

Regional Diagnosis

Alentejo Regional Coordination and Development Commission, Public
Institute (CCDRA, I.P.)

Executive Summary

This regional diagnosis constitutes the first step of the INTEGRA project – Integrated Territorial Strategies for a Sustainable Transition – under Interreg Europe. It sets out a critical, evolutionary, and improvement-oriented assessment of the regional model through which integrated territorial strategies are designed, governed, and delivered in the Alentejo, taking the ALENTEJO 2030 Regional Programme as the central reference. The analysis is structured around the six building blocks of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) framework — strategic dimension, territorial focus, governance, cross-sectoral integration, funding and implementation, and monitoring — complemented by an additional module on transformative capacity introduced by the INTEGRA project. The evidence base combines the systematic review of strategic and operational documents, the 2025 independent evaluation of the Alentejo Regional Programme 2021–2027, and the institutional experience of the Managing Authority (CCDR Alentejo, I.P.) and its partners.

This documentary foundation was validated, enriched, and deepened through a structured stakeholder consultation held on 25 March 2026, which brought together Intermunicipal Communities, municipalities, the scientific and technological system, Local Action Groups, development associations, business associations, and social-sector organisations, supplemented by additional written contributions. Stakeholders expressed a very positive view both of the INTEGRA project, recognised for its relevance and timeliness, and of the diagnosis itself, which was considered broadly aligned with the region’s dynamics and needs. The most relevant points and challenges that emerged from these contributions — organised across the seven analytical dimensions — are synthesised below.

Most relevant points emerging from the contributions. Stakeholders confirmed that the Alentejo has a coherent and well-defined strategic framework, anchored in ALENTEJO 2030 and explicitly aligned with European and national priorities. The multi-level governance architecture is formally robust, with clearly defined roles for the Managing Authority, intermediate bodies, the Monitoring Committee, the Intermunicipal Communities, and the municipalities. The portfolio of territorial instruments — the Territorial Plan for a Just Transition for the Alentejo Litoral, the ITI of the Intermunicipal Communities, the ITI for Water and Landscape Ecosystems, the PROVERE strategies, and the Non-Urban Cohesion Partnerships — was recognised as a rich expression of place-based policy-making, capable of embedding territorial specificities within the Regional Programme. Inter-municipal partnerships, such as the joint initiative of the five municipalities along the Guadiana River, were highlighted as evidence that cooperation frameworks can overcome the limitations of scale and capacity faced by smaller authorities. The international recognition of the Serra de Serpa montado as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System by the Food and Agriculture Organization was also underlined as a strategic asset that differentiates the territory. Across the seven dimensions, the contributions pointed to transferable good practices — the territorialisation of the Just Transition Fund, the formal integration of sub-regional strategies, emerging experiences of inter-institutional coordination, and the growing use of digital platforms and monitoring tools — with clear potential to inform interregional learning within the INTEGRA partnership.

Challenges identified across the seven dimensions. On the strategic dimension, stakeholders pointed to an excessive dependence of planning on funding cycles and called for more realistic, implementation-oriented strategies and for the systematic incorporation of medium- and long-term foresight. On the territorial focus, the structural asymmetry between urban centres — which benefit from specialised departments dedicated to European funds — and low-density municipalities, where generalist staff must combine multiple responsibilities, was flagged as a major constraint; the loss of fund integration, with LEADER now confined to the EAFRD, was highlighted as particularly damaging for the coherence of integrated approaches. On governance, institutional fragmentation was confirmed, together with the observation that funding instruments tend to foster territorial competition rather than collaboration, and that NGOs and non-profit organisations — often the most effective actors at community level — face persistent difficulties in accessing funds.

On cross-sectoral integration, the contributions confirmed that strategies are designed in an integrated manner but are diluted at the implementation stage by rigid, sector-specific calls for proposals; the proposal of multi-fund calls structured around local development strategies, and the revival of the social innovation approach tested in previous programmes, emerged as concrete avenues for improvement. On funding and implementation — the most recurrent theme of the consultation — stakeholders underlined the lack of continuity of interventions after the end of funding cycles, the absence of instruments to scale up successful pilot projects, and the need for greater autonomy in fund management, for the broader use of simplified cost options, and for more flexible and coordinated funding models grounded in ongoing dialogue between managing and implementing bodies. On monitoring and evaluation, the limitations of current systems focused on financial execution were emphasised, and a clear call was made for qualitative, territorial indicators capable of capturing actual improvements in quality of life — such as the retention of young people or the reduction of isolation among elderly populations — and for the fuller use of existing platforms such as ODS Local. On transformative capacity, stakeholders proposed the creation of a laboratory for testing new approaches to the co-design of social and environmental policies, a capacity-building mechanism through which more experienced bodies would support smaller local authorities in preparing complex applications, and the integration of foresight methodologies into strategic planning, with a stronger role for higher education institutions in the production of applied knowledge and in the evaluation of pilot projects.

