

# Territorial Cohesion – The Story

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AI-generated illustration of Territorial Cohesion (DALL-E 2)



## **Preface**

The aim of this document is to tell the story about Territorial Cohesion as a part of EU Cohesion Policy – the history, the content, actors, processes tools, challenges and strategies, etc. The document can be used to facilitate the communication around Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda, both to newcomers in the work and to actors that are interested or ought to be interested.

The ambition is to make this to a “living-document” that could be updated during each coming Presidency, if needed.

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## **Territorial Cohesion – The Story**

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## The history

Territorial Cohesion is, alongside with Economic and Social cohesion, an essential component of the European Union's Cohesion Policy. To understand its history, we need to look back at the development of the Cohesion Policy itself and the growing focus on territorial aspects in the European integration process.

Cohesion Policy, sometimes also referred to as Regional Policy, has been a cornerstone of EU integration since the 1950s, but its formal introduction came with the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986. The primary goal of the policy is to reduce regional disparities and promote economic, social, and territorial cohesion across the EU by investing in growth, development, and sustainable infrastructure.

Territorial Cohesion, however, emerged more prominently on the EU agenda during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The focus on territorial aspects was a response to growing concerns over spatial imbalances and the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities within the EU. The goal of Territorial Cohesion is to ensure balanced and harmonious development across European regions, taking into account their specific characteristics, opportunities, and challenges.

The concept was first mentioned in a European Commission communication in 1999, and since then, it has been further developed through various policy documents and strategies. In 2001, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) was adopted, setting out the key principles for achieving territorial cohesion and promoting a balanced and polycentric urban system.

### **The Lisbon Treaty**

Territorial Cohesion was formally integrated into the EU Treaties with the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) emphasizes the importance of economic, social, and territorial cohesion, highlighting the need to address disparities between different regions and the challenges posed by less-favoured areas.

**Article 174 from the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU):**

"In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and **territorial** cohesion.

In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions.

Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions."

In the years following the Lisbon Treaty, Territorial Cohesion has become increasingly intertwined with the EU's Cohesion Policy. The 2014-2020 programming period marked a significant step in this direction, as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund began to allocate more resources toward promoting integrated territorial development, including cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation initiatives.

**The Green Paper**

The European Commission published a Green Paper<sup>1</sup> on Territorial Cohesion in October 2008. The document, titled "Turning Territorial Diversity into Strength," aimed to stimulate debate and gather feedback on various aspects of territorial cohesion from stakeholders, including national, regional, and local authorities, NGOs, researchers, and the general public.

The Green Paper acknowledged that territorial disparities remained a challenge within the European Union and emphasized the need for more

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<sup>1</sup> A European Union (EU) Green Paper is a document published by the European Commission to stimulate discussion on various policy topics at the European level. It serves as a starting point for consultation and debate among various stakeholders, including EU institutions, member states, regional and local authorities, businesses, civil society organizations, and citizens.



effective policies to address these disparities. The document presented several key questions on which the Commission sought feedback, such as:

- How can territorial cohesion complement economic and social cohesion policies?
- What should be the role of cities and urban areas in promoting territorial cohesion?
- How can territorial cohesion policies better integrate the urban-rural relationship?
- What is the role of cross-border cooperation and macro-regional strategies in enhancing territorial cohesion?
- How can the EU better support regions with specific geographical features, such as mountainous or coastal areas?
- How can the EU effectively measure and monitor territorial cohesion and its impact on regional development?

The consultation process that followed the publication of the Green Paper helped gather valuable input, which informed subsequent policy developments and strategies related to Territorial Cohesion.

While the European Commission did not release a White Paper<sup>2</sup> specifically on Territorial Cohesion, it has continued to develop and refine its approach through various policy documents, strategies, and legislative proposals. Key milestones in this regard include the adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2020 in 2011, the integration of Territorial Cohesion objectives into the 2014-2020 programming period for the European Structural and Investment Funds, and the more recent Territorial Agenda 2030.

### **The definition(s)**

Territorial Cohesion, as a concept, has evolved over time and has been interpreted in various ways. However, there isn't a single, universally

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<sup>2</sup> A White Paper, in the context of the European Union (EU), is a policy document published by the European Commission that sets out detailed proposals for new legislation or specific actions in a particular policy area. White Papers are more concrete and prescriptive than Green Papers, which serve as discussion documents to stimulate debate on various topics.

accepted definition. Instead, the understanding of Territorial Cohesion has been shaped by the EU's policy documents, strategies, and academic discourse.

In general terms, Territorial Cohesion can be understood as the pursuit of balanced and harmonious development across the European territory. This involves reducing disparities between regions, fostering cooperation, and taking into account the unique characteristics and opportunities of each area.

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), adopted in 1999, emphasized the importance of three core policy aims to achieve Territorial Cohesion:

- Balanced and polycentric urban development: promoting a more balanced distribution of economic activity and population across the European territory, thus avoiding the concentration of resources and opportunities in a few metropolitan areas.
- Better accessibility to information and knowledge for all regions: ensuring that all areas have access to essential services and resources, including modern communication networks and transportation infrastructure.
- Wise management of the natural and cultural heritage: preserving and enhancing the European landscape, biodiversity, and cultural assets while promoting sustainable development and economic growth.

Since then, the understanding of Territorial Cohesion has been refined and expanded through various policy documents, such as the Territorial Agenda 2020 and the Territorial Agenda 2030. These agendas set out priorities for territorial development and emphasize the importance of cooperation between member states, regions, and cities to tackle shared challenges and achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

In conclusion, Territorial Cohesion is a multifaceted concept that aims to promote balanced development across the EU, reduce regional disparities, and foster cooperation among different levels of governance. Although there isn't a single, universally accepted definition, the concept has been continuously refined through EU policy documents and academic discussions.

