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POLICY BRIEF N°11

European Parliament intergroups as channels of local and regional government interest representation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A significant share of European Union policies directly affects the functioning of local and regional governments. It is therefore crucial to understand through which channels their interests are represented in EU decision-making. This policy analysis examines the role of European Parliament (EP) intergroups and the informal networks of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) associated with them.

Although intergroups have no legislative powers, they provide important forums for parliamentary consultation and coordination. They facilitate cooperation among MEPs from different political groups, the coordination of policy positions, and the involvement of local government associations and other interest representation organisations.

The significance of intergroups lies primarily in their capacity to bring local and regional interests into parliamentary deliberations and to support initiatives pursued by individual MEPs. The analysis also highlights the potential of unofficial groupings of MEPs to provide additional channels for interest representation alongside formally recognised intergroups.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis draws on semi-structured interviews, an examination of intergroup meeting minutes, and an analysis of reports and other parliamentary documents available on the European Parliament's website.

The research focuses on the role of intergroups in representing local and regional government interests, coordination among MEPs, and relations with external interest representation organisations.

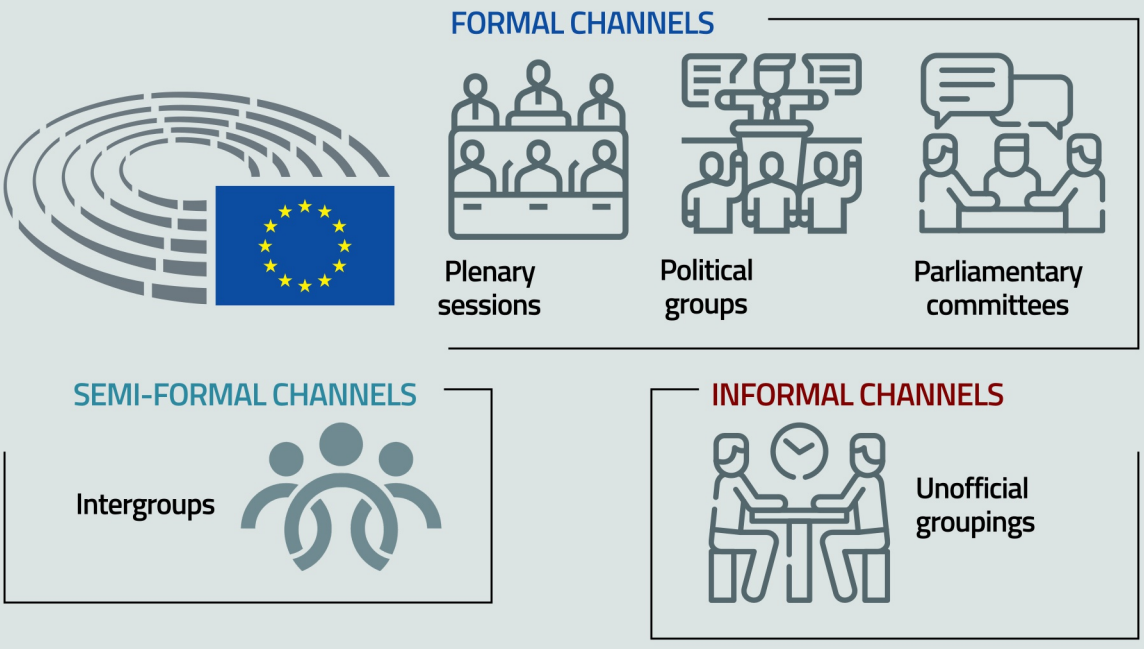
BACKGROUND

The European Parliament has become a co-legislator alongside the Council of the European Union in most policy areas. Consequently, the EP is an important arena for representing local and regional government interests, where external stakeholders, including local government associations and professional interest groups, can participate in policy discussions through MEPs and parliamentary committees.

Intergroups are forums organised around specific policy issues that bring together MEPs from different political groups. They have no independent legislative or decision-making powers and do not formally form part of the European Parliament's decision-making structure. Their semi-formal nature nevertheless facilitates cross-party cooperation, information exchange, and engagement with interest representation organisations.

Unofficial groupings of MEPs that do not receive formal recognition or support from the EP can perform similar functions.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANNELS OF INTEREST REPRESENTATION IN THE EP



Source: own editing

KEY FINDINGS

1. Intergroups complement the European Parliament's formal structures

Intergroups do not replace the work of parliamentary committees; rather, they complement it by providing additional forums for policy consultation and coordination. Their significance lies in information-sharing, political coordination, and the development of common positions.

Intergroups can facilitate the representation of local and regional government interests by fostering coordination between local government representatives and associations of local and regional governments, on the one hand, and MEPs active in intergroups dealing with policy areas of particular relevance to local and regional authorities, on the other.

THEMATIC MAP OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S INTERGROUPS

○ What does the working group do?
● *Subnational focus*

- Anti-Corruption ○
- Anti-Racism and Diversity ○
- Attracting Investment to Ensure a Competitive and Sustainable EU ○
- Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside ●
- Cancer and Rare Diseases ○
- Children's Rights ○
- Christians in the Middle East ○
- Cohesion Policy and Outermost Regions ●
- Demography ○
- Disability ○
- European Cultural Heritage, Ways of Saint James and other European Cultural Routes ○
- Fighting against Poverty ○
- Freedom of Religion, Belief and Conscience ○
- The Future of Education and Skills for a Competitive Europe ○
- Sustainable Livestock ○
- LGBTIQ+ ○
- Mental Health ○
- Police ○
- Resilience, Disaster Management and Civil Protection ○
- Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas (SEARICA) ●
- Sky and Space ○
- Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) ○
- Social Economy and Services of General Interest ○
- Trade Unions ○
- Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages ●
- The Two-State Solution for Israel and Palestine ○
- Welfare and Conservation of Animals ○
- Wine, Quality Foodstuffs and Spirits ○

INTERGROUP

Source: European Parliament

2. Several intergroups can help channel local and regional interests into EU decision-making

During the 2024–2029 European Parliament term, four intergroups are particularly relevant to the representation of local and regional government interests in EU decision-making, either directly or indirectly:

- Intergroup on Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas;
- Intergroup on Cohesion Policy and Outermost Regions Intergroup;
- Intergroup on Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside;
- Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages.

These forums help bring the specific challenges faced by different types of territories to the European level.

3. The political influence of intergroups is primarily based on coordination

Intergroups do not adopt binding decisions and cannot submit parliamentary amendments as collective bodies. However, they provide opportunities for MEPs to coordinate their positions, build support for policy initiatives, and bring the issues they advocate to the European Parliament's formal decision-making forums.

Links with parliamentary committees are particularly important in this respect, as a substantial share of the legislative process takes place within these bodies. The positions developed within intergroups are more likely to gain traction when their membership includes committee chairs and other office-holders, as well as rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs responsible for the relevant policy areas.

4. Cooperation with European associations of local and regional governments is essential for representing local and regional government interests

Intergroups maintain contacts with European associations representing local and regional governments, as well as with professional and sectoral organisations. These relationships enable local and regional concerns to be incorporated into policy discussions among MEPs. Intergroups can therefore act as intermediaries between local and regional authorities and European decision-makers.

5. Unofficial groupings of MEPs provide additional channels for interest representation

Alongside intergroups, informal networks of MEPs operate within the European Parliament. Even without formal parliamentary recognition or support, these networks can facilitate political coordination and relationship-building.

One example is the former Urban Intergroup, which failed to secure the support required for its re-establishment following the 2024 European Parliament elections. It has therefore continued its activities as an informal network of MEPs under the name European Urban Forum.

6. Direct engagement with MEPs is crucial

As intergroups primarily serve as forums for MEPs, direct contact with Members of the European Parliament represents one of the most important entry points for local and regional authorities seeking to advance their interests. Engagement can be particularly effective when directed towards MEPs with links to the relevant territory or policy area, as well as those involved in the leadership of the intergroup concerned.

Cooperation with the chairs of relevant parliamentary committees, rapporteurs, and shadow rapporteurs can further strengthen interest representation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Targeted engagement with relevant intergroups

- Local and regional governments should pay attention not only to the European Parliament's formal committees but also to intergroups dealing with the relevant policy areas. They should make use of the opportunities these forums provide for consultation and coordination.

2. Building relationships with key actors

- Once the intergroup most relevant to a particular policy issue has been identified, local and regional authorities should establish direct contact with its chair, co-chairs, or vice-chairs, who play an important role in setting the intergroup's agenda.

- Identifying the rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs responsible for the relevant policy files is equally important, as they can help carry positions developed within intergroups into the formal parliamentary decision-making process.

3. Raising policy issues at an early stage

- Local and regional governments and national associations of local authorities should communicate their policy proposals before intergroup meetings take place. This would increase the likelihood that their concerns are considered when common positions are being developed.

4. Cooperation with European associations of local and regional governments

- Local and regional governments should strengthen their links with European associations representing local and regional authorities and cooperate with them to coordinate the representation of their shared interests and ensure that these interests are more effectively reflected in EU decision-making.

5. Monitoring unofficial groupings of MEPs

- Local and regional governments should also take unofficial groupings of MEPs into account in their interest representation activities, particularly where no relevant formally recognised intergroup exists in the policy area concerned.



CONCLUSION

European Parliament intergroups are important semi-formal forums for interest representation that operate alongside the Parliament's formal decision-making structures. Although they have no legislative powers, their significance lies in facilitating information exchange, political coordination, and the alignment of different interests.

For local and regional governments, intergroups and the informal networks of MEPs operating alongside them provide additional channels for interest representation. Together with the Parliament's formal structures, they form a multi-level network of engagement through which local and regional perspectives can be incorporated into European policymaking at an early stage, when policy positions are being developed.

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