



REGIONS AND REGIONALISM

There is no generally accepted definition of a region. Its basic characteristic is that it is territorially delimited, ranging in size from the national to the municipal level; however, in addition to these, a number of factors can shape the boundaries and characteristics of each region: geographical specificities, language, culture, historical traditions, socio-economic development and the specific identities that these may give rise to (European Parliament: Resolution on Community regional policy and the role of the regions, [Doc. A2-218/88](#); Keating [1998](#)).

One of the two most important processes shaping a region is regionalisation, whereby the state typically designates territorial units with sufficient autonomy from the “top down”. The other process is regionalism, which is a political and intellectual concept of territorial organisation from the “bottom up”, aiming to strengthen the role of subnational territorial units in relation to the state level (Nemes Nagy [2009](#), see also Fawcett [2004](#)).

Cultural and linguistic diversity is a defining feature of Europeanness. The rich, common European cultural heritage, made up of cultures that are unique from nation to nation and even from region to region, belongs to every single European citizen. European citizens are attached to Europe, their country and their region as bearers of mutually reinforcing elements of identity, i.e. they are highly attached to the sense of home provided by their immediate and wider homeland. The different levels of attachment are not in opposition to each other. In the same area, there are also high levels of attachment to Europe, the country or the region (Charron et al. [2022](#)). We can consider national, regional and even local identity elements as components of European identity.

Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [[1334\(2003\)](#)], states that regional autonomy “allows a minority group within a state to exercise its rights and preserve its cultural identity, while providing certain guarantees of the state’s unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity”.

In its [Recommendation 1811 \(2007\)](#), the body expressed its conviction “of the virtues of regional governance, of the effectiveness of subsidiarity and of the democratic power of proximity”. For this reason, the Parliamentary Assembly also recommended to the European Union to strengthen the role of the regions.

EU regional policy is based on the Treaties. TEU [Article 3](#) states that the Union shall promote territorial cohesion, but also that it shall respect cultural and linguistic diversity and ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced. Pursuant to TFEU [Article 167](#), the Union shall respect national and regional diversity. At the heart of the EU’s regional policy is the strengthening of economic, social, and territorial cohesion, which has its legal basis in TFEU [Articles 174-178](#). The principle of subsidiarity is also fundamental for the regions (TEU [Article 5](#)).

Interreg (European Territorial Cooperation) is a key element of regional socio-economic cooperation, promoting European territorial cooperation by funding cross-border programmes [[Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1059](#), [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#)].

The main institution representing regional interests in the EU is the [European Committee of the Regions](#), which gives its opinion on policies directly affecting local or regional authorities.

The European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation ([EGTC](#)) are organisations with legal personality within the Union through which Member States facilitate cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation by providing common services [[Regulation \(EC\) No 1082/2006](#)].

The European Union has established the Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) to collect and harmonise regional statistical data. This territorial system is used for socio-economic analysis, and provides the basis for cohesion policy [[Regulation \(EC\) No 1059/2003](#)]. ♦

1

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS, EU-27 (percentage)

OUTER CIRCLE: local administration

INNER CIRCLE: national government



2

THE IMPACT OF EU REGIONAL POLICY, EU-27

Do EU funded projects in your area make you feel like an EU citizen? (percentage)



3

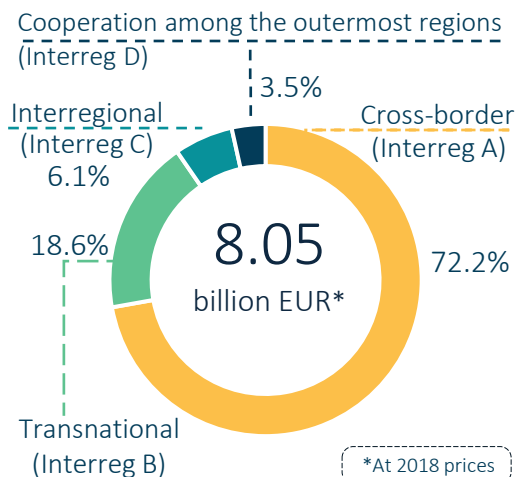
PROMOTING ACCESS TO CULTURE

- ✓ By ensuring free and equal access and participation.
- ✓ By protecting cultural heritage for social cohesion.
- ✓ By respecting cultural and linguistic diversity.
- ✓ By preventing the digital divide.

§ Culture is a fundamental human right

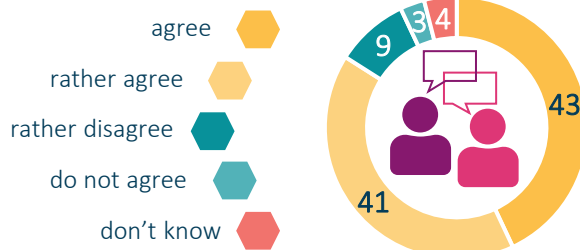
5

BUDGET FOR FUNDING PROGRAMMES SUPPORTING CROSS-BORDER REGIONAL COOPERATION (INTERREG), 2021–2027



4

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE THAT REGIONAL AND MINORITY LANGUAGES SHOULD BE PROTECTED? (EU-27, percentage)

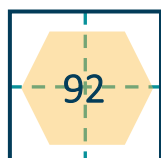


6

NOMENCLATURE OF TERRITORIAL UNITS FOR STATISTICS (NUTS)

Number of regions (units), upper and lower population size for ranking

Main socio-economic regions

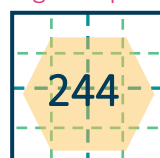


NUTS 1



3.0–7.0 million persons

Basic regions for the application of regional policies



NUTS 2



0.8–3.0 million persons

Smaller regions with a specific purpose



NUTS 3



0.15–0.8 million persons

SOURCES

- 1 European Commission (2024): [Flash Eurobarometer 539](#) | 2 European Commission (2023): [Flash Eurobarometer 531](#) |
- 3 Council of the European Union conclusions on improving and promoting access to culture ([C/2024/7446](#)) |
- 4 European Commission (2023): [Flash Eurobarometer 540](#) | 5 [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1059](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council | 6 Regulation (EC) No [1059/2003](#), [Eurostat](#): NUTS Correspondence tables (25.03.2025)