

# C4T

**Community  
of Practice**



## Flash Report -C4T Conference

25 JUNE 2025



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## Introduction

The 3rd edition of the Cohesion for Transition (C4T) Conference titled 'Driving sustainability transitions through Cohesion Policy' brought together the C4T Community of Practice, such as members of the C4T Academic Sound Board, C4T Working Groups, and C4T GROUNDWORK beneficiaries, as well as representatives of the European Commission, national and regional policymakers, national, regional, and local authorities, and practitioners to discuss how Cohesion Policy can drive sustainable transitions to achieve a greener and low-carbon. The Conference featured high-level contributions and interactive panels on the topics of funding sustainability, water resilience, affordable housing and circular waste management, and also showcased inspiring technical assistance examples via the C4T GROUNDWORK exhibition. This report summarises the main highlights and key takeaways from the four main sessions.

## Keynote address by Themis Christophidou, Director-General at DG REGIO

The keynote address took place between 09:45 and 10:00 CET; please click [here](#) for the recording.

**Ms Themis Christophidou, Director-General at DG REGIO**, opened the Conference and emphasised the importance of projects such as the C4T Community of Practice for Europe to achieve a sustainable transition towards a greener and low-carbon economy. For this, the C4T Community of Practice plays a vital role in turning high-level ambitions into actionable results. She further underlined that the Cohesion Policy is a proven enabler of green and just transitions, and that future reforms must strengthen its adaptability, performance, as well as its inclusiveness.



## Session 1 - Funding Sustainability: the co-benefits of climate resilience and competitiveness

Session 1 took place between 10:00 and 11:15 CET; please click [here](#) for the recording.

### Speakers:

- Nicola de Michelis, Director of Smart and Sustainable Growth and Programme Implementation IV at DG REGIO
- Jarosław Orliński, Director of the Department of Infrastructural Programmes at the Ministry of development Funds and Regional Policy of the Republic of Poland
- Eduardo Medeiros, ASB member and a Professor of Geography Professor and Research Fellow in Regional Resilience at Setúbal Polytechnic Institute



**Mr Jaroslaw Orliński** found that Cohesion Policy needs to be flexible to respond quickly to crises and changing contexts. The legislation process is long, so it is important to find a compromise to ensure funds are available to respond to current needs. He shared that in Poland, a modification of the Operational

Programme concerning modernising some investments was fast-tracked by DG REGIO, making a big impact by being able to implement these measures. He also noted that resilience is crucial to integrate in disaster relief funding mechanisms, especially for RESTORE which has recently been introduced by the European Parliament to help Member States affected by climate-related disasters repair damages and provide the population with most needed services. Poland is one of the Member States which received quick and much needed assistance through Regional Emergency Support to Reconstruction (RESTORE) following severe and destructive flooding in 2024. Mr Orliński observed that more investment are needed in economic development through the Cohesion Policy, with emphasis on investments in regions facing challenges to avoid issues of inequality within the EU.

**Mr Eduardo Medeiros** was of the opinion that it is impossible to have competitiveness in the EU without supporting environmental sustainability as a key dimension in all possible development strategies. In a recent publication, he outlines various barriers to the implementation of Cohesion Policy, such as multi-level institution connections, excessive bureaucracy, and a lack of public participatory approaches among others. He thought that the goal of Cohesion Policy should be to achieve territorial cohesion, to continue supporting monitoring assessment tools to assess impacts, to continue investing in sustainability, and to support social economic cohesion.

**Mr Nicola de Michelis** argued that reinforcing institutions and supporting capacity building should be at the centre of future investment strategies, as without administrative capacity in absorbing and managing resources, the resources will be wasted. He acknowledged that utilising EU funding can be complicated due to regulations, though they serve as checks and balances to ensure the resources are well spent and so there is a limit to the extent to which such rules can be simplified. He also found that administrative capacity and reform are necessary priorities of the Cohesion Policy to ensure that resources are effectively utilised. Lastly, he highlighted that climate change is the defining challenge of this generation, reinforcing the urgency of making investments work. In this context, he noted that Member States have access to large amounts of technical assistance funding, which remains underutilised, though there are many possibilities for how this funding can be spent. The C4T Community of Practice is a prime example of an instrument that can effectively support national and regional authorities with capacity building, identifying bottlenecks and structural issues, and providing support for the execution of technical assistance.

## Session 2 - Innovative Solutions for Water Resilience

Session 2 took place between 11:45 and 13:00 CET; please click [here](#) for the recording.

### Speakers:

- Luca Perez, Deputy Head of Unit C.1, Sustainable Freshwater Management Unit, DG ENV
- Myriam Bovéda, Team leader for Sustainable Growth, Unit G.1 Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO
- Gustáv Csomor, Coordinator of the Danube project Sponge City and Senior Priority Officer, Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Danube Region Programme.
- Gisela Martins, Head of Environment Division, Municipality of Valongo



**Mr Luca Perez** presented the [European Water Resilience Strategy](#), which was established as water resilience is an EU-wide cross-cutting issue. It has three main goals: (i) to restore and protect the water cycle, (ii) to build a water-smart EU economy, and (iii) to ensure clean and affordable water and sanitation for all. The Strategy is about transforming how we think about the use of water, and to make this more efficient as water is not an infinite source, and puts the implementation of existing water legislation at the centre. A digitalisation action plan for the water sector will be launched next year which is foreseen to help regional and local authorities leapfrog and take advantage of the provided opportunities for water

resilience. action plan for the water sector will be launched next year which is foreseen to help regional and local authorities leapfrog and take advantage of the provided opportunities for water resilience.

