



Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2020/2220 as regards specific measures under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to provide additional assistance to Member States affected by natural disasters

(COM(2024) 495 final — 2024/0274(COD))

(C/2025/775)

Rapporteur-general: **Peter SCHMIDT**

Referral	Council, 25.10.2024 European Parliament, 25.10.2024
Legal basis	Articles 43(2) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
Adopted at plenary session	4.12.2024
Plenary session No	592
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	138/2/6

1. Conclusions and recommendations

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC),

1.1. recognises the worsening impact of climate disasters as a driving force behind this proposal. Climate-induced events, including the recent floods in Central and Eastern Europe, wildfires in Portugal and catastrophic flooding in Valencia, Spain, are evidence of a rapidly escalating crisis. The EESC fully supports the principle of immediate disaster relief to respond to these recent crises and recognises the urgent need to take swift action so that affected communities can receive prompt assistance. The Commission's proposal aims to address these immediate needs, reflecting the EU's recognition of the fact that the frequency and severity of climate-related events will only increase, placing vulnerable rural regions at higher risk;

1.2. reiterates its strong support for rural areas, as expressed in previous opinions⁽¹⁾. As extreme weather events increase, Europe's rural areas – often already vulnerable – face worsening hardships, with little room to absorb further losses. Without deliberate planning, these communities, vital to Europe's food security and cultural heritage, are in danger of being left behind. Therefore, it is essential that reallocated funds to address urgent needs do not overshadow or undermine long-term rural development priorities;

1.3. emphasises that the current proposal, while a necessary and rapid response to a crisis, reallocates funds from existing rural development programme. This approach, though effective in the short term, may leave critical rural development needs unmet. Taking funding from these communities in a crisis response could inadvertently further inequalities and drive further economic hardship in areas that cannot afford it. Europe's response to natural disasters must be designed not only to provide immediate relief but also to protect the long-term stability and resilience of rural

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 517, 22.12.2021, p. 114.

OJ C 290, 29.7.2022, p. 137.

OJ C, C/2024/1570, 5.3.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1570/oj>.

OJ C, C/2024/4055, 12.7.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4055/oj>.

communities. Policies crafted now should acknowledge the increasing threat posed by climate change and build proactive measures that ensure no one is left behind, as highlighted in the EU's Long-term Vision for Rural Areas. This vision calls for resilience and long-term planning to protect and strengthen rural communities from the growing environmental and economic challenges;

1.4. therefore calls on the European Commission to ensure that rural development projects are not sidelined or sacrificed in favour of immediate disaster relief. Vital rural initiatives provide stability and opportunities in these regions, and taking resources from these programmes could generate resentment, potentially fuelling anti-EU sentiment and extremism. The EU must prioritise both immediate relief and the sustained well-being of rural communities;

1.5. recommends that the Commission establish a dedicated EU climate disaster fund to address climate disasters effectively. This fund would allow the EU to respond to climate-related disasters within its own borders while preserving rural development budgets. Such an EU-specific fund would complement the international loss and damage fund established at COP28 and would not impact or compete with the EU's global commitments to support international climate resilience. Rather, this EU fund would reflect the EU's commitment to a future where rural growth and resilience can coexist with effective disaster response. Furthermore, it would be complementary to existing funds covering natural disasters, such as the agricultural reserve under the CMO regulation (Article 226), the CAP investment support aimed at restoring agricultural or forestry potential following natural disasters, adverse climatic events, or catastrophic events and the EU Solidarity Fund;

1.6. acknowledges the need for this immediate crisis response but emphasises that the EU cannot rely solely on reactive measures. A strategy driven by emergency-driven reallocation is in danger of leaving rural communities behind. A comprehensive, proactive EU framework for disaster preparedness, particularly to cope with climate impact, is essential to maintain stability and foster resilience across the EU's rural regions. To this end, the Committee appreciates the fact that the 'build back better' principle is included in the amendment to the regulation, as this forward-thinking approach strengthens resilience to face future disasters;

1.7. further highlights that prevention remains far more effective and sustainable in the long term. Scientific evidence shows that nature-based solutions – such as restoring wetlands, reforesting degraded areas, and implementing sustainable water management systems – can mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events ^(?) ^(?). These measures are cost-effective, helping to slow the water cycle, enhance green water retention, and buffer against extreme temperatures. Investing in such preventive actions would not only reduce the need for costly reactive measures but also strengthen the resilience of rural areas and ecosystems;

1.8. calls on the Commission to integrate preventive approaches, particularly nature-based solutions, more prominently into disaster resilience and rural development policies. Doing so would address the root causes of vulnerabilities and reduce the financial and societal burden on emergency response mechanisms over time;

1.9. welcomes the proposal's simplified procedures as a means to expedite relief delivery and reduce administrative burdens on affected regions. The EESC recommends that streamlined processes be incorporated into future policies for greater responsiveness in times of crisis.

1.10. calls for future climate disaster response planning to prioritise the preservation and increase of rural development budgets. While the EESC fully supports the current amendments to address this crisis, it underscores the importance of safeguarding these funds to uphold the EU's broader development objectives. The EESC calls on the Commission to avoid repeated reliance on rural development funds for reactive disaster relief. If the EU is to be ready for future climate disasters, it must transition from reactive measures to proactive planning, as outlined in point 1.5, and establish dedicated mechanisms with greater funding and coherence while strengthening existing funds, in order not to undermine long-term rural development. The EESC stresses, that while this approach is warranted for the current crisis, the EU cannot rely on continually amending rural development funds or other instruments such as cohesion policy each time disaster strikes;

^(?) IUCN position paper for UNFCCC COP 27, 2022.

^(?) Nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation, UNEP, 2021.

1.11. highlights the urgent need for a coordinated EU approach to climate resilience. This regulation illustrates Europe's vulnerability to climate impacts, underscoring the need for robust, long-term planning. While the current proposal effectively addresses immediate needs, it also reveals the need for an EU-wide framework for climate resilience that includes stable, dedicated funding for proactive and reactive measures alike.

Brussels, 4 December 2024.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Oliver RÖPKE