## The Territorial Agenda

The Territorial Agenda is a strategic policy framework that guides the European Union's approach to Territorial Cohesion. It is connected to Territorial Cohesion in that it sets out the priorities, objectives, and principles that member states, regions, and cities should follow to promote balanced and harmonious territorial development across the EU.

The work with the Territorial Agenda is driven by the EU member states in cooperation with the EU Commission, partner states and other stakeholder organisations. Each member state leads the work during its presidency period, as well as arranging meetings at different levels.

The Territorial Agenda aims to provide a coherent, overarching strategy for achieving Territorial Cohesion by addressing regional disparities, fostering cooperation between territories, and enhancing the competitiveness of European regions. It helps to translate the concept of Territorial Cohesion into concrete policy actions and initiatives.

The first Territorial Agenda, adopted in 2007, was revised in 2011 to create the Territorial Agenda 2020, which set out the following key priorities:

- Promoting polycentric and balanced territorial development
- Encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions
- Territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions
- Ensuring global competitiveness of regions based on strong local economies
- Improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities, and enterprises
- Managing and connecting ecological, landscape, and cultural values of regions

These priorities helped guide EU policies and programs in promoting Territorial Cohesion and informed the allocation of resources under the European Structural and Investment Funds.

### **The Territorial Agenda 2030**

In 2020, the EU and the member states adopted the updated Territorial Agenda 2030, which further aligned the EU's territorial development objectives with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the European Green Deal. The Territorial Agenda 2030 introduced the following priorities:

#### **A Just Europe**

**Balanced Europe:** Better balanced territorial development supported by Europe's diversity.

**Functional regions:** Convergent local and regional development, less inequality between places.

**Integration beyond borders:** Easier living and working across national borders.

#### **A Green Europe**

**Healthy environment:** Better ecological livelihoods, climate-neutral and resilient towns, cities and regions.

**Circular economy:** Strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world.

**Sustainable connections:** Sustainable digital and physical connectivity of places.

By addressing these priorities, the "Just and Green Europe" objective under the Territorial Agenda 2030 aims to create a more equitable, climate-resilient, and environmentally sustainable European territory.

The Territorial Agenda, both in its 2020 and 2030 versions, serves as a strategic framework for achieving Territorial Cohesion by setting priorities, objectives, and principles for territorial development at the EU level. It

fosters cooperation between member states, regions, and cities, and ensures that EU policies and programs contribute to reducing regional disparities and promoting balanced development.

## The actors

### **The EU Commission**

The European Commission, as the executive arm of the European Union, plays a crucial role in shaping and implementing policies related to Territorial Cohesion. The Commission's view on Territorial Cohesion has evolved over time, with policy documents, communications, and legislative proposals reflecting this progression. Here are some key aspects of the Commission's approach to Territorial Cohesion:

**Emphasis on integration with economic and social cohesion:** The European Commission highlights that Territorial Cohesion is an essential component of the broader EU Cohesion Policy, which also includes economic and social cohesion. The Commission emphasizes the need for an integrated approach, recognizing that addressing territorial disparities contributes to achieving the EU's overall economic, social, and sustainability goals.

**Tailored policies and place-based approach:** The Commission recognizes that regions across the EU have diverse characteristics, challenges, and opportunities. Therefore, it advocates for a place-based approach in designing and implementing Territorial Cohesion policies. This approach takes into account the specificities of each territory, enabling tailored solutions that consider local context, assets, and needs.

**Multi-level governance and cooperation:** The Commission promotes the importance of cooperation among different levels of governance (European, national, regional, and local) in implementing Territorial Cohesion policies. The involvement of regional and local stakeholders is seen as crucial for ensuring that policies address local challenges and foster ownership and commitment.

**Cross-border and transnational collaboration:** The Commission underlines the importance of fostering cross-border and transnational

cooperation to tackle shared challenges, such as environmental issues, transport infrastructure, and regional development. The INTERREG program, for example, aims to facilitate cooperation and partnerships among EU regions to support integrated territorial development.

**Urban-rural linkages:** The Commission acknowledges the interdependencies between urban and rural areas, emphasizing the need to strengthen their linkages and create mutually beneficial relationships. Policies and investments targeting Territorial Cohesion should consider the connections between urban and rural areas to promote balanced territorial development.

**Sustainable development:** The European Commission aligns Territorial Cohesion objectives with its broader sustainability goals, such as the European Green Deal and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This involves promoting sustainable growth, protecting natural resources, and enhancing social and economic well-being in line with Territorial Cohesion objectives.

These principles inform the design and implementation of EU policies and initiatives that aim to promote balanced territorial development and reduce disparities across the European territory.

### **The Member States**

The role of EU member states in the work with Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda is crucial, as the Territorial Agenda is an intergovernmental strategic policy framework developed and implemented in cooperation with EU member states. Their roles include:

**Policy development and adoption:** EU member states actively participate in the process of developing, negotiating, and adopting the Territorial Agenda, its objectives, and priorities. They contribute their perspectives, experiences, and expertise to ensure the framework reflects diverse regional needs and challenges.

**Implementation:** EU member states are responsible for implementing the Territorial Agenda at the national, regional, and local levels. This involves aligning their spatial planning and territorial development policies with the

objectives and priorities of the Territorial Agenda, as well as integrating Territorial Cohesion considerations into other relevant policy areas.

**Territorial Agenda Pilot Actions:** Member states can initiate, support, and participate in TA Pilot Actions, which are practical projects aimed at demonstrating and testing innovative approaches to territorial development in line with the Territorial Agenda 2030.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** EU member states play a role in monitoring and evaluating the progress and effectiveness of the Territorial Agenda, both at the national level and collectively within the EU. They contribute to the assessment of achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, which can help inform the future development of the Territorial Agenda and related policies.