Taken together, the contributions confirm a recurring tension between strategic ambition and operational capacity, and point to a regional model that is strategically well-conceived but operationally constrained. They also make clear that the diagnosis should be understood as a living instrument, designed to support debate, to enable mutual learning with partner regions, and to inform the preparation of more transformative territorial policy instruments for the post-2027 programming period. The detailed findings and preliminary policy implications are developed in the sections that follow.

1. General Context and Regional Model of Integrated Territorial Strategies

This regional diagnosis constitutes the first step of the INTEGRA project – Integrated Territorial Strategies for a Sustainable Transition – under Interreg Europe. Its objective is to analyse the regional model for the design, governance, and implementation of integrated territorial strategies in the Alentejo, with a particular focus on its capacity to promote a sustainable, inclusive, and transformative transition.

The assessment is based on a qualitative and critical analysis of the regional model, supported primarily by:

- Strategic and operational documents of the ALENTEJO 2030 Regional Programme;
- Evaluation and monitoring reports already produced;
- Direct implementation experience of the Managing Authority and involved entities.

The assessment incorporates the contributions gathered during the structured stakeholder consultation process, held on 25 March 2026, involving a broad range of relevant regional actors. This process allowed for the validation, supplementation, and deepening of the empirical evidence initially gathered, reinforcing the robustness of the analysis and ensuring greater alignment with the dynamics and needs of the territory¹.

The results presented thus reflect a more participatory approach, constituting a solid foundation for mutual learning and for the continuous improvement of territorial policy instruments.

2. Key findings of the assessment

The Alentejo has a coherent strategic framework aligned with European priorities, based on ALENTEJO 2030, which serves as the main policy instrument for the territorial implementation of cohesion policy. The regional model is characterised by:

- a strong strategic orientation, aligned with the EU's Policy Objectives and the Portugal 2030 Strategy;
- the existence of integrated sub-regional strategies, particularly at the level of intermunicipal communities and specific functional areas (e.g., Alentejo Litoral / Just Transition Fund);

¹ (Terras Dentro, ESDIME, Rota do Guadiana), Intermunicipal Communities (CIMAC, CIMAA, CIMAL), academy (University of Évora), Civil Society Organizations (Earth Project/Terra Sintrópica) and international partners (PACT).

- formally structured multilevel governance, with challenges in practical coordination between levels and actors;
- implementation still marked by sectoral fragmentation, procedural complexity, and an imbalance between strategic ambition and operational capacity, limiting the transformative potential of integrated territorial strategies.

The regional model thus reveals a recurring tension between strategic ambition and operational capacity, limiting the transformative potential of integrated territorial strategies.

3. Strengths and weaknesses of the regional model

Strengths

- Solid strategic foundation, with a clear and coherent territorial vision;
- Formal integration of territorial and functional strategies within the regional programme framework;
- Existence of innovative instruments, such as the Territorial Plan for a Just Transition, which introduces a logic of territorial justice and sustainable transition;
- Accumulated technical capacity within the Managing Authority and in some territorial entities;
- Explicit alignment with European priorities (green transition, digitalisation, and inclusion).

Weaknesses

- Fragmentation of the governance model, with multiple actors and responsibilities that are not always well coordinated;
- Uneven institutional capacity among territories and implementing entities;
- Excessive administrative complexity, affecting beneficiaries and delaying implementation;
- Weak cross-sectoral integration during the implementation phase, despite an integrated strategic design;
- Limitations in results-oriented monitoring and territorial impact assessment;
- Limited systematic incorporation of stakeholder feedback into strategy adaptation.

4. Good practices, opportunities, and future challenges

Good practices and transferable elements

- The territorialisation of the Just Transition Fund as a response to structural shocks;
- The formal integration of subregional strategies within the programme framework;
- Emerging experiences in interinstitutional coordination and organisational learning;
- Increasing use of digital platforms and monitoring tools.

Opportunities

- Strengthen collaborative governance and policy the co-production with stakeholders;
- Simplify procedures and improve the usability of tools;
- Strengthen the place-based approach by tailoring tools to local specificities;
- Move toward more flexible, results-oriented funding models;
- Capitalise on the post-2027 period to redesign more transformative territorial instruments.

