



BE-Rural Mid-Term Conference

“Exploring the bioeconomy as a central pillar of regional recovery plans during and after COVID-19”

Background Reader

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused social and economic devastation across the world, with the sum of the impacts still remaining to be seen. In light of this, the objective of the BE-Rural mid-term conference is to explore the extent to which the implementation of a bioeconomy concept can leverage the reactivation of regional economies across Europe. In July of this year, EU leaders agreed on a recovery plan for Europe totalling €750 billion to be invested over the next few years. The aims of this plan are: to support the recovery of EU Member States, to kick-start the economy and help private investment, and to learn lessons from the crisis.

In parallel to this, certain Member States have announced their own recovery plans to complement the efforts from the European Union. To date, the information on these country-level plans is limited. Most countries have not yet announced recovery plans, some have stated that they are working on plans, while a few have revealed more detailed measures and budgets. With regards to the content of the recovery plans, it is mostly too early to pass a judgement on the sustainability factors – i.e. how “green” is the recovery plan? More so, issues surrounding the bioeconomy are entirely absent from any plans at this stage.

Of the Member States which have announced details of their recovery plans, Germany, France, and Portugal each present some degree of “sustainability” or investment to tackle climate change. In Germany, about one-third of the total budget (€130 billion) is earmarked for green investment: €50 billion are allotted for “climate change, innovation, and digital technology” including significant investments in green hydrogen and electric vehicles. The remainder of the budget covers short-term economic recovery (€78 billion) and European and international solidarity (€3 billion).

In France, €30 billion of the overall €100 billion recovery plan is allocated to “greening the economy” – including refitting buildings; investments in infrastructure, green mobility, and green technologies; and a hydrogen strategy. The remaining €70 billion is split between improving the competitiveness and sovereignty of France, and social and territorial cohesion.

Finally, in Portugal, the draft of the recovery plan developed by a government consultant outlines a wide range of proposals to reduce the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. A full version with a budget is only expected in October, though some key proposals include compliance with the European Green Deal, which includes investments in renewable energy and digital technologies and a shift away from gas and coal. Additionally, the plan proposes the creation of clusters to develop the interior – mentioning the fundamental roles of both forestry and agriculture to the Portuguese economy. Though the bioeconomy is not explicitly mentioned here, this orientation could leave room for the potential development of bioeconomy measures and actions.

Other states have announced or presented recovery plans in varying degrees. Spain, Italy, Latvia, and Romania have all announced their own recovery plans, though some of these are still in the draft stage, and others did not include any explanations of “green” elements or sustainability investments

In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to trigger systematic change on many levels. In the context of the BE-Rural project, we see an opening for the bioeconomy to be incorporated into national recovery strategies, thus improving Member States' economic resilience through sustainability and circularity.

The objective of the BE-Rural Mid-Term Conference is to explore the extent to which the implementation of a bioeconomy concept can leverage the reactivation of regional economies across Europe. Through short expert talks, virtual break-out groups, and a panel discussion with participation of the audience, we will aim at answering the following questions:

- How is the current crisis an opportunity to trigger systemic change?
- Who is already incorporating the bioeconomy concept into their recovery plans and actions?
- How do (short term) recovery plans fit with bioeconomy strategies (which have a longer term vision)?
- How resilient is our current notion of the EU bioeconomy, and can it help us navigate future crises?