

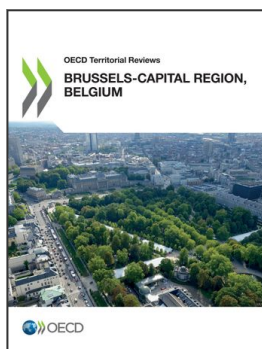
Foreword

As shown in *OECD Regional Outlook 2023*, large metropolitan regions across OECD countries have been moving ahead over the past 15 years, often enjoying stronger population growth, higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and better access to infrastructure and services than other regions. Yet many of these large metropolitan regions are also paying the price of their success, including in terms of challenges related to housing affordability, congestion and inequalities.

The Brussels-Capital Region, Belgium, offers a stark illustration of agglomeration benefits and costs. This report delves into the “Brussels paradox” of a highly performing region in terms of economic wealth creation and competitiveness but with relatively poor social conditions. While serving as a major engine of the Belgian economy, the region is grappling with internal inequalities and struggling to accommodate its growing population against the backdrop of a persistent shortage of affordable housing and ageing building stock. Car dependency and traffic congestion are driving up commuting times and pollution levels in the region despite good accessibility to public transport. Although a comprehensive urban and land use planning system is in place, the accumulation of multiple layers of governance at different scales (including those related to the bilingual nature of the region) has blurred the allocation of competencies, often making it difficult to design and implement effective policy interventions on housing, mobility and other infrastructure investment, in a context of deteriorating regional and municipal public finances.

Based on a 15-month policy dialogue with more than 50 stakeholders across levels of government, this review benchmarks the strengths and challenges of the Brussels-Capital Region with those of similar regions in OECD countries and offers policy avenues to pursue more sustainable, inclusive and resilient urban development. In particular, it discusses ways to support affordable housing and improve mobility in the region. It also looks into options to navigate the complex governance framework in the region, clarify the division of responsibilities across levels of government and enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability. Finally, the review makes a case for bolstering financial and fiscal sustainability, including strengthening solidarity among Belgian regions and municipalities.

This report is part of the series of OECD Territorial Reviews, which take a deep dive into the drivers of growth and well-being at a more local level, drawing, in turn, on international best practices to guide policy interventions. The report was presented at the 7th meeting of the Expert Group on Multi-level Governance and Public Investment for Regional Development on 14 November 2023 and approved by the OECD Working Party on Urban Policy at its 34th session on 15 November 2023 under cote CFE/RDPC/URB(2023)19.



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