Key future challenges

- Move from predominantly formal integration to effective functional integration;
- Strengthen the transformative capacity of strategies, going beyond incremental changes;
- Ensure coherence between strategic objectives, financial instruments, and implementation;
- Improve the coordination between the green transition, digital transformation, and social cohesion;
- Building monitoring systems that support continuous learning and adaptation.

5. Final Considerations

The assessment shows that the Alentejo has a regional model with solid foundations, but faces structural challenges common to many European regions. In this context, the INTEGRA project emerges as a strategic opportunity to critically reflect on this model, learn from other regions, and contribute to improving integrated territorial strategies in the post-2027 period.

It is also important to highlight that, as part of the stakeholder consultation process, there was a very positive overall assessment, not only regarding the INTEGRA project, recognised as a relevant and timely initiative, but also regarding the diagnosis itself, which was considered generally adequate, relevant, and aligned with the territory's main dynamics and challenges.

This executive summary should therefore be understood as a starting point: an initial knowledge base, validated and enriched by the contributions of regional actors, which will be further developed through interregional learning, the continuous involvement of stakeholders, and the joint construction of transformative agendas for territorial cohesion and sustainable transition.

1. Introduction

The preparation of this regional assessment is part of the INTEGRA project—Integrated Territorial Strategies for a Sustainable Transition—co-funded by the Interreg Europe Programme and represents the first step in a broader process of mutual learning and improvement of regional public policies.

The assessment aims to analyse the regional model for the design, governance, and implementation of integrated territorial strategies in the Alentejo, using the ALENTEJO 2030 Regional Programme as its primary policy reference. The analysis does not focus on an isolated strategy, but rather on the systemic model through which territorial strategies are designed, approved, and implemented, as well as on its capacity to address the challenges of territorial cohesion and sustainable transition.

The perspective adopted is deliberately critical, evolutionary, and improvement-oriented, recognising that the diagnosis is not a static description of the current state, but rather an analytical basis to support debate, interregional learning, and preparation for the post-2027 period.

1.1 General Regional Context

The Alentejo is the largest region in mainland Portugal in terms of area, covering approximately 31,551 km², which corresponds to roughly one-third of the country's total territory. Despite this vast expanse, the region is characterised by a low population density—about 18 inhabitants per km², far below the national average (115 inhabitants per km²) —, with approximately 700,000 residents spread across 58 municipalities organised into four Intermunicipal Communities (Central Alentejo, Upper Alentejo, Coastal Alentejo, and Lower Alentejo) and the Lezíria do Tejo. From a demographic perspective, the Alentejo has an ageing index exceeding 200 (more than double the national average), with a proportion of the population aged 65 or older exceeding 28%, and a continuing trend of population loss that INE projections indicate will intensify through 2030. The birth rate is among the lowest in the country, and the region faces chronic difficulties in retaining its young and skilled population, particularly in inland areas.

From an economic perspective, the Alentejo's GDP per capita (2024) stands at around 77.1% of the national average and above 75% of the European average. The economic structure is based on sectors such as agriculture and agro-industry—including intensive olive cultivation, viticulture, and livestock farming—tourism (notably the Alentejo Coast and the cultural heritage of Évora, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site), extractive industries, logistics, and port activities (the Port of Sines, Portugal's largest cargo port), and, increasingly, renewable energy (solar photovoltaics, green hydrogen). The region also boasts major investment hubs in the aerospace sector (Ponte de Sor) and in agri-food technologies.

With regard to the urban network, the region is characterised by a fragile polycentric structure. Internal disparities are significant: the Alentejo Litoral benefits from its proximity to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and the Sines industrial complex, while the Alto Alentejo and the inland Baixo Alentejo face conditions of landlockedness, isolation, and a scarcity of public services.

At the same time, the Alentejo plays a central role in contributing to several of the European Union's strategic priorities, positioning itself as a key territory for:

- the energy transition, with strong potential and investment in renewable energy, green hydrogen, and associated infrastructure;
- the sustainable management of natural resources, with a particular focus on water, soil, and biodiversity;
- agriculture and agro-industry, as structural sectors of the regional economy;
- logistics, mobility, and port activities, with emphasis on the Sines complex as a strategic national and European asset;
- and the just transition, in the context of the economic restructuring of the Alentejo Litoral following the closure of the Sines Thermal Power Plant.

From an environmental perspective, the region combines significant natural and scenic values with growing pressures stemming from climate change, water scarcity, intensified land use, and the need to reconcile economic development with environmental sustainability and territorial resilience.