**Coordination and collaboration:** Member states work together to coordinate their efforts and ensure coherent and effective implementation of the Territorial Agenda across the EU. They engage in various collaborative platforms, networks, and initiatives, such as ESPON or the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP), which facilitate knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and cooperation on spatial planning and territorial development issues.

**Promotion and advocacy:** EU member states have a role in promoting the Territorial Agenda and raising awareness about its objectives, priorities, and benefits among policymakers, practitioners, and citizens. They can advocate for the importance of Territorial Cohesion and spatial planning in the broader European policy context and contribute to the development of related EU strategies and funding programs, such as the EU Cohesion Policy.

The partner states Norway and Switzerland are also participating in the work with Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda.

### **The Committee of Regions (CoR) and The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**

**The CoR** is an advisory body that represents regional and local authorities in the European Union. Its main role is to ensure that the voice of local and regional authorities is heard within the EU's decision-making process, particularly on issues that directly impact regions and cities.

In relation to Territorial Cohesion, the CoR plays a crucial role in several ways. Firstly, it advises on policy proposals that may have a significant impact on regions, and it helps to ensure that these policies are attuned to local needs, thus contributing to achieving Territorial Cohesion. Secondly, it promotes a place-based approach to policymaking, recognizing the diverse needs and potentials of different territories. Finally, through its direct link with regional and local governments, the CoR helps to facilitate dialogue and exchange of good practices among regions, contributing to a better understanding and implementation of Territorial Cohesion across the EU.

**The EESC** is an advisory body that represents civil society, including employers, trade unions, and various other interest groups, at the EU level. It provides a platform for dialogue and ensures that the positions of socio-economic actors are taken into account in EU policies.

Regarding Territorial Cohesion, the EESC contributes by promoting social inclusion, democratic participation, and civil dialogue – all key elements of a cohesive territory. It ensures that socio-economic interests, particularly those of civil society organizations and social partners, are reflected in Territorial Cohesion policies. Moreover, by advocating for sustainable development and socio-economic balance among regions, the EESC also supports the broader objectives of Territorial Cohesion.

### **The European Parliament**

**The European Parliament** plays a central role in shaping, deciding on, and overseeing Territorial Cohesion policies in the EU. Through its legislative, budgetary, supervisory, and representation roles, it contributes significantly to the promotion of Territorial Cohesion and to ensuring that this principle is reflected in EU policies and actions.

### **Other stakeholders**

In addition to the Commission, EU member states and partner states, various stakeholders play important roles in the development, implementation, and promotion of the Territorial Agenda. These stakeholders include:

**Regional and local authorities:** They are responsible for translating the Territorial Agenda's objectives and priorities into concrete actions at the regional and local levels. They design and implement spatial planning and



territorial development policies, programs, and projects that align with the Territorial Agenda's goals.

**European Parliament:** The European Parliament can contribute to the Territorial Agenda by discussing and influencing related policies and legislation, ensuring that the objectives of Territorial Cohesion are considered and integrated into EU policymaking.

**Private sector:** Businesses, entrepreneurs, and investors play a significant role in territorial development by creating jobs, driving innovation, and contributing to economic growth in different regions. They can align their activities with the objectives of the Territorial Agenda and participate in collaborative initiatives aimed at promoting territorial cohesion and sustainable development.

**Civil society organizations:** Non-governmental organizations, associations, and other civil society actors can contribute to the Territorial Agenda by advocating for specific issues, participating in policy discussions, and providing feedback on the implementation and impact of territorial development policies and programs.

**Research institutions and academia:** Universities, research institutes, and think tanks contribute to the Territorial Agenda by conducting research and analysis on territorial development issues, providing evidence-based insights, and developing innovative approaches, tools, and methodologies that support spatial planning and Territorial Cohesion.

**Citizens:** The active involvement of citizens is crucial for the successful implementation of the Territorial Agenda. They can engage in local planning processes, participate in consultations and decision-making, and contribute their perspectives, experiences, and knowledge to the development and implementation of territorial development policies and initiatives.

By actively participating in the Territorial Agenda's development, implementation, and evaluation, these diverse stakeholders can help to ensure that the objectives and priorities of the Territorial Agenda are effectively addressed, leading to more balanced, sustainable, and cohesive territorial development across the European Union.

## **Sector policy interests**

Sector policy interests play a crucial role in the work with Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda, as they represent the various policy areas that interact with and influence the spatial development of the European Union. These sector policies include areas such as transport, environment, agriculture, energy, digital economy, and social policies, among others. Their role in the work with Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda can be summarized as follows:

**Integration of sector policies:** Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda aim to integrate various sector policies to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to spatial development. By considering the territorial impacts and interdependencies of different policy areas, the EU can better address the challenges and opportunities of balanced and sustainable territorial development.

**Policy alignment and coordination:** Sector policy interests are essential in aligning and coordinating different policies to achieve the goals of the Territorial Agenda. Ensuring that sector policies support the objectives of Territorial Cohesion, such as reducing regional disparities, promoting urban-rural partnerships, and enhancing connectivity, is crucial for effective policy implementation.

**Evidence-based policy-making:** Sector policy interests contribute to the development of a robust evidence base for Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda. Data, research, and analysis from various policy areas help to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities for spatial development, enabling more effective and targeted policy interventions.

**Implementation and monitoring:** Sector policy interests play an essential role in the implementation and monitoring of the Territorial Agenda, as they can help identify synergies, barriers, and potential adjustments needed to ensure the effective realization of Territorial Cohesion objectives.

Sector policy interests are crucial for the successful integration, coordination, and implementation of the Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda. By working together across various policy areas and engaging with relevant stakeholders, the EU can create a more coherent and coordinated approach

to spatial development that promotes balanced, sustainable, and inclusive territorial growth.

## The meetings

### **Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP)**

The NTCCP is a network of representatives from EU member states and participating countries, as well as the EU Commission and different stakeholder organisations. The network serves as a key platform for coordination, cooperation, and knowledge exchange on issues related to Territorial Cohesion and spatial planning. The specific functions of NTCCP include:

**Facilitating cooperation:** NTCCP helps foster collaboration between member states, EU institutions, and other stakeholders in the implementation and promotion of the Territorial Agenda and related policies.

**Sharing knowledge and experiences:** NTCCP enables member states to share best practices, lessons learned, and insights on territorial development and spatial planning issues, contributing to mutual learning and capacity-building.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** NTCCP supports the monitoring and evaluation of the Territorial Agenda and its implementation by gathering information on progress, achievements, and challenges faced by member states in promoting Territorial Cohesion.

**Providing technical expertise:** NTCCP serves as a source of technical expertise and advice on Territorial Cohesion and spatial planning issues, which can inform policy discussions and decision-making at various levels of governance.

### **Director-General (DGTC) meetings**

DG meetings bring together high-level representatives from the ministries responsible for territorial development and spatial planning in EU member

states and partner countries, as well as the EU Commission and different stakeholder organisations. The main functions of DG meetings include:

**Policy coordination:** DG meetings facilitate policy coordination between member states on issues related to Territorial Cohesion, ensuring coherent and effective implementation of the Territorial Agenda across the EU.

**Strategic guidance:** DG meetings provide strategic guidance and direction for the development and implementation of the Territorial Agenda and related policies, based on the shared priorities and objectives of EU member states.

**Monitoring progress:** DG meetings help monitor the progress and effectiveness of the Territorial Agenda and its implementation, enabling member states to identify and address any challenges or gaps in the process.

### **Informal ministerial meetings**

These meetings gather ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development from EU member states and partner countries, as well as the EU Commission and different stakeholder organisations. It is up to every presidency country to decide on arranging a meeting at this level. Normally it is done when more important steps in the work with Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda should be taken. Informal ministerial meetings play crucial roles in:

**High-level political dialogue:** These meetings provide a forum for high-level political dialogue on Territorial Cohesion and spatial planning issues, enabling member states to discuss common challenges, opportunities, and priorities in the field of territorial development.

**Decision-making:** Informal ministerial meetings contribute to the development and adoption of the Territorial Agenda and related policies by facilitating consensus-building and decision-making among EU member states.

**Advocacy and promotion:** By engaging ministers in discussions on Territorial Cohesion, these meetings can help raise the profile and visibility of the Territorial Agenda and its objectives within the broader European policy context.

Together, the NTCCP, DG meetings, and informal ministerial meetings create a multilevel governance structure that fosters coordination, cooperation, and knowledge exchange between EU member states and other stakeholders, ensuring the effective development and implementation of the Territorial Agenda and promoting Territorial Cohesion across the European Union.

### **Territorial Agenda Working Group (TAWG)**

The TAWG comprises experts and representatives from EU member states, with a focus on those holding the current, preceding, and the four upcoming EU Presidencies. Besides also the EU Commission, ESPON and other stakeholders are invited to participate. This setup ensures that there is a smooth transfer of knowledge, experiences, and priorities related to Territorial Cohesion between the rotating presidencies. The TAWG is also preparing for NTCCP-meetings and DG-meeting during each presidency.

According to the document *Establishment of the Territorial Agenda Working Group* by the Croatian Presidency first half year 2020, the TAWG would consist of the following NTCCP members:

- representatives of the current Presidency
- representatives of the former Presidency of the Council of the EU
- representatives of the four future Presidencies of the Council of the EU
- representative of the European Commission
- representative of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- representative of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)
- representative of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON)

## **Evidence, knowledge and tools**

### **ESPON**

The European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) was established in 2002 to support the development of knowledge and evidence base for Territorial Cohesion and spatial planning in Europe. ESPON aims to promote a better understanding of the territorial dynamics, trends, and

disparities within the European Union and provides evidence-based insights to inform policymaking at various levels of governance.

The roots of ESPON can be traced back to the late 1990s and early 2000s when there was a growing interest in spatial planning and Territorial Cohesion within the EU. The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) was adopted in 1999, which highlighted the importance of territorial balance and polycentric development. Policymakers recognized the need for a more robust evidence base to inform spatial planning policies and strategies across the EU.

ESPON was established as an EU-funded program in 2002 to address this need for knowledge and evidence related to European territorial development. It started as an intergovernmental cooperation, involving all EU member states, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

ESPON's role in developing knowledge and evidence base for Territorial Cohesion:

**Research and data analysis:** ESPON conducts research and data analysis to understand the territorial dynamics, trends, and disparities across the EU. This includes thematic studies on various topics, such as urban development, regional competitiveness, accessibility, climate change, and demographic change.

**Mapping and visualization:** ESPON produces maps, charts, and other visualizations to help policymakers and stakeholders better understand the spatial distribution of socio-economic and environmental trends, challenges, and opportunities across European territories.

**Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA):** ESPON develops tools and methodologies for Territorial Impact Assessment, which allows policymakers to assess the potential territorial consequences of policies and initiatives and ensure that they align with the goals of Territorial Cohesion.

**Capacity-building and knowledge transfer:** ESPON organizes workshops, seminars, and training events to enhance the capacity of policymakers, planners, and other stakeholders to use spatial data, research findings, and Territorial Impact Assessment methodologies in their work.

**Networking and collaboration:** ESPON foster collaboration and networking among researchers, planners, and policymakers by creating platforms for sharing knowledge, experiences, and best practices related to spatial planning and Territorial Cohesion.

