with regard to partnership;
- To stimulate capacity building;
- To disseminate relevant outcomes, in particular good practice and innovative approaches;
- To review the application and functioning of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership and prepare proposals for its possible update.

### COMPOSITION

The network currently has **158 members** consisting of coordination bodies and managing authorities, which are nominated by the Member States, and partners mentioned in Article 8 of the CPR 2021-2027, such as NGOs at national and sub-national level, CSOs, municipalities, regional authorities, economic and social partners, research organisations and universities.

**New members are accepted on the basis of [open calls](#).**

### WORKING FORMATS

ECOPP meets annually in plenary and virtual meetings. In between, the community works in thematic sub-groups and task forces where they share their experience, develop best practices on partnership, and discuss and reflect on the effective application of the [European Code of Conduct on Partnership \(ECCP\)](#).

In 2025 ECOPP has 3 working groups: **Partnership in the next programming period** (WG 1), **Citizens engagement in decision-making** (WG 2), and **Change agents and improved partnership processes** (WG 3). Two ECOPP experts support the Commission with the coordination and steering the work of the network.

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