



Advancing integrated territorial development through place-based cooperation in Lower Saxony

SUMMARY

The 'Future Regions in Lower Saxony' programme was established in 2021 to implement ERDF and ESF+ funding through integrated, place-based territorial strategies. With a total budget of around EUR 96 million, this regional programme supports 14 sub-regional partnerships which function as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs), each covering several counties. These partnerships develop 'future concepts' aligned with a regional strategy and deliver projects through dedicated regional management structures and multi-stakeholder governance.



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CONTEXT

Located in north-west Germany, Lower Saxony is a large and diverse federal state of around eight million inhabitants, spanning major cities, smaller towns and extensive rural areas with very different development needs. Delivering EU cohesion policy funding effectively across such varied territories presents a governance challenge.

A delivery model was needed that could combine state-wide strategic direction with genuine place-based decision-making, encourage cooperation across municipal and sectoral boundaries, and give sub-regional partnerships the means to design and manage their own integrated projects.

The programme was established as an overarching regional instrument, through which cohesion funding is allocated for the implementation of integrated, locally designed projects.



OBJECTIVES

- > Implement ERDF and ESF+ funds in an integrated, place-based way, aligning a single state-wide strategy with the specific priorities of each sub-region;
- > Provide regional and local authorities and stakeholders with greater flexibility to address local challenges through bottom-up approaches;
- > Foster cooperation across municipalities and sectors by empowering sub-regional partnerships to design and manage their own integrated projects.

Themes: Governance

Country: Germany

Organisations:

> State Chancellery of Lower Saxony, public authority

> Lower Saxony Ministry for Economic Affairs, Transport and Construction, public authority

Start & end date: 01/2021 - ongoing

Budget: Approximately EUR 95 million

Funding sources:

> European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

> European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)

Website: https://www.europa-fuer-niedersachsen.niedersachsen.de/startseite/regionen_und_foerderung/efre_und_esf/konzepte-der-zukunftsregionen-in-niedersachsen-225235.html

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

Lower Saxony established the Future Regions programme in 2021 and invited sub-regional partnerships (typically of four to six counties) to apply. This involved **submitting a 'future concept' strategy identifying a limited number of thematic priorities and an operational programme**. A total of 14 partnerships were selected, each of which functions as an Integrated Territorial Investment.

A single **regional strategy sets the key political priorities**, while the **sub-regional partnerships build integrated strategies aligned to these priorities**.

Implementation is structured around four main elements:

- > **Strategy development and Future Regions selection:** forming of sub-regional partnerships, designation of a lead partner (usually a public authority) and submission of applications. The selected partnerships receive regional funding;
- > **Steering at regional level:** the state's Ministry for Economic Affairs, Transport and Construction (the ERDF and ESF+ managing authority) provides the strategic framework, allocates funding and oversees implementation across the whole of Lower Saxony;
- > **Management and governance at sub-regional level:** each ITI is supported by a dedicated regional management structure for coordination and project development, while a multi-stakeholder steering committee (municipalities, civil society organisations, economic actors and other partners) guides its strategic orientation. LEADER Local Action Groups are not formally integrated into this structure and continue to operate separately under the common agricultural policy, but both approaches coexist in the same territories;
- > **Building capacity and peer learning:** the State Chancellery of Lower Saxony organises and supports capacity-building and networking events which bring together representatives of all 14 Future Regions. This helps manage the complexity of coordinating across governance levels and funding streams.



RESULTS

- > **14 Future Regions were selected** covering the whole of Lower Saxony, with partnerships typically including four to six counties.
- > Around **EUR 96 million in ERDF and ESF+ funding is being delivered** through integrated, locally designed projects rather than via centralised, sector-by-sector calls.
- > By early 2026, the programme had almost **100 projects approved**.
- > Each region now has a **dedicated regional management system that organises cooperation and develops joint projects**, building lasting territorial capacity beyond any single project.
- > The State Chancellery of Lower Saxony reports **improved intermunicipal cooperation** in the majority of Future Regions and **strong stakeholder involvement** in many territories.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > **A preparation phase is necessary:** developing strategies, rules and guidance takes time, and territorial instruments cannot be fully set up within a single year.
- > **Invest in dedicated management:** giving each partnership a clear and professional regional management structure turns a strategy on paper into deliverable projects.
- > **Plan for administrative complexity:** coordinating across governance levels and two funding streams (ERDF and ESF+) adds administrative burden; this needs to be anticipated and actively supported rather than underestimated.
- > **Use peer learning to build capacity:** Lower Saxony invested in peer learning and support, through network events, exchange formats and training on state-aid rules, project design and scoring.



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