Through its research activities, data analysis, and capacity-building efforts, ESPON plays a significant role in strengthening the knowledge and evidence base for Territorial Cohesion and spatial planning in Europe. This has helped inform the development of EU policies, strategies, and funding programs, such as the EU Cohesion Policy and the Territorial Agenda, contributing to more effective and targeted interventions aimed at reducing regional disparities and fostering balanced and sustainable territorial development.

### **Joint Research Centre (JRC)**

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is the European Commission's science and knowledge service. It provides independent scientific advice and support to EU policy. The JRC carries out research on a wide range of topics relevant to Territorial Cohesion, including urban and regional development, rural and coastal areas, cross-border and transnational cooperation, and others.

JRC develops and maintains databases, mapping tools, and platforms that provide data and visualizations for Territorial Cohesion. For example, the Smart Specialisation Platform assists regions in developing research and innovation strategies that are tailored to their unique strengths and challenges, thereby supporting Territorial Cohesion. JRC also work with capacity building and networking, organising workshops, training courses, and networking events that bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working on Territorial Cohesion.

### **Pilot Actions**

The Territorial Agenda Pilot Actions (TA Pilot Actions) are a set of practical projects and initiatives aimed at making the Territorial Agenda 2030 more concrete and tangible. They are designed to help implement the priorities and objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030 by demonstrating how spatial planning and territorial development policies can be applied in practice. By showcasing innovative solutions, best practices, and success stories, TA Pilot Actions can inspire and guide other regions and localities in their efforts to promote territorial cohesion and sustainable development.

TA Pilot Actions focus on aspects such as:

**Cross-sectoral cooperation:** TA Pilot Actions promote integrated approaches to territorial development by bringing together various sectors, stakeholders, and levels of governance. They encourage collaboration between different policy areas, such as environment, transport, housing, and economic development, to address complex and interrelated territorial challenges.

**Place-based solutions:** TA Pilot Actions emphasize the importance of tailoring policies and interventions to the specific characteristics, needs, and potential of individual territories. They support the development and implementation of locally-driven solutions that reflect the unique assets and challenges of each place, thus enhancing the effectiveness and impact of territorial development policies.

**Policy experimentation and innovation:** TA Pilot Actions provide a platform for testing innovative approaches, tools, and methods in the field of spatial planning and territorial development. They support policy experimentation, learning from both successes and failures, and the exchange of best practices and lessons learned among different regions and localities.

**Capacity-building and knowledge transfer:** TA Pilot Actions contribute to capacity-building and knowledge transfer by involving a wide range of stakeholders, such as policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and civil society, in the design, implementation, and evaluation of pilot projects. They facilitate the sharing of experiences, insights, and expertise, thus enhancing the ability of regions and localities to address territorial challenges and implement the Territorial Agenda 2030 effectively.

TA Pilot Actions can cover a wide range of topics and themes, such as urban-rural partnerships, sustainable mobility, climate adaptation, social innovation, or digital connectivity, depending on the specific priorities and objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030.

By showcasing practical examples and success stories, TA Pilot Actions can inspire and guide other regions and localities in their efforts to promote territorial cohesion and sustainable development, making the Territorial



Agenda 2030 more concrete and tangible for policymakers, practitioners, and citizens alike.

## **TIA**

Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) is a tool used to analyse and evaluate the potential territorial consequences of policies, programs, or legislative proposals at various levels of governance. The primary goal of TIA is to ensure that territorial cohesion considerations are taken into account in the decision-making process, thus contributing to balanced and sustainable territorial development across the European Union.

TIA plays a significant role in achieving Territorial Cohesion by helping policymakers identify, assess, and mitigate the potential impacts of their proposals on different regions and territories. It can reveal potential disparities, unintended consequences, or synergies that may arise from the implementation of policies or initiatives.

Key elements of Territorial Impact Assessment include:

**Context analysis:** TIA starts with an understanding of the spatial context in which policies or initiatives are to be implemented, taking into account the diversity of regional characteristics, challenges, and opportunities.

**Identification of territorial impacts:** TIA helps policymakers identify the potential positive and negative territorial impacts that may result from a proposed policy, program, or legislative initiative. This involves assessing the potential consequences for regional economies, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and accessibility, among other factors.

**Assessment and evaluation:** The TIA process involves evaluating the significance, magnitude, and distribution of potential territorial impacts. This allows policymakers to understand the extent to which the proposed policy or initiative may affect different regions and whether these impacts are consistent with the objectives of Territorial Cohesion.

**Mitigation and enhancement measures:** Based on the assessment, TIA can inform the development of mitigation measures to minimize negative impacts and enhance positive effects. This may involve revising the policy or initiative, introducing complementary measures, or adjusting the

implementation approach to better align with Territorial Cohesion objectives.

**Stakeholder involvement and consultation:** A TIA process often includes engagement with stakeholders, such as regional and local authorities, experts, and communities, to gather insights and feedback on potential territorial impacts and appropriate mitigation measures.

By integrating Territorial Impact Assessment into the decision-making process, policymakers can better understand the spatial implications of their actions, ensuring that policies and initiatives contribute to the overall goals of Territorial Cohesion, reduce disparities among regions, and foster balanced and sustainable development across the European Union.

### **ITI and CLLD**

Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) are two instruments that support the work with Territorial Cohesion in the European Union. Both instruments are part of the EU Cohesion Policy framework and are designed to facilitate the implementation of integrated, bottom-up, and place-based approaches to local and regional development.

### **Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)**

ITI is a tool introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period that allows for the combination of resources from different European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to address the specific needs and challenges of a defined territory. The main objective of ITI is to promote integrated, place-based strategies for territorial development by combining different policy areas, funding sources, and stakeholders.

