

POSITION PAPER
by the Association of German Metropolitan Regions
ON THE EU'S COHESION POLICY BEYOND 2020¹

The Association of German Metropolitan Regions (Initiativkreis Europäische Metropolregionen in Deutschland, IKM), the joint platform of metropolitan regions in Germany², was established to discuss metropolitan regions' challenges and possible solutions and to bring these into the political discourse.

Providing functional spaces that comprise urban, peri-urban and rural areas, metropolitan regions play a key role in contributing to political cohesion and are thus important regional drivers for European regional policy. Against this background, the IKM is committed to highlighting and promoting the role of strong metropolitan regions as engines for growth, innovation and sustainable development in Europe to ensure that today's societal challenges can be addressed appropriately.

Specifically, the IKM is making the following **key demands for the future of cohesion policy beyond 2020**:

1. The IKM firmly endorses the **continuation of the EU's cohesion policy beyond 2020**. In the view of the IKM it is vital to ensure that cohesion policy continues to be provided with **adequate resources** within the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The rationale of the Structural Funds is to be upheld, and with regard to implementation the focus should continue to be on subsidies and, where necessary, on additional financial instruments.
2. Cohesion policy plays a central role in reducing development disparities between European regions and in consolidating economic, social and territorial cohesion. Therefore, it is important to ensure that **all of the EU regions** continue to be **eligible for funding** as development disparities between urban, peri-urban and rural areas can even be observed in more highly developed regions.

Moreover, metropolitan regions are facing particular **challenges** such as **migration, digitisation, shortage of skilled workers** and **settlement pressure** alongside **environmental, noise and traffic pollution** as well as challenges associated with the **energy transition** and **climate protection policies**. These challenges are most relevant to metropolitan regions and other functional spaces that are required to reconcile the often opposing trends occurring in rural and urban areas. With their specific governance approach, metropolitan regions provide the appropriate operational level that is needed to compensate differences in development conditions and to shoulder the above challenges on a partnership basis.

¹ Please note that this position paper does not override the statements of the individual metropolitan regions and their organisations. Instead, it is aimed at integrating several perspectives and highlighting common grounds.

² The members of the IKM are the metropolitan regions as defined by the German Ministerial Conference on Spatial Planning, i.e. Berlin-Brandenburg, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, Hamburg, Hanover-Braunschweig-Göttingen-Wolfsburg, Central Germany, Munich, Northwest, Nuremberg, Rhine-Neckar, Rhine-Ruhr, and Stuttgart.

The more highly developed regions in particular, such as metropolitan regions, are drivers of employment, innovation and creativity. Metropolitan regions thus generate added value in Europe, while at the same time strengthening the EU as a whole in a global context and in global competition.

3. To master these challenges, **functional spaces** need to receive **more support from cohesion policy** than has been the case up to now. Launched in the 2014–2020 funding period, both the **Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)** instrument for regions and the **Community Led Local Development (CLLD)** instrument for sub-regional areas provide favourable preconditions for implementing integrated projects within functional spaces. As these instruments are developed and implemented via a bottom-up approach, they are highly suited to address the challenges and needs at this level. Yet in Germany, despite positive examples from other Member States, the ITI instrument in particular has not been employed or has only been employed in an attenuated form. The IKM regrets this and calls on the European Commission to enter into negotiations with Germany's federal and state governments to make greater use of these or similar tools for integrating different programmes beyond 2020.

Moreover, the INTERREG A programme, another cross-border instrument with a focus on investment in functional spaces, is to be continued and expanded even further. On the one hand, this will ensure that the challenges of transnational functional spaces can be tackled, and on the other hand, the programme generates considerable added value for Europe. The same applies to the other European Territorial Cooperation programmes, INTERREG B and INTERREG C, which also need to be strengthened further. What is more, collaboration between stakeholders from different European countries on integrated and spatial issues fosters the exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices and thus facilitates the development, testing and implementation of new innovative solutions.

4. The IKM endorses a **continuation of the joint preparation of operational programmes** financed by the Structural Funds. This would involve collaboration between the European Commission and the Member State level, the regional level (in Germany, the *Länder*) as well as stronger partnerships with metropolitan regions and other regional stakeholders below the *Länder* level. Metropolitan regions can stretch across *Länder* boundaries and include municipalities, administrative districts and other stakeholders and are familiar with their respective needs and challenges. This allows the IKM to make a qualified contribution to process optimisation, and therefore the IKM demands a **greater share of responsibility** on behalf of the **metropolitan regions** when it comes to **preparing and implementing cohesion policy measures**. The metropolitan regions are ready to play a more prominent role in shaping the EU's cohesion policy within the next funding period.

5. The EU is faced with major challenges as scepticism towards the EU and associated claims regarding the EU's alleged remoteness from the people continue to grow. These trends are being reinforced by disproportionately high administrative requirements in the context of the EU's cohesion policy. Therefore, **simplified processes in the area of application and administration** could contribute to strengthening acceptance of and solidarity with the EU among all stakeholders and citizens. Furthermore, financial control of both ongoing and completed projects is also in need of **consistent simplification**.