This set of characteristics places the Alentejo in a position that is both challenging and strategic: on the one hand, it faces structural constraints associated with low population density and territorial fragmentation; on the other, it possesses unique conditions to implement innovative solutions in the areas of energy transition, climate adaptation, and integrated territorial management.

Institutionally, the Alentejo is characterised by complex multilevel governance, involving the Regional Programme Management Authority, intermunicipal communities, municipalities, national sectoral entities, and a broad range of economic and social actors. In this context, the development of integrated territorial strategies is particularly important, as they can foster coordination among policies, sectors, and decision-making levels, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of interventions and territorial cohesion.

1.2 Scope of the Analysis

The scope of this assessment focuses on the regional model for the development and implementation of integrated territorial strategies, with a particular emphasis on the role of the ALENTEJO 2030 Regional Programme as a key instrument of cohesion policy in the region.

The analysis covers:

- the types of existing territorial strategies (sub-regional strategies, functional strategies, just transition instruments, among others);
- their positioning within the framework of cohesion policy and their articulation with other national and European strategic frameworks;
- programming processes, from strategic design to approval and implementation;
- the institutional actors involved, including their respective roles and responsibilities;
- the mechanisms for coordination, participation, and multilevel coordination (EU, national, regional, and local).

Under the Alentejo 2030 Regional Programme and in accordance with the guidelines set forth in Article 29 of REGULATION (EU) 2021/1060 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of June 24, 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund, and the European Maritime Affairs Fund, Fisheries, and Aquaculture, and financial rules applicable to those funds and to the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund, and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, the following Territorial Strategies have been included in the programme:

- ITI CIM;
- ITI Water and Landscape Ecosystems;
- ITI Integrated Territorial Intervention in the Oeste e Vale do Tejo (IIBT OVT);
- ITI Urban Networks;
- PROVERE – Collective Efficiency Strategy;
- Partnerships for Non-Urban Strategy;
- Just Transition Fund (since it does not fall under the aforementioned article, it is intended to be treated in a manner similar to territorial strategies).

Strategy	Thematic Priorities	Thematic Focus	Territory	Stakeholders involved	Governance Model
ITI CIM	1A. A more Competitive and Smart Alentejo; 2A. A Greener Alentejo; 2B. Greener Urban Centres in the Alentejo; 4A. A More Social and Inclusive Alentejo 5A. More Territorially Cohesive Alentejo; 5H. Affordable and Sustainable Housing	The thematic focus is on efficient water management and climate adaptation, alongside significant investment in social and demographic cohesion. This translates into on-demand mobility projects for isolated communities, the strengthening of community-based healthcare, and the promotion of the region as a destination for sustainable and cultural tourism. There is also a concerted effort to digitise rural areas, aiming to attract new talent and highly skilled workers, in an effort to reverse the trend of depopulation.	The entire Alentejo region is organised by Intermunicipal Communities—each CIM has a Pact for Development and Territorial Cohesion	Municipalities	Multilevel, with the CIM serving as Intermediate Bodies
ITI Water and Landscape Ecosystems – Algarve and Alentejo	1A. A more Competitive and Smart Alentejo; 2A. A Greener Alentejo; 5A. A Territorially More Cohesive Alentejo	Water and landscape ecosystems, with an implicit focus on combating population loss and economic in these territories	The scope of the strategy encompasses the identification of common challenges, needs, and resources; neither the NUTs nor the subregions were taken into account - 17 the NUTS II regions of Algarve and Alentejo, and the NUTS III regions of Algarve, Alentejo Litoral, and Baixo Alentejo, with a focus on demography, competitiveness,	key public and private stakeholders and Local Action Groups in the region: CCDDR Algarve and Alentejo, I.P., and the Portuguese Environment Agency (APA) – Algarve and Alentejo River Basin Authorities, the Algarve and Alentejo Regional Directorate for	A strategy aligned with and outlined in the Regional Programmes for the Algarve and Alentejo. A Coordination Committee composed of the two Regional Development Councils

			cohesion, and environmental sustainability Annex	Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Local Development Associations (ADL) in the region	(Algarve and Alentejo) An Advisory Council comprising representatives from local governments, the Department of Agriculture, the Alentejo Water Authority (APA), the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF), higher education institutions, and development associations
ITI Integrated Territorial-Based Intervention for the West and Tagus Valley (IIBT OVT);	1A. A More Competitive and Smart Alentejo; 2A. A Greener Alentejo; 5A. A Territorially More Cohesive Alentejo	5 Key Dimensions: environmental sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda; administrative reorganisation, related to governance and spatial planning; the enhancement of “water” resources—from the Tagus River to the coastline—and the region’s endogenous resources; functional and territorial coordination with the AML;	3 NUTS III regions: Lezíria do Tejo, Médio Tejo, and Oeste, which were previously part of the NUTS II regions of Alentejo (Lezíria do Tejo) and Centro (Médio Tejo and Oeste), but which, since January 2024, have constituted the NUTS II region of Oeste e Vale do Tejo.	Municipalities	A Coordinating Council and an Executive Committee, supported by a Technical Support Unit.

