

IMPLEMENTING THE RECOVERY PLAN IN THE OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

The Prime Minister, Mr Jean Castex, has asked the ESEC to examine the “*overseas implementation of the industrial, ecological, local, cultural and educational recovery plan announced by the President of the Republic in his address to the French people on 14 July 2020*”.

To prepare this opinion, the ESEC heard from a number of actors on the ground, including local authority executives and representatives of organised civil society from the eleven overseas communities.

All of our speakers indicated that the challenges present in the overseas territories meant that the responses provided by the “plans” should not be situational but rather structural, as assessments confirm that there are still major gaps with mainland France and within the territories themselves when it comes to development and access to major fundamental rights.

They all reiterated that the Overseas Territories, in all their uniqueness, presented both demographic, economic,

social and environmental challenges as well as exceptional opportunities due to the diversity of their cultural and natural wealth.

Finally, all of them hoped to see our communities become laboratories of resilience in the face of major transitions (demographic, ecological, digital and societal), as well as pioneers for sustainable development and the implementation of the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby envisioning a common destiny for the overseas populations under a holistic approach combining education, economics, social issues, the environment, culture and society.

Consequently, the ESEC believes that the Recovery Plan can only be fully effective overseas if it is subject to the following conditions:

- The plan should be adapted at the local level, with the development of territorial recovery plans with dedicated budgets for each territory;
- These plans should be consistently developed in conjunction with the national government, local authorities, organised civil society, social partners, leaders of environmental protection organisations and cultural representatives;
- Cohesion should be developed between:
 - the various levels of intervention and funding (Europe, State, local authorities);
 - the various plans over time,
 - the general plans, with land-use planning tools and biodiversity and environmental protection tools;
- Contracts should developed between the national government and local authorities, and projects and public policies should be co-funded between European, national and local resources.



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THE ESEC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The hundred or so hearings conducted in preparation for this opinion have led to the following recommendations.

LOCAL AUTHORITY FUNDING, ENGINEERING AND STANDARDS

- The ESEC recommends that audits be carried out on the most distressed municipalities and that “support contracts” be set up with them, including reciprocal commitments and the partial assumption of their debt, to enable them to stabilise their budgets and rebuild their self-funding capacity.
- The ESEC recommends enlisting the expert capacities of the main public operators to help local authorities develop their projects. Local authorities must acquire their own or shared engineering resources, develop opportunities to share experience and disseminate good practice, and promote solutions based on traditional knowledge.
- The ESEC calls for a specific section on the Overseas Territories to be included in the next 4D Act to enable better implementation of the principles of differentiation, devolution, decentralisation and decomplexification in the Overseas Territories, in accordance with the spirit and the letter of the Real Overseas Equality Act. For this to happen, the 4D Act will have to be an organic law.

THE RECOVERY PLAN AND BUSINESSES, INDIVIDUAL ENTREPRENEURS, THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY, EMPLOYEES AND CIVIL SOCIETY, INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

- The ESEC recommends assisting companies with their state-guaranteed loans (SGLs) through a combination of measures differentiated by sector and type of business, including debt rescheduling, equity loans, interest-free loans and the conversion of some SGLs into grants.
- The ESEC recommends a massive plan to speed up the construction of schools and increase the number of locally trained teachers (particularly in Mayotte and French Guiana).
- The ESEC calls for the Overseas Recovery Plan to fund an ambitious vocational training policy aimed at meeting skills needs in the territories and developing talent, particularly among the young, who should enjoy an expanded range of measures to enable them to build a future for themselves.
- The ESEC calls on the government to ensure that all the measures provided for in the “Strategy for Preventing and Combating Poverty” are implemented in all eleven overseas communities, particularly with regard to at-risk youth and families, relying in particular on municipalities, the non-profit sector and family associations.

USING THE RECOVERY PLANS TO TURN OVERSEAS COMMUNITIES INTO LABORATORIES AND PIONEERS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, BIODIVERSITY PRESERVATION AND RESILIENCE TO GLOBAL WARMING

- The ESEC recommends that each territorial plan should define sectors of excellence (renewable energy, digital technology, the silver economy, the green and blue economy, tourism, etc.) for which research efforts, appropriate and innovative vocational training programmes, and investment aid should be undertaken simultaneously, in order to make each community a pioneer for sustainable development.
- The ESEC recommends that the national government and local authorities promote the development of endogenous economies by acquiring stakes in their main development tools in the telecoms, energy, tourism and air transport sectors and the green and blue economy, based on local public and private capital with the support of major national public operators.
- The ESEC recommends that each of the overseas communities adopt a local Agriculture, Blue Economy and Food Project in order to improve its food sovereignty.
- The ESEC recommends that efforts to research and exploit biological and genetic resources from overseas habitats should be made a priority for the economic development of overseas France, while engaging in equitable benefit-sharing (2010 Nagoya Protocol).
- The ESEC recommends that tourism offerings in the overseas territories be radically transformed in order to set them firmly on a path toward sustainable tourism, by making cultural identity and biodiversity central to their development strategy.