

Organised by:

Orkestra-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, Bizkaia (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.

ECLAC's participation in this conference is made possible through the support of German Cooperation (BMZ).





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

- Cristina Múgica - Director of Territorial Competitiveness and International Promotion, Government of Bizkaia (Spain)
- Rudiger Ahrend - Head of Division, Economic Analysis, Data and Statistics Division, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (France)
- Iván Marten - President, Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (Spain)

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.

- **Moderator:** Raquel Ortega-Argiles - Director of The Productivity Lab and Chair of Regional Economic Development at Alliance Manchester Business School (United Kingdom)
- **Reality Check:** Ana Lehmann - Professor of Economics, University of Porto and Former State Secretary for Industry in the Portuguese Government (Portugal)
- **Insights from the research frontier:** Luisa Gagliardi – Assistant Professor, Bocconi University (Italy)
- **Sharing the evidence:** Enric Fuster – Consulting Director, Siris Academic (Spain)
- **Policy pitch:** Olly Bartrum - Head of Industrial Analysis, Department for Business and Trade, UK Government (United Kingdom)



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.

- **Moderator:** Xabier Goenaga - Former European Commission Official (Spain)
- **Reality Check:** Estibaliz Goñi - Director of Processes and Technology, Iberdrola (Spain)
- **Insights from the research frontier:** Tommaso Ciarli – Senior Researcher UNU-MERIT (Netherlands)
- **Sharing the evidence:** Andrea Conte - Territorial Data Analysis and Modelling Team Coordinator, Joint Research Centre, European Commission (Spain)
- **Policy pitch:** Amaia Jugo – General Director, Bizkaia Talent (Spain)

20.00-22.00 *Dinner ([San Mames Restaurant](#))*



Day 2: Thursday, 16 April 2026

Venue: BAT Tower, Bilbao

09.00-09:30 ■ Institutional address

Bizkaia's long-term investment strategy: Ainara Basurko - Deputy for Economic Development, Government of Bizkaia (Spain)

09:30-11:00 ■ SESSION 3: Policy 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 distinguished 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.

Moderator: Mari Jose Aranguren - Vice-Rector for the San Sebastian campus and Institutional Relations, University of Deusto (Spain)

Policy panel:

- Karen Maguire - Senior Counsellor for Strategic Coherence, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (France)
- Christian Ketels - Lead Economist, Competitiveness Unit, World Bank (United States)
- Marco Dini - Head of Governance and Territorial Productive Development Unit, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Chile)
- Stefan Appel - Head of European Semester and Economic Analysis Unit, DG REGIO, European Commission (Belgium)

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.

- **Moderator:** Zuzana Zavorska – Economist, OECD Spatial Productivity Lab (Italy)



- **Reality Check:** Richard Harding and Claire Nauwelaers - Independent consultants (Belgium)
- **Insights from the research frontier:** Alberto Marzucchi - Associate Professor of Applied Economics, Gran Sasso Science Institute (Italy)
- **Sharing the evidence:** Carlo Menon – Manager, OECD Spatial Productivity Lab (Italy)
- **Policy pitch:** Tim Husmann - Managing Director, Energy Hub Emsland (Germany)

13.00-14.15 *Lunch*

14.15-15.45 ■ **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.

- **Moderator:** Rudiger Ahrend - Head of Division, Economic Analysis, Data and Statistics Division, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (France)
- **Reality Check:** María Pilar Lopez - Secretary for Economic Development, Bogota City Government (Colombia)
- **Insights from the research frontier:** Phillip McCann - Sir Terry Leahy Chair of Urban and Regional Economics at Alliance Manchester Business School (United Kingdom)
- **Sharing the evidence:** Edurne Magro – Senior Researcher, Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (Spain)
- **Policy pitch:** Alice Rubbra - Assistant Director, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (United Kingdom)

15.45- 16.00 ■ **Closing Summary**

- **Moderator:** James Wilson – General Director, Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (Spain)
- Raquel Ortega-Argiles - Director of The Productivity Lab and Chair of Regional Economic Development at Alliance Manchester Business School (United Kingdom)
- Xabier Goenaga - Former European Commission Official (Spain)
- Zuzana Zavorska – Economist, OECD Spatial Productivity Lab (Italy)
- Rudiger Ahrend - Head of Division, Economic Analysis, Data and Statistics Division, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (France)



Practical information

■ About Bilbao and Bizkaia

Bilbao is the main city of Bizkaia, a dynamic region in the north of Spain, part of the Basque Country. Over the past decades, Bilbao has undergone a remarkable transformation, combining a strong industrial and economic tradition with contemporary architecture, culture and innovation.

[Bizkaia](#) offers a unique mix of urban life, coastline and green landscapes, as well as a rich cultural identity, renowned gastronomy and a strong commitment to sustainability and economic development. Visitors will find a compact, walkable city with excellent public transport and a welcoming atmosphere.

■ How to get to Bilbao

By air: Bilbao Airport (BIO) offers connections to major European cities, as well as daily direct flights to Madrid, where you can easily connect to destinations around the world. From the airport, the city centre can be reached easily by bus, taxi or car. A direct bus service (Bizkaibus line A3247), which runs every 15-30 minutes, links the airport with the city centre in approximately 30 minutes. One of the stops, Plaza Moyua, is within walking distance of the event venue. Other nearby airports, such as Santander (SDR), Vitoria-Gasteiz (VIT) and San Sebastián (EAS), also offer additional flight options and are well connected to Bilbao by public transport.

By train: The main railway station is Bilbao-Abando Indalecio Prieto, located in the city centre and well connected to metro, bus and taxi services.

By public transport: Bilbao has a modern and efficient public transport system, including metro,

tram and urban buses, making it easy to move around the city and reach the event venue

■ Event Venue | B Accelerator Tower

The event will take place at [BAT – B Accelerator Tower](#), a landmark building located in the heart of Bilbao. BAT is an international hub for entrepreneurship, innovation and collaboration, bringing together startups, corporations, investors and public institutions.

The venue is centrally located on Gran Vía, Bilbao's main avenue, and is easily accessible on foot or by public transport.

■ Accommodation

The following hotels are conveniently located in central Bilbao, within walking distance or a short ride from the venue:

- [Hotel Abando](#): Located in the Abando district, close to the city centre and main transport connections. A comfortable option with easy access to the venue and Bilbao's main attractions.
- [Sercotel Ayala](#): A highly rated hotel near the main shopping streets and transport hubs. Its central location makes it a practical choice for event participants.
- [Sercotel Coliseo Bilbao](#): Near Plaza Moyua and Gran Vía, this hotel offers excellent public transport connections and easy access to the event venue.

■ Useful links

For more information about Bilbao, Bizkaia and things to do during your stay, you may find the following resources useful:

- [Bizkaia Tourism](#)
- [Bilbao Tourism](#)
- Public Transport in Bilbao: [Tram](#), [Metro](#) and [Trains](#).

From analysis to action: Harnessing local policies to boost productivity

In-person policy conference (*Second edition*)

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

■ Contacts

Carlo Menon (OECD)

carlo.menon@oecd.org

Edurne Magro (Orkestra)

edurne.magro@orquestra.deusto.es

Raquel Ortega-Argiles (TPI)

raquel.ortega-argiles@manchester.ac.uk

Organised by:



Local institutional partner:

