

Organised by:

Orchestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness

OECD Trento Centre and its Spatial Productivity Lab

The Productivity Institute

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Institutional local partner:

Government of Bizkaia

From analysis to action: Harnessing local policies to boost productivity

In-person policy conference

SECOND EDITION

15-16 April 2026 | Bilbao, Spain

AGENDA





■ Why this event / Objectives

Productivity underpins economic competitiveness and the achievement of high levels of wellbeing. The key drivers of productivity, such as innovation, skills and infrastructure, are highly place specific, a fact that is reflected in the persistence of regional disparities in economic and social performance.

The implication is clear: **productivity policies require a spatial lens**. Yet this spatial lens is also highly dynamic at a time when places are facing complex challenges related to sustainability transitions, demographic shifts, rapid technological change and a changing geopolitical scenario. In this context there is more need than ever to explore and understand how local policy can navigate these challenges and boost productivity as a route to sustainable wellbeing.

This conference brings together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to strengthen the evidence base, share lessons, and **bridge analysis with actionable strategies** for effective place-based development.

■ Participants

The conference is open to **policy makers, academics, experts and practitioners** from national and local governments, international organisations, research centres and think-tanks.

■ Working language

All sessions will be conducted in **English**.

■ Dates & venue

The event will take place on **15-16 April 2026** in Bilbao, Basque Country (Spain) at the **BAT Tower**.

■ Attending the event

Attendance is free of charge but there are limited places and registration is necessary. Please register via the [online platform](#) as soon as possible and **not later than 20 March 2026**.

Registrations will be processed in the order in which they are received. Registrations will close once the maximum limit is reached, even if that is before the official closing date. The organisers reserve the right to limit participation.

Food and drink are provided during the conference, and all participants are invited to a conference dinner on the first day. Travel to Bilbao and accommodation expenses will be the responsibility of the participants.

■ Organisers

Orkestra - Basque Institute of Competitiveness is a research centre for the study of regional competitiveness based at the University of Deusto. Established in 2006, it has an explicit mission to conduct transformative research, working with stakeholders in the Basque Country and internationally to generate tangible improvements in competitiveness and wellbeing.

The **OECD Trento Centre for Local Development** is an integral part of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities and works "from data to practice" to provide strategic advice and capacity building to enhance local policy implementation. Building on the granular analysis of its Spatial Productivity Lab (SPL) and leveraging Trento and other communities as "living labs", the Trento Centre has been developing innovative and effective approaches to local development for over 20 years.

The Productivity Institute is a UK-wide research organisation which aims to pinpoint the causes of the stagnation in UK productivity and focus energies to laying the foundations for a new era of sustained and inclusive productivity growth through interdisciplinary research in collaboration with businesses and policymakers.

The **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)** is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. It was founded with the purpose of contributing to the economic development of Latin America, coordinating actions directed towards this end, and reinforcing economic ties among countries and with other nations of the world.



Day 1: Wednesday, 15 April 2026

Venue: BAT Tower, Bilbao

13.00-14.30 *Registration and welcome lunch*

14.30-14.45 ■ Opening

Welcome remarks by organisers and local authorities

14.45-16.15 ■ SESSION 1: Knowledge flows for industrial transformation

The industries rooted in our regions are in continuous processes of transformation that are intimately linked with their productivity: failure to transform regional industries (or clusters) in the right directions risks falling behind in productivity. Knowledge flows are central to these processes of transformation and productivity enhancement, and the role of proximity is widely recognized in concepts such as regional innovation systems. Universities, research centers and other knowledge organizations play key roles within place-based innovation systems, but the connections that facilitate effective direction and use of knowledge for industrial transformation require deliberate strategies, structures and policies. There are also new questions being raised by the fast-moving AI era that we are entering and by new geopolitical scenarios that may impact on international flows of knowledge as places seek greater strategic autonomy. In this session we will focus on how to bridge the gaps between different forms of knowledge generation and industrial applications and discuss how local innovation strategies can harness knowledge-fueled productivity growth.

16.15-16.30 *Coffee break*

16.30-18.00 ■ SESSION 2: Skills ecosystems in the AI era

Driving forwards industrial transformation and generating local productivity growth depend critically on the people working in firms and knowledge organisations. Skill shortages and an aging workforce are widespread concerns across OECD regions, and each place faces distinct challenges in adapting its skills ecosystem to the demands of a rapidly evolving production system. Indeed, the diffusion of generative artificial intelligence and other automation technologies may yield large productivity gains and potentially ease some of the pressure on labour markets, but they will also change the types of skills that are needed, drastically and rapidly reducing demand for some skills and placing a premium on others. This session focuses on local labour market and talent policies and innovative solutions aimed at bridging skill gaps, increasing labour market participation, and enhancing workforce mobility, talent attraction and retention. In addition, it will explore the future of work, discuss how workers can cope with changes brought by new technologies and what kind of cities and regions are best positioned to embrace these changes.

20.00-22.00 *Dinner*



Day 2: Thursday, 16 April 2026

Venue: BAT Tower, Bilbao

09.30-11.00 ■ **SESSION 3: Institutional welcome and high-level panel**

A long term vision for investing in people, firms and places

Building sustainable place-based productivity is not an overnight task and requires consistent investment with a long-term vision. This is something that neither the public sector nor the private sector can achieve alone: sophisticated public-private collaboration is critical both for generating the long-term vision and for operationalising the investments in people, places and firms needed to drive continuous productivity enhancements. International institutions also play a critical supporting role in this equation in many contexts, both in terms of knowledge/expertise and financial support. This session brings together high-level representatives from key international organisations and academic expertise to discuss where and how places should be prioritising long-term investments in productivity-generating capacities at a time of high international instability.

11.00-11.30 *Coffee break*

11.30-13.00 ■ **SESSION 4: Leveraging environmental sustainability and energy transition to drive local productivity**

There is a clear imperative for policies that foster a green transition whereby regional industries and the behaviour patterns of citizens become more environmentally sustainable. Energy transition, in particular, is at the heart of debates, given the dependency of regional economies and societies on affordable energy and the impacts of energy prices on both industrial competitiveness and individual wellbeing. While regions around the world are grappling with some of the trade-offs inherent in the transition to cleaner energy and a more sustainable economy, and specific local conditions make the green transition more challenging for some places, there are also important synergies with productivity growth. This session will explore how local policies can leverage environmental sustainability and energy transition to drive local productivity growth.

13.00-14.15 *Lunch*

14.14-15.45 ■ **SESSION 5: Ensuring a balanced approach to territorial productivity**

Aggregate figures on local economic growth can mask important disparities between regions in the same country, between geographical areas within the same region, and between demographic groups within the same community. Local economic structures as well as other factors such as institutions and policies cause regions to react to shocks differently, with some areas being disproportionately affected due to their reliance on specific industries and other types of lock-ins. Factors such as education levels, gender, age, place of birth, and the skill content of occupations further determine who benefits most from growth, and who is left behind. Public investments and local leadership are crucial to ensure that the positive outcomes of successful transformations are shared with vulnerable groups. In this session, we explore how local development strategies can ensure that productivity gains are shared equitably across all workers and residents.

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In-person policy conference (*Second edition*)

15-16 April 2026 | Bilbao, Bizkaia (Spain)

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Organised by:



Local institutional partner:

