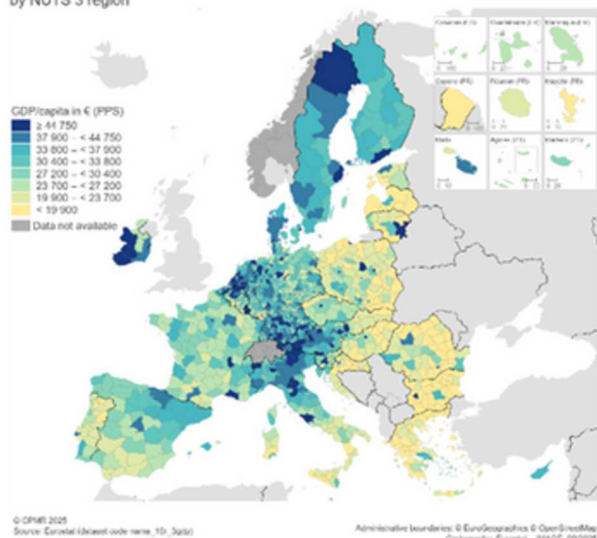


A EU that works for all regions: The Freedom To Stay

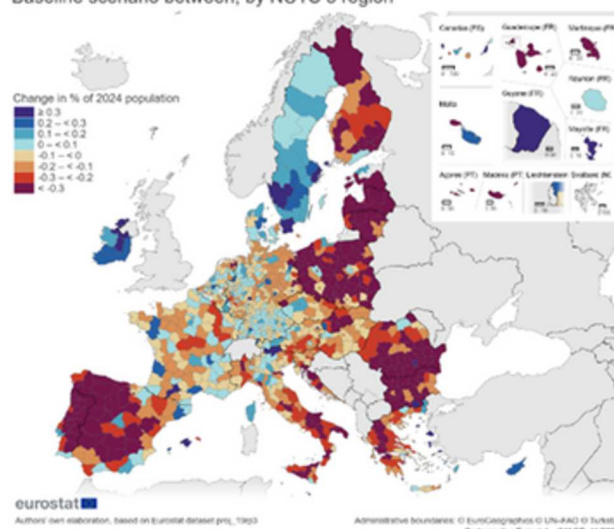
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Freedom to stay means that the EU Single Market should serve everyone, including those who choose to remain in their region. The Single Market, and the EU more broadly, must be designed to empower all individuals to shape their own futures. This requires Europe to do more for people living in disadvantaged areas than simply offering them the option to relocate to another country (freedom to move).

GDP per capita in PPS (2022)
by NUTS 3 region



Projected Population change between 2024 and 2100
Baseline scenario between, by NUTS 3 region



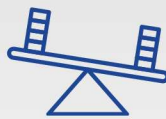
Territorial decline
has structural
consequences

WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT THE FREEDOM TO STAY?



DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE

If people lack opportunities in their region of origin, they might have no other possibility than to move to larger cities or even another country. Large parts of the EU will empty out of young and well-educated people, leaving behind an older and less-well adapted population. This will concern over 50% of NUTS 3 regions by 2100.



ECONOMIC POLARISATION

Outmigration will reduce both the available workforce as well as the customer base for local companies. Together with dis-investment by companies which see no future in the territory this can create a downward spiral. Physical and social infrastructure is under-utilised and cannot be maintained, reducing further regional attractiveness.



SOCIAL ISOLATION

Those unable to leave are often feeling marginalized, deepening social inequality. This leads to an erosion of community cohesion and in the long term a breakdown of social networks, as well as local identity and heritage. The feeling of being left behind can create distrust in authorities, including the EU, and those benefitting more from the modern economy.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

Current trends go in the opposite direction to the freedom to stay. What can be done to create opportunities for people in those regions currently in a development trap? Which policies can actually create the conditions for all people to remain in their regions if they wish to do so? Do regions need to invest in aspects that make themselves attractive to companies? Should they invest in social infrastructure to attract people? Or maybe the focus needs to be on the people remaining and increase their quality of life? Those and more questions will be discussed at **our event 'Don't move! Using economic policy to help people stay on 15 October 2025 in the Committee of the Regions.** More information [here](#).