ITI enables the implementation of territorial strategies that are tailored to the unique needs, opportunities, and challenges of specific areas, such as urban, rural, or coastal zones. This instrument encourages the development of integrated approaches, focusing on areas such as urban regeneration, climate change adaptation, innovation, and social inclusion.

The key features of ITI include:

**Flexibility:** ITI allows for the combination of resources from different ESIF funds and policy areas to address complex territorial challenges in a comprehensive manner.

**Place-based approach:** ITI is tailored to the specific needs and potentials of defined territories, ensuring that interventions are context-sensitive and locally relevant.

**Integrated strategy:** ITI promotes the development of integrated strategies that bring together different policy areas, stakeholders, and funding sources to achieve common objectives.

### **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)**

CLLD is a bottom-up approach to local development that empowers local communities to design and implement strategies that address their specific needs, challenges, and opportunities. It was introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period and builds on the experiences of the LEADER program, which was focused on rural development.

The main objectives of CLLD are to promote inclusive, participatory, and innovative local development, strengthening the capacity of local communities to address their own development challenges. CLLD is implemented through Local Action Groups (LAGs), which are composed of representatives from the public, private, and civil society sectors.

The key features of CLLD include:

**Bottom-up approach:** CLLD empowers local communities to take ownership of their development process, fostering greater participation, engagement, and accountability.

**Partnership:** CLLD promotes the formation of inclusive and representative Local Action Groups that bring together stakeholders from different sectors to collaborate on common objectives.

**Innovation:** CLLD encourages the development and implementation of innovative, locally tailored solutions to complex challenges, fostering creativity and experimentation in local development.

Both ITI and CLLD contribute to the work with Territorial Cohesion by promoting integrated, place-based, and participatory approaches to local and regional development. By combining resources, policy areas, and stakeholders, these instruments facilitate the implementation of tailored, context-sensitive, and inclusive territorial strategies that help achieve the objectives of the Territorial Agenda and EU Cohesion Policy.

## **EGTC**

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a cooperative entity established to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation. It is the first European cooperative structure defined by EU law to overcome obstacles hindering the effective execution of joint actions.

An EGTC can include members from EU member states, but also from outside the EU, as long as the national law of the respective state allows for such participation. The members can be national, regional, local authorities, or bodies governed by public law. An EGTC has a legal personality and therefore can act in its own right. It can acquire or transfer property, employ staff and enter into contracts and agreements.

By facilitating cooperation between different regions and across borders, an EGTC can promote Territorial Cohesion and the creation of a harmonious economic area throughout the EU. An EGTC can manage territorial cooperation programmes or projects co-financed by the European Union, making it an important instrument for the implementation of cohesion policy.

ESPON has since the 2020 program been organised as an EGTC. This was a shift from the previous structure, where ESPON was coordinated by a consortium of partners. The decision to transform ESPON into an EGTC was taken to provide it with a more stable and efficient structure. As an EGTC, ESPON has legal personality and capacity in all Member States, which can facilitate its operations.

## **Territorial Agenda Website**

The Territorial Agenda website ([www.territorialagenda.eu](http://www.territorialagenda.eu)) is a dedicated online platform that provides comprehensive information about the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, including its history, objectives,

priorities, actions, and related policy documents. The website is intended for a wide range of stakeholders interested in territorial cohesion, spatial planning, and regional development, such as policymakers, planners, researchers, and representatives of regional and local authorities.

The Territorial Agenda website contains various resources and information, including:

**Background information:** The website provides an overview of the history, rationale, and development of the Territorial Agenda, including its relation to other relevant EU policies and initiatives, such as the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the Leipzig Charter, and the Urban Agenda for the EU.

**Policy documents:** The website features key documents related to the Territorial Agenda, such as the Territorial Agenda 2030, the previous versions of the Territorial Agenda (2020 and 2007), and the action plans developed to implement these strategies.

**Priorities and actions:** The website outlines the strategic priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030, including the goals of a Just Europe, a Green Europe, and a Connected Europe. It also provides information about specific actions and initiatives undertaken to implement these priorities, such as pilot actions, cross-sectoral cooperation, and the monitoring and evaluation framework.

**News and events:** The website offers updates on the latest news, events, and developments related to the Territorial Agenda, such as workshops, conferences, policy debates, and progress reports.

**Resources and publications:** The website provides access to various resources and publications related to territorial cohesion, spatial planning, and regional development, including research reports, policy briefs, and case studies.

The Territorial Agenda website serves as a valuable resource for stakeholders interested in the work on territorial cohesion and the Territorial Agenda in the European Union. It offers up-to-date information, resources, and opportunities for engagement, helping to promote awareness, understanding, and participation in the Territorial Agenda and its implementation.

## The challenges

European territorial cohesion faces several challenges. Some of the key issues that are likely to have significant impact are:

**Economic disparities:** The uneven distribution of economic growth across regions has led to significant wealth gaps, with some areas experiencing much faster development than others. Addressing these disparities and fostering balanced development is crucial for ensuring territorial cohesion.

**Demographic challenges:** Population decline in rural areas and some regions, along with aging populations, can exacerbate territorial disparities. Developing policies to reverse depopulation and supporting the elderly population will be important.

**Climate change and environmental risks:** Climate change poses various threats to European territories, including rising sea levels, flooding, and more frequent and severe weather events. Building resilience against these risks and promoting sustainable development will be critical for territorial cohesion.

**Infrastructure and connectivity:** Improving transportation, digital infrastructure, and accessibility between regions is key to achieving territorial cohesion. Ensuring that all regions have access to quality infrastructure can help foster economic growth and social inclusion.