		the promotion of territorial intelligence and the creation of a smart region.			
ITI Urban Networks	1A. A More Competitive and Smart Alentejo; 2A. A Greener Alentejo; 5A. A Territorially More Cohesive Alentejo	aims to enhance the capacity for innovation and to drive economic, social, and cultural development in major urban centres by establishing thematic networks capable of implementing joint strategies (at the NUTS III level and above) to strengthen their competitiveness and international standing, with a focus on the following themes: Competitiveness; Climate Change and Decarbonisation; and Digitalisation Strategies to ensure innovative responses	Polycentric regional development depends on the establishment and strengthening of inter-city partnerships at the supra-NUTS III level	Urban centres led by municipalities; local authorities and their associations; central government agencies; other public entities; Business associations; institutions of higher education; R&D centres; non-governmental organisations; other non-profit entities	
PROVERE – Collective Efficiency Strategy	1A. A More Competitive Alentejo; 5A. A Territorially More Cohesive Alentejo	A territory-based economic development strategy grounded in the enhancement of local resources, specifically targeting low-density areas, aims to foster the competitiveness of these areas by promoting innovative economic activities and economic and cultural diversification that contribute to job creation, strengthening the territory's value chain, and increasing added value and population retention	Each strategy defines its own territory, and the boundaries are drawn around the defined endogenous resource	Non-profit development associations; business associations; intermunicipal communities; municipalities; local regional development agencies and associations; companies	Each strategy and action plan (7 in total) is led by an entity that forms a partnership consortium tasked with reflecting on and deliberating changes
Non-Urban Cohesion	5A. A more Territorially Cohesive Alentejo	strengthening the capacity of local areas	Each strategy defines its own	Non-profit development	Each strategy and action

Partnerships;		to mobilise knowledge; boosting local economic activity to attract people and investment through innovative approaches in rural contexts, involving the creation of local partnerships to address specific regional challenges within the following areas: health and well-being, migration, regional marketing and revitalisation, culture, and the environment; innovation in the delivery of services of general interest, as well as regional cooperation and collaboration	scope, and the boundaries are centered around the thematic focus	associations; business associations; intermunicipal communities; municipalities; local regional development agencies and associations; companies	plan (14 in total) is led by an entity that forms a partnership consortium tasked with reflecting on and deliberating changes. Between September 2023 and May 2024, the Managing Authority promoted a broad participatory process throughout the Region, involving approximately 200 people in various forms and at different stages of participation: in-person sessions, online sessions, conferences, and public consultations.
Just Transition Fund	6A. Fund for a Just Transition	The Territorial Plan for a Just Transition calls for the closure of the Sines Thermal Power Plant and outlines a plan to support the region through the following measures: - Economic diversification;	NUTIII Alentejo Litoral – this region has been identified as the one affected by the closure of the Sines Thermal Power Plant	workers and businesses, particularly those affected by the climate and energy transition; municipalities; Alentejo Higher Education; youth associations;	The Observatory for a Just Transition in the Alentejo Litoral has been established; it has an advisory board and a

		- Employment and training; - R&D; - Mobility; - Affordable and sustainable housing		Regional Tourism Authority; business associations in the tourism, agriculture, and energy sectors; labour unions; IEFP; Education	standing committee
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1.3 Sources and stakeholders consulted

At this initial stage, the assessment is based primarily on a review of documents and institutional experience, drawing on the following main sources:

- ALENTEJO 2030 Regional Programme;
- available implementation, monitoring, and evaluation reports;
- relevant national and regional strategic documents;
- Evaluation of the implementation of the Alentejo Regional Programme 2021–2027;
- methodological guidelines from the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC);
- documentation and methodological framework of the INTEGRA project.

In addition, the assessment incorporates accumulated knowledge derived from the direct experience of the Managing Authority and the regional entities involved in the design and implementation of territorial strategies.