**Ms Myriam Bovéda** gave a presentation on how the Cohesion Policy supports water resilience via Policy Objective 2 “a greener, lower-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe”, highlighting that 24 billion Euros of EU funding is being used by regions to address water challenges. Following the mid-term review of the Cohesion Policy, water resilience is one of the five main priorities, aiming to encourage water investments. The mid-term review stressed water resilience as a vital part of cohesion, the need to build a water resilient society and protect water ecosystems, and proposes measures to strengthen investments in the water sector (e.g. allowing investments in wider areas such as restoration of water bodies and deployment of nature-based solutions to reduce flood risks).

**Mr Gustáv Csomor** explained that the object of the [Sponge city project](#) is to improve urban climate change adaptation capacities in the Danube Region by testing and promoting the sponge city methodology in transnational cooperation. Sponge city methodology is a nature-based solution focused on retention of water in urban areas and how to cope with weather extremes. The Sponge city project has produced an [online toolbox for urban planners](#) to identify vulnerable areas within their territory in connection to climate change and possible solutions to combat challenges. This tool is being used by 12 pilot settlements to develop local action plans, investment plans, and feasibility studies for sponge city investments.

**Ms Gisela Martins** shared her experience with receiving [C4T GROUNDWORK technical assistance](#) for the municipality of Valongo (PT), which she described as a territory of contrast where the challenge of urbanisation coexists with opportunities for environmental and ecological enhancement. As part of the received technical assistance, the municipality of Valongo (PT) worked with a national expert to design a well-planned and robust project to apply for funding to address a variety of challenges around the river ‘Ferreira’ in the Valongo area. The goal of the project would be to have part of the river requalified, to restore the river banks, and to monitor the river in real time.

One main take-away that **all speakers** agreed with is that local communities are crucial to achieve water resilience goals, as they are the first to be impacted by water issues and they implemented the solutions (especially nature-based solutions). Their involvement is also important to take ownership and provide their local knowledge on encountered challenges, as emphasised. In order to engage with the local community, **Ms Csomor** emphasised the importance of organising events to make them aware of the projects to implement solutions, while **Ms Martins** underlined the need to involve them from the start in the planning of projects. **Ms Boveda** highlighted that Communities of Practice, such as the C4T Community of Practice, are an example of bringing together stakeholders to work on future-proof solutions.

## Session 3 - From Policy to Action – Advancing Affordable Housing

*Session 3 took place between 14:00 and 15:00 CET; please click [here](#) for the recording.*

### Speakers:

- Tatiana Marquez Uriarte, Team leader, Task Force on Affordable Housing, DG ENER
- Aleš Mrkela, Head of Cross Border Programmes Management Division and Interreg Financial Mechanisms Office, Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development of Slovenia
- Kaspar Alev, Head of Housing Policy, Ministry of Climate of Estonia
- Riccardo Coletta, Senior Project Manager, APRE





**Ms Tatiana Marquez Uriarte** presented the EU Affordable Housing Task Force, launched in February 2025 to address the long-standing absence of a dedicated EU-level housing body despite growing concern among citizens. The task force intends to support Member States in developing affordable, sustainable, and decent housing strategies. Sustainable housing goes beyond energy efficiency, and also includes recycled materials and quality aesthetics, while decent housing refers to accessible, high-quality dwellings suitable for all, including people with disabilities. Priorities for the task force include launching a comprehensive EU Affordable Housing Action Plan in early 2026 and addressing both supply-side challenges and demand-side needs. To support these efforts, the Commission is working with the European Investment Bank on a pan-European financing platform and encourages Member States to reprogram Cohesion Funds to include housing, offering 100% co-financing and 30% pre-financing under the mid-term review.

**Mr Aleš Mrkela** showed that the [Zero500 project](#) was an example of how to blend funding from the European Regional Development Fund with national climate funds to achieve new affordable housing construction/renovation opportunities and energy poverty mitigation. The Zero500 project was further supported by a nationwide network of energy advisers, allowing the project to use a place-based approach to address challenges in regard to affordable housing and avoid the relocation of citizens to other areas.

**Mr Kaspar Alev** explained that the Estonian national strategy aims to renovate 16000 apartment buildings by 2050. The strategy is focused on deep renovations using prefabricated technologies, and does not provide funding for minor upgrades. It is currently being investigated to diversify the provided funding and include loans and direct support for vulnerable households. The strategy has activated a variety of cooperation with municipalities interested in proactive housing policy.

