

Foreword

Across the OECD, the globalisation of trade and economic activity increasingly tests the ability of regional economies to adapt and exploit or maintain their competitive edge. On the one hand, there is a tendency for performance gaps to widen between and within regions, and the cost of maintaining cohesion is increasing. On the other hand, rapid technological change, the extension of markets and the greater use of knowledge offer new opportunities for local and regional development. This requires further investment in the business environment, reorganisation of labour and production, and upgrading skills and environmental improvements. All of these trends are leading public authorities to reconsider their strategies. The role of policies aimed at improving the competitiveness of regions by promoting the valorisation and use of endogenous resources has been strengthened.

Along these lines, the vertical distribution of power between the different tiers of government and the decentralisation of resources and competencies need to be reassessed in order to better respond to the diverse opportunities and demands of the different regions and improve policy efficiency. Public authorities need to weigh current challenges, evaluate the strategies pursued in recent years and define new options.

Comparing regional policies across OECD member countries suggests future directions and best practices for policy makers. However, such information has often been limited. This report is a handy reference to regional policies and offers some tools for cross-country analysis based on sound comparable information. It is the first systematic comparative analysis of OECD member countries' regional policies.

The report covers key issues, such as problem recognition, objectives of regional policy, legal/institutional frameworks, urban/rural frameworks, budget structures, and governance mechanisms between national and sub-national governments as well as across sectors. The comparative analysis uses a common conceptual framework, which allows countries to share their experiences. The analysis suggests an important role for regional policies in shaping sustainable endogenous development, notably the need for well-developed governance mechanisms capable of better responding to the diverse opportunities and demands of different regions in order to improve policy efficiency.

This report was presented and discussed at the OECD Territorial Development Policy Committee (TDPC). This committee was created in 1999, responding to the need of studying and spreading innovative territorial development strategies, as well as governance practices, in a more systematic way. It is a unique forum for international exchange and debate on regional policy. The TDPC has developed a number of activities, including a series of Territorial Reviews and analytical reports on different regional policy issues.

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