**Social inclusion and integration:** Addressing social inequality and fostering inclusive societies is essential for territorial cohesion. This includes ensuring access to quality education, healthcare, and housing for all citizens, regardless of their geographic location.

**Migration and integration:** The influx of migrants and refugees has put pressure on some regions and has led to social and economic challenges.

Effective policies and strategies for integration and redistribution of migrants across the EU will be important to maintain territorial cohesion.

**Urban-rural divide:** The growing gap between urban and rural areas in terms of access to services, infrastructure, and economic opportunities can

exacerbate territorial disparities. Addressing these issues and supporting rural development will be crucial.

**Impact of Brexit:** The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union has introduced additional challenges for territorial cohesion, including trade, regulatory, and border issues. Navigating these changes and fostering collaboration will be essential for maintaining cohesion across European territories.

**Multilevel governance and subsidiarity:** Ensuring effective coordination and cooperation among different levels of government (local, regional, national, and European) is essential for achieving territorial cohesion. This requires a balance between centralization and decentralization, as well as promoting cross-border cooperation.

**Access to EU funding:** Ensuring equitable access to EU funding programs, such as the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, is vital for promoting territorial cohesion. Developing strategies to better target these funds and ensuring they reach areas that need them most will be important in addressing disparities.

### **The future**

There are several new factors and trends that are growing in importance and could have a significant impact on European territorial cohesion:

**The rise of remote work:** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift towards remote work, which could potentially help to reduce the concentration of economic activities in specific urban centers. As remote work becomes more prevalent, investments in digital infrastructure and policies to support remote work will be important in fostering regional development and reducing disparities.

**The green transition:** The European Green Deal and related policies are pushing for a more sustainable and climate-resilient Europe. This transition offers opportunities for new regional growth and job creation in sectors such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and green technologies. Ensuring that all regions can benefit from these opportunities will be crucial for territorial cohesion.

**The digital divide:** As digitalization becomes more widespread, the digital divide between urban and rural areas, as well as between different social groups, has grown more apparent. Addressing this divide and ensuring equal access to digital infrastructure, tools, and resources will be essential in promoting social inclusion and territorial cohesion.

**Geopolitical shifts:** Geopolitical tensions and shifting trade relationships, particularly in the context of an increasingly multipolar world, can impact European territorial cohesion. Navigating these changes and promoting economic diversification and resilience will be important in maintaining cohesion.

**The rise of populism and Euroscepticism:** The rise of populist and Eurosceptic political movements in some regions can pose challenges for European territorial cohesion. These movements can hinder cross-border cooperation and the development of EU-wide policies. Addressing the root causes of these sentiments, such as economic disparities and social exclusion, will be important in promoting cohesion.

**The circular economy:** The shift towards a circular economy, which emphasizes reducing waste, increasing resource efficiency, and fostering sustainable production and consumption patterns, offers new opportunities for regional development. Ensuring that all regions can participate in and benefit from this transition will be crucial for territorial cohesion.

**Resilience to future pandemics and crises:** The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of resilience in the face of global crises. Developing strategies to improve resilience to future pandemics, as well as other global challenges such as economic downturns and climate change, will be important in maintaining territorial cohesion.

**Changing patterns of migration:** Climate change and political instability in certain parts of the world may lead to new migration patterns, putting pressure on specific regions within Europe. Developing effective policies and strategies to manage these migration flows and ensure social and economic integration will be important in maintaining territorial cohesion.



## The strategies aiming for Territorial Cohesion

To make Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda more relevant for policy development at EU, national, and regional levels, the following approaches can be considered and intensified:

**Enhancing policy coherence:** Ensure that the Territorial Agenda is well-integrated with other key policy frameworks, such as the European Green Deal, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the Digital Europe program. This will help create synergies and promote a comprehensive approach to territorial cohesion.

**Promoting multi-level governance:** Encourage strong collaboration and coordination among different levels of government, including EU institutions, national governments, and regional and local authorities. This can help align policies, share best practices, and facilitate cross-border cooperation for more effective implementation of the Territorial Agenda.

**Supporting evidence-based policymaking:** Strengthen the use of data, indicators, and monitoring tools to track progress on territorial cohesion goals, identify areas of improvement, and inform policymaking. Enhance research and capacity building for better understanding of territorial dynamics, challenges, and opportunities.

**Fostering place-based and context-specific approaches:** Recognize the unique characteristics, needs, and potentials of different territories, and develop tailored policies and interventions that can respond to these specific contexts. This can help ensure more targeted and effective use of resources for territorial development.

**Inclusive stakeholder engagement:** Engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including regional and local authorities, businesses, civil society, academia, and citizens, to ensure that the Territorial Agenda reflects diverse perspectives and addresses the needs of all segments of society.

**Strengthening communication and outreach:** Increase awareness and understanding of the Territorial Agenda and its objectives among policymakers, stakeholders, and the public. This can help generate greater support for the Agenda and promote more effective implementation.

**Facilitating access to funding:** Streamline and simplify the process of accessing EU funds for territorial development and ensure that funding programs are aligned with the Territorial Agenda's goals. This can help facilitate more effective use of resources and better support policy implementation at various levels.

**Focusing on capacity building and technical assistance:** Support the capacity building of regional and local authorities in developing and implementing policies that contribute to territorial cohesion. This can include sharing best practices, providing technical assistance, and creating platforms for collaboration and learning.

**Regular monitoring and evaluation:** Establish mechanisms for regular monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of progress on the Territorial Agenda's objectives. This can help identify successes, challenges, and areas for improvement, and inform future policy development and implementation.

**Emphasizing the importance of cross-border cooperation:** Encourage and support cross-border cooperation initiatives that contribute to territorial cohesion, such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), Interreg programs, and macro-regional strategies. This can help address common challenges, leverage shared resources, and promote more integrated and cohesive development across Europe.