**Mr Riccardo Coletta** showcased [the Supershine project](#), which has pilot projects in Trieste (IT), Riga (LV), and Hanley (DK) on energy-efficient and inclusive housing. The project follows the pillars of the New European Bauhaus: sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion, while emphasising the need for co-designing solutions with tenants and communities in order to restore a sense of belonging. The project is currently exploring innovative financing (e.g. crowdfunding, public-private partnerships) and is developing replication plans with four additional cities across Europe.

One **key take-away from the panel session** was that EU housing initiatives must balance energy efficiency with affordability, as housing must be both affordable and sustainable. Renovation efforts should focus on the worst-performing buildings and prioritise support for vulnerable groups, using tailored co-financing mechanisms. Furthermore, local ownership and co-creation are essential, as successful projects involve residents early in the process, enabling co-creation of public spaces and fostering trust. Lastly, funding and technical support should be expanded, for instance by providing high co-financing rates for low-income households, expanding technical assistance, and providing regulatory clarity.

## Session 4 - From Waste to Resource – Circular Solutions in Action

Session 4 took place between 15:30 and 16:45 CET; please click [here](#) for the recording.

### Speakers:

- Agata Kotkowska, Deputy Head of Unit B.1, Circular Economy, Sustainable Production & Consumption DG ENV
- Francisco Carvalho, Geneal, Research & Innovation Coordinator, Laboratório da Paisagem.
- Chrysovalantis Ketikidis, Research Associate at CERTH and project coordinator for the Interreg project VERDEinMED.
- Elmar Willems, Facilitator Circular Economy, Circular Flanders.



**Ms Agata Kotkowska** presented a comprehensive EU policy update on the Circular Economy and Bioeconomy strategies, both expected to be adopted by the end of 2025. The strategies aim to modernise EU environmental policy and align it with the EU's climate neutrality goals. The **Circular Economy Act** focuses on three main pillars: (i) revision of the Waste Framework Directive to clarify end-of-waste criteria and improve digitalisation of waste shipments, (ii) economic measures to address market distortions, and (iii) updates to electrical and electronic waste regulation. The **Bioeconomy Strategy** promotes the sustainable and cascading use of biological resources (e.g. prioritising food use, followed by materials and energy), aiming to position the EU as a global leader in this domain. Ms Kotkowska announced the launch of a public consultation on the Circular Economy Act by **mid-July 2025**, and encouraged stakeholders to contribute to the final legislative proposal.

**Mr Francisco Carvalho** presented the efforts from Guimaraes (PT) as a CCRI [Pilot city](#) for **bio-waste collection and reuse**. The project created a local governance ecosystem to implement door-to-door biowaste collection and introduced a mechanism to sell the collected biowaste to southern regions in Portugal as fertiliser to support wine making. As a result, Guimarães now leads Portugal in biowaste collection with 6,000+ tons collected since the end of 2024.

**Mr Chrysovalantis Ketikidis** discussed the [VERDEinMED](#) Interreg project on circularity in the **textile and clothing sector**. The project aims to produce tools include a digital knowledge platform, local stakeholder hubs, and localised strategy support, addresses regional disparities in textile circularity and emphasised stakeholder support (e.g., industry, consumers, policymakers).

**Mr Elmar Willems** shared the work of [Circular Flanders](#) in **supporting municipalities** in circular economy transitions. Their key activities are capacity-building, providing tailored local support, circular procurement, political engagement, and climate policy integration. He highlighted the need for structural support through EU projects and the importance of local experimentation funded by open calls.

Three main key messages resulted from the panel discussion that followed: successful circular transitions require integrative governance that combines top-down policy with community-led action supported by tailored local capacity; stronger alignment is needed between Cohesion Policy and circular economy goals, with improved funding access (especially in less-developed regions) to accompany the Circular Economy Act; and actions must accelerate through scaling pilot initiatives, embracing innovation, and leveraging tools like public procurement to unlock the full potential of circularity.

## Closing remarks by Joanna Jakubowska, Programme Assistant at Unit G.1 Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO and Coordinator of the C4T Community of Practice

*The closing remarks took place between 16:45 and 17:00 CET; please click [here](#) for the recording.*

**Ms Joanna Jakubowska** reflected on two days of rich discussion within the C4T Community of Practice, emphasising its role as a platform that brings together stakeholders from EU, national, regional, and local levels to support sustainability through Cohesion Policy. She noted that the core message echoed throughout the Conference was that competitiveness and sustainability are not conflicting, but mutually reinforcing goals.



One take-away from Ms Jakubowska was that the Cohesion Policy must deliver on sustainability across diverse challenges, as was noted in all sessions: topics such as sustainable funding, water resilience, affordable housing, and circular economy were explored and their urgency was acknowledged, alongside the need for future-proof, nature-based solutions.

The role of the C4T Community of Practice is to accelerate the impact of the Cohesion Policy by supporting Managing Authorities in accelerating the absorption and impact of Cohesion Fund, and Ms Jakubowska reaffirmed the C4Ts commitment to do so by announcing the second call to apply for C4T GROUNDWORK technical assistance will open on 1 October 2025 and run until 17 November 2025.