

## Address by DG Christophidou to the Regional Studies Association Annual Conference

University of Porto, Portugal. 9<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Dear academics and policy experts of the Regional Studies Association

Today we stand at one of the turning points of history. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence, the climate emergency, challenges to the world trade system, and changes in global alliances: in these challenging times, it is not a luxury to be ahead of the curve, it is an imperative. This is why we in the European Commission are committed to research, to analysis and to evidence-based policy making. This is why we in the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy work closely with academics, researchers and data providers. And this is why we particularly welcome the work of the Regional Studies Association.

As we look to the coming months and years, we would value your research in three key areas.

First, in crafting place-based policies. Geography is not dead. On the contrary, geography matters, and an understanding of geography underpins many of the challenges of today. Innovation depends on local ecosystems. The green transition depends on regional systems and energy grids. Competitiveness, resilience and quality of life depends on region specific endowments as well as the value chains which increasingly stretch from one region to another.

So, we need solid **place-based analysis and research**, identifying development opportunities, enabling regions to plug into value chains and find the best fit in the future economy, and enabling policymakers to craft European policies which take account of the specificities of our regions and our cities.

Second, we need **research on how to tackle disparities**, giving people the right to stay in the place they call home, the right to affordable housing, the right to high-quality, future proofed jobs, the right to high-quality services, from education and training to culture and sport.

And your role is crucial, because old disparities are evolving and new disparities are emerging, so we need more research on traditional disparities where they persist. More research on emerging disparities and development traps and new metrics which go beyond GDP, capturing critical features of the new reality, including regional integration into global networks, exposure to structural change, social inclusion, and resilience capacities. Shifting our thinking from static disparities to dynamic vulnerabilities and new opportunities.

Third, we need **research on policy delivery**. Our mission is clear. Cohesion policy must become simpler, faster, more focused and more connected to citizens' needs, guaranteeing access to essential services and revitalising cities and rural areas.

And cohesion policy is modernising and aligning with Europe's new strategic priorities to build a stronger and more self-reliant Union.

In every previous transformation of Cohesion Policy, academic research has been both a guiding star and the solid foundation stone.

Over the years, you have helped us understand territorial dynamics, anticipate changes and design policies fit for the future. And today again, we count on your evidence and your insights for a renewed Cohesion Policy, which helps build stronger regions and stronger Europe.

Thank you for your work and for your continued collaboration.