In achieving Territorial Cohesion and the goals related to the Territorial Agenda, the European Commission, the Member States, the Regions and different instruments have important roles to play.

### **The role of the EU Commission**

**Policy coordination:** The European Commission plays a key role in coordinating policies and strategies at the EU level to ensure coherence and consistency in achieving territorial cohesion objectives.

**Providing guidance:** The Commission should provide guidance, best practices, and technical assistance to member states to help them develop and implement effective policies for territorial cohesion.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** The Commission should establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress on the Territorial

Agenda, using data and indicators to assess the effectiveness of policies and identify areas for improvement.

**Financial support:** The Commission manages EU funding programs, such as the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and other structural funds, which support territorial cohesion objectives. Ensuring these funds are accessible and effectively targeted is crucial.

**Facilitating cross-border cooperation:** The Commission plays a critical role in facilitating cross-border cooperation initiatives, such as the Interreg programs, European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), and macro-regional strategies.

**Fostering dialogue and exchange:** The Commission can create platforms and networks for dialogue, exchange, and learning among member states, regional and local authorities, and other stakeholders to share best practices, experiences, and innovative solutions.

**Integrating the Territorial Agenda into EU policymaking:** The Commission should ensure that the Territorial Agenda is well-integrated into broader EU policy frameworks, such as the European Green Deal, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the Digital Europe program, to promote coherence and synergies.

What could the specific roles of the member states and the Commission respectively be in these achievements?

### **The role of the Member States**

**Policy implementation:** Member states are responsible for implementing policies in line with the Territorial Agenda's objectives, tailoring them to their specific national and regional contexts.

**Multi-level governance:** Member states should actively involve and empower regional and local authorities in the development, implementation, and monitoring of policies that contribute to territorial cohesion.

**Capacity building:** Member states should invest in capacity building for regional and local authorities to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement territorial cohesion policies.

**National policy alignment:** Align national policies, strategies, and investment priorities with the objectives of the Territorial Agenda to ensure coherence and consistency in policy approaches.

**Stakeholder engagement:** Encourage inclusive stakeholder engagement at the national level, involving public and private entities, civil society, academia, and citizens in policy development, implementation, and monitoring processes.

**Financial support:** Allocate sufficient financial resources for territorial development projects and facilitate access to EU funding programs to support territorial cohesion objectives.

By working together and playing their respective roles, both the European Commission and the member states can contribute to the successful implementation of the Territorial Agenda and promote greater territorial cohesion across the EU.

### **The role of the Regions**

**Implementation of Territorial Policies:** Regions are the primary entities responsible for implementing territorial policies. This includes developing regional development plans, managing and using structural funds, and overseeing various projects. Their actions directly affect the achievement of Territorial Cohesion goals.

**Representation in EU Institutions:** Regions are represented in various EU bodies like the Committee of the Regions, which gives them a platform to voice their perspectives, share best practices, and influence EU legislation and policies related to Territorial Cohesion.

**Interregional and Cross-Border Cooperation:** Regions often participate in cross-border, interregional, and transnational cooperation initiatives, such as those under the Interreg programme or Macro-Regional Strategies. These initiatives promote Territorial Cohesion by addressing shared challenges and leveraging collective opportunities.

**Application of Place-Based Approaches:** Regions are at the forefront of implementing the place-based approach promoted by the Territorial Agenda, which involves tailoring interventions to local contexts and needs. This

approach contributes to more effective and equitable outcomes, supporting Territorial Cohesion.

**Participation in EGTCs:** Regions can be members of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), which are instruments for facilitating cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation.

**Involvement in ESPON:** Regions can contribute to and benefit from the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON), which provides data, tools, and analyses to support policy-making related to territorial cohesion and development.

### **The role of Interreg programmes**

Interreg programmes, as a part of the European Union's Cohesion Policy, play a crucial role in promoting Territorial Cohesion. These programmes are designed to stimulate cooperation between regions and cities across different Member States and beyond, to address common challenges and leverage shared opportunities.

Interreg contributes to Territorial Cohesion by promotion of **Cross-Border Cooperation** among neighbouring regions across national borders. This cooperation aims to reduce the development disparities and to address common issues, such as environment protection, transportation and connectivity, which often extend beyond national boundaries.

Interreg programmes also support **transnational cooperation**, fostering integrated development among wider geographic areas, such as the Baltic Sea Region or the Danube Region. This cooperation helps to address transnational challenges, like water management, climate change adaptation, and innovation capacity.

Furthermore, Interreg programmes promote **interregional cooperation** to improve the effectiveness of regional development policies and programmes. Through exchange of experiences, mutual learning, and the sharing of good practices, these programmes support capacity building and innovation in policy making, thus contributing to Territorial Cohesion.

## **The role of EU Macro-Regional Strategies**

These strategies are mechanisms of cooperation between different countries (both EU members and non-members) in a particular geographical area, or a 'macro-region', where they face common challenges and opportunities.

There are currently four EU Macro-Regional Strategies: the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP).

Macro-Regional Strategies foster integration across larger geographic areas, transcending national borders. This helps to ensure that development is harmonized across the region, and that disparities between different parts of the macro-region are addressed. The strategies enable countries within a macro-region to work together to address common challenges, such as environmental issues, infrastructure development, and socio-economic disparities. This joint problem-solving can enhance Territorial Cohesion by promoting balanced development and ensuring that all parts of the macro-region benefit.

The strategies provide a framework for countries to capitalize on shared opportunities. They can enhance the alignment and coordination of policies across different sectors and levels of governance and they can involve a wide range of stakeholders, including national, regional, and local authorities, as well as civil society and the private sector.