

Informal Meeting of EU Ministers responsible for cohesion policy, territorial cohesion and urban matters

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Issue paper

Territorial approach to effectively address current and emerging challenges



Nowadays, the European Union is facing a number of pressing challenges, from increasing climate-related risks, accelerating digital, green and demographic transitions, deteriorating housing and energy affordability, and persisting social, economic and territorial inequalities to growing geopolitical instability. These challenges affect territories in various ways and require responses that are not only ambitious but also territorially sensitive, recognizing the diversity of development paths and institutional realities across the entire EU. In this context, the importance of ensuring that EU, national, regional and urban policies are territorially sensitive is increasingly evident and relevant. A place-based approach, rooted in the specific needs and potentials of diverse territories and moving beyond a one-size-fits-all solution, should be strongly embedded in future actions and policies at all levels, and relevant support measures adjusted to the needs resulting from the geographical locations and specific characteristics of each region, city and its functional area.

Advancing a territorially sensitive approach to policymaking is fundamental to implementing and delivering the cohesion objective and joint EU priorities. The upcoming policy cycle post 2027 offers a great opportunity to reinforce territorial cohesion as a common goal across all levels of governance. By more effectively tailored policies, the EU and its Member States can foster more inclusive, resilient, and harmonious development across all regions, leaving no one and no place behind. Moreover, incorporating territorial sensitivity into policymaking not only enhances its effectiveness, but also fosters stronger ownership and legitimacy among regional and local stakeholders and citizens.

Given the multifaceted nature of today's challenges, it is worth considering whether the existing mechanisms are sufficient or the potential of new EU instruments and initiatives, such as a possible territorial vision and the upcoming ambitious policy agenda for cities. It seems that without a bold territorial vision for the Union, the EU risks missing an important opportunity to strengthen its unity, protect its citizens and turn territorial diversity into a source of strength.

Therefore, the ministers are invited to reflect on how to better embed the territorial dimension into EU and – where relevant – national policies and instruments, in line with the objective of the Treaties and the commitments of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the Urban Agenda for the EU.

The aim of the ministerial meeting is to strengthen coordination and discuss how to improve the effectiveness of existing efforts – by addressing territorial disparities, supporting functional urban areas, and enabling all regions, cities and communities to contribute to the Union's priorities. In order to orientate the debate at the informal meeting of EU Ministers responsible for cohesion policy, territorial cohesion and urban matters, the Polish presidency invites delegations to share their view on the questions below. These questions will be dealt with within a single round table session. Interventions should not exceed 3 minutes.

1. How to ensure that EU policies other than cohesion are territorially sensitive?
2. Given the current challenges faced by the EU, what types of territories (for instance internal or external border regions, urban areas, rural areas, less developed, those in development trap, low education levels or others) require particular focus due to the challenges they experience?
3. Do you think that the existing mechanisms and platforms are sufficient to ensure territorial approach, or do we need new tools, e.g. strategies, implementation mechanisms, procedures, etc?