Furthermore, a structured consultation with external stakeholders was conducted on March 25, 2026, involving intermunicipal communities, entities from the scientific and technological sector, associations, and other relevant local actors.

This process allowed for the collection of relevant qualitative contributions, contributing to the validation, deepening, and enrichment of the preliminary conclusions, as well as to the identification of challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of territorial instruments.

Across the board, the contributions gathered reflect a positive assessment of both the INTEGRA project—recognised for its relevance and timeliness—and the analysis conducted, which is considered generally adequate and aligned with the region’s key dynamics and needs.

This approach reinforces the participatory nature of the assessment, providing a more robust foundation for the subsequent phases of the project, particularly in the context of interregional learning, the sharing of best practices, and the formulation of recommendations for the post-2027 period.

2. Key Contributions from Stakeholders

As part of the regional assessment process, a structured stakeholder consultation session was held on March 25, involving a diverse group of regional entities.

The objective was to validate, expand upon, and supplement the analysis conducted, as well as to identify challenges and opportunities in the implementation of territorial instruments.

2.1 Background

As part of the development of the regional assessment, a stakeholder consultation session was held, supplemented by additional written contributions. This process involved a diverse range of regional entities, enabling the analysis to be validated, expanded upon, and supplemented.

The contributions were organised according to the six building blocks defined by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), ensuring methodological consistency with the INTEGRA project.

2.2 Summary of contributions

2.2.1 Strategic dimension

Recognition of the relevance of the assessment and the INTEGRA project;

Need for more realistic and implementation-oriented strategies;

Criticism regarding the reliance on funding cycles in strategic planning;

Importance of strengthening the medium- and long-term vision (territorial foresight).

Summary: Strategies are well-defined but remain overly influenced by funding mechanisms.

2.2.2 Territorial focus

Consultations with regional stakeholders confirmed that low population density requires the aggregation of territories in order to achieve scale and access funding. However, such aggregation often conflicts with the limited technical capacity of smaller municipalities.

A structural asymmetry was identified between urban centres, which benefit from specialised departments dedicated to European funds, and low-density municipalities, where generalist staff must manage funding applications alongside a wide range of other municipal responsibilities.

The experience of inter-municipal partnerships—such as the initiative involving the five municipalities along the Guadiana River—demonstrates that these limitations can be overcome when an appropriate cooperation framework is in place. It is also important to highlight the recognition of the Serra de Serpa montado as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System by the Food and Agriculture Organization, which represents a strategic asset that differentiates this territory.

The consultation also revealed the existence of a solid strategic foundation, but with a recurring mismatch between the ambition of the plans and the available funding instruments. In particular, the loss of fund integration was emphasised—LEADER, previously a multi-fund instrument, is now limited to the EAFRD—raising questions about how integrated policies can be effectively pursued in the absence of corresponding implementation tools.

Difficulties were also identified in designing plans aligned with existing calls for proposals. It was suggested that the CCDRs and intermediate bodies should take a more proactive role in shaping funding instruments. The need for realistic strategies to avoid unmet expectations was also highlighted, acknowledging that participatory processes do not always succeed in adequately addressing the needs identified within the territory.

The partners highlighted:

- The need to operate at a functional (rather than purely administrative) level;
- The importance of grouping territories to achieve scale and critical mass;
- Recognition of the specific characteristics of low-density territories;
- The value of integrated territorial approaches (e.g. DLBC, PROVERE).

Summary: Reinforcement of a place-based approach, tailored to territorial specificities.

2.2.3 Governance

Institutional fragmentation was confirmed through consultations with regional stakeholders. It was observed that funding instruments tend to promote territorial competition rather than collaboration, making it more difficult for NGOs and non-profit organisations—often those delivering effective work within communities—to access funding. Three structural issues were also identified: the financial sustainability of initiatives, the limited flexibility of funding instruments, and the misalignment between programmes and the actual needs of the territories. The need to respond to citizens' immediate, day-to-day demands—characteristic of municipal action—was found to constrain the adoption of long-term strategic approaches. To address these limitations, it was proposed that the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) methodology be adapted to new funding instruments, with decision-making criteria more closely aligned with

local realities. In addition, greater experimentation in governance was recommended, including the development of new approaches to inter-institutional cooperation.

The partners highlighted:

- Difficulties in coordination between decision-making levels and organisations;
- Institutional fragmentation and the need for greater coordination;
- The importance of collaborative and participatory (bottom-up) approaches;
- The need for continuous stakeholder involvement;
- The key role of CCDRs as territorial coordination bodies;

Summary: Structured multi-level governance, but with challenges in implementation.

2.2.4 Cross-sectoral integration

Although strategies are designed in an integrated way, their implementation is still constrained by rigid sector-specific calls for proposals, which limit coordination between projects funded by different funds within the same territory, such as those related to social inclusion and energy efficiency. In this context, the creation of integrated multi-fund calls, structured around local development strategies, was proposed in order to strengthen the territorial coherence of interventions. As an example of this limitation, the case of PEPAC was highlighted, where only a small share of development funding is allocated to agriculture under DLBCs, significantly reducing the margin available for other areas of rural development. In addition, it was suggested to revive the social innovation approach tested in previous programmes, enabling Alentejo 2030 to support pilot projects for territorial experimentation before their potential roll-out at regional level.

The partners highlighted:

- Difficulty in coordinating different funds and policies (ERDF, ESF+, PEPAC, JTF);
- Implementation constrained by inflexible sectoral guidelines;
- The need for multi-fund instruments and integrated approaches;
- Lack of alignment between projects, funding and strategies.

Summary: Integration is envisaged at the strategic level but remains limited in implementation.

2.2.5 Funding and implementation

The issue of funding emerged as the most recurrent theme in the consultation, particularly due to the difficulty of ensuring continuity of interventions after the end of funding cycles. It was highlighted that many projects, although successful, come to an end without the possibility of extension, compromising the consolidation of strategies on the ground and limiting the ability of local authorities to sustain the results achieved. The lack of suitable instruments to scale up successful pilot projects was also noted, creating a gap between the experimental phase and its wider implementation. In this context, greater autonomy in fund management and the broader use of simplified cost options were advocated, particularly relevant for local associations and micro-enterprises, helping to reduce administrative burdens. International best practices were also referenced, highlighting the importance of more flexible and coordinated funding models, based on ongoing dialogue between managing and implementing bodies, as a way to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of public policies.

The partners highlighted:

- Administrative complexity and the bureaucratisation of processes;
- Difficulties in accessing funding for small organisations and NGOs;
- Excessive dependence on funding and lack of financial stability;
- Lack of project continuity after funding cycles;
- Need for greater flexibility and autonomy in project management.

Summary: Inflexible instruments, affecting implementation effectiveness.

2.2.6 Monitoring and evaluation

The importance of strengthening the qualitative evaluation of projects was emphasised, using indicators capable of measuring the real impact of interventions in the region and valuing not only quantitative results but also the good practices generated. In this regard, the adoption of metrics focused on actual improvements in quality of life was advocated, such as the ability to retain young people or reduce the isolation of elderly populations, as opposed to approaches limited to the number of implemented or amounts paid. It was also suggested that existing territorial monitoring platforms, based on statistically validated indicators, be used to improve results assessment and encourage more active participation by inter-municipal structures and private actors in policy monitoring.

The partners highlighted:

- The need for impact indicators (qualitative and territorial);
- Limitations of current systems focused on financial implementation;
- The importance of integrating scientific and academic knowledge;
- Potential for utilising existing platforms (e.g. ODS Local).

Summary: Monitoring is functional but insufficient to capture territorial impact.

2.2.7 Transformative capacity

Innovative solutions were proposed to strengthen experimentation and capacity-building in rural areas, notably through the creation of a laboratory dedicated to testing new approaches to the co-design of social and environmental policies ahead of the next programming cycle, as well as a capacity-building mechanism enabling more experienced bodies to support small local authorities in preparing more complex applications. At the same time, the integration of foresight methodologies into strategic planning was advocated, so that strategies are no longer based solely on lists of investments but instead constitute resilient medium- and long-term plans, better equipped to respond to uncertain contexts. The importance of adopting a mindset of continuous change and adaptation was also highlighted, with the flexibility to adjust approaches whenever necessary. In this context, the potential role of higher education institutions in the production of applied knowledge, the evaluation of pilot projects and the promotion of cross-border cooperation processes was also highlighted.

The partners emphasised:

- The importance of experimentation and pilot projects;
- The lack of mechanisms for scaling up successful projects;
- The need for greater coordination between projects and strategic vision;
- The importance of promoting innovation, learning and knowledge transfer;
- Potential for creating spaces for territorial experimentation.

Summary: High transformative potential, yet still largely unexplored in a systematic manner.

2.3 Overall summary of contributions

Across the board, the contributions gathered confirm the main conclusions of the preliminary assessment, reinforcing the existence of challenges in terms of governance, policy integration, institutional capacity and the suitability of funding instruments.

Stakeholders also expressed a very positive view of both the INTEGRA project, recognised for its relevance and timeliness, and the assessment carried out, which was considered broadly aligned with the dynamics and needs of the region.

Clear opportunities for improvement were also identified, particularly in terms of administrative simplification, strengthening coordination, promoting integrated approaches and creating mechanisms that enhance the continuity and scalability of interventions.

2.4 Final note

Stakeholders also expressed a generally very positive view of the INTEGRA project and the assessment presented, recognising its relevance, timeliness and alignment with the region's challenges, as well as its potential to contribute to the improvement of regional policies in the post-2027 period.

3. Analysis of the regional model for developing territorial strategies

The analysis follows the six pillars of the JRC Handbook for integrated territorial strategies, supplemented by the additional module of the INTEGRA project on transformative capacity. The analysis focuses on the regional model (logic, processes, actors, instruments and practices), using ALENTEJO 2030 as the central policy instrument and considering, as a territorialised expression, the associated sub-regional and functional strategies (including the Fund for a Just Transition in the Alentejo Litoral). The evidence used in this phase is based primarily on documentary analysis and implementation experience, to be further explored through structured stakeholder consultation.

3.1 Strategic dimension

How the strategic vision and long-term objectives are defined

The regional model is based on a strategic vision structured by the ALENTEJO 2030 Regional Programme, aligned with Portugal 2030 and the European cohesion policy framework. The regional vision is operationalised through strategic objectives/priorities and specific objectives, seeking to ensure coherence between:

1. European priorities (green transition, digital transition, cohesion),
2. national priorities (Portugal 2030), and
3. sub-regional and functional strategies.

In June 2021, the European Parliament adopted the legislative package on Cohesion Policy for 2021–2027, including Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, which lays down common provisions on European funds and establishes the Just Transition Fund (JTF)⁴, Regulation (EU) 2021/1057, which establishes the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)⁵, and Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF)⁶.

This Cohesion Policy package sets out five Policy Objectives (PO) that will guide European Union (EU) investments during the 2021–2027 financial programming period:

PO1. A more competitive and smarter Europe;

PO2. A greener, low-carbon and resilient Europe;

PO3. A more connected Europe;

PO4. A more social and inclusive Europe;

PO5. A Europe closer to its citizens.

Furthermore, under the establishment of the JTF, the objective was defined as “enabling regions and people to address the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union’s energy and climate targets for 2030 and towards a climate-neutral Union economy by 2050, based on the Paris Agreement”.

In the context of the 2021–2027 financial programming period, the following legal instruments are of particular note in Portugal:

- Council of Ministers Resolution No. 98/20208 approving the Portugal 2030 Strategy, which serves as the main reference for planning public policies to promote the country’s economic and social development and is organised into four central thematic agendas for the development of the economy, society and the territory up to 2030:

- Agenda 1. People First: a better demographic balance, greater inclusion, less inequality;

- Agenda 2. Digitalisation, innovation and skills as drivers of development;

- Agenda 3. Climate transition and resource sustainability;

- Agenda 4. A country that is competitive externally and cohesive internally.

- Council of Ministers Resolution No. 97/20209, which establishes the guiding principles and operational structure for the 2021–2027 programming period of European cohesion policy funds, stipulates that the Portugal 2030 Strategy serves as the framework for the drafting of the Partnership Agreement and the Operational Programmes (OPs) to be implemented in the 2021–2027 programming cycle, alongside the strategies of the NUTS II regions of the mainland and the autonomous regions, and the national territorial organisation model defined in the National Spatial Planning Policy Programme (PNPOT, Law No. 99/2019 of 5 September). This legislation sets out the operational structure of cohesion policy funds at national level, establishing three thematic operational programmes (OPs) on the mainland, five regional operational programmes on the mainland, two in the Autonomous Regions and one operational programme for technical assistance.

With the legal framework in place, supplemented by additional legislation, the Partnership Agreement was signed in July 2022. This document established the guiding principles and operational structure for the 2021–2027 programming period of European Cohesion Policy funds, as well as the financial envelope and implementation timetable allocated to it (Ministry of Planning, 2022). The four thematic programmes and the regional programmes, including that of the Alentejo, contribute to the five selected policy objectives (PO), namely:

- 1. A more competitive and smarter Europe, through the promotion of innovative and smart economic transformation and ICT connectivity at regional level.
- 2. A greener, low-carbon Europe, transitioning to a net-zero carbon economy, and a resilient Europe, through the promotion of a clean and equitable energy transition, green and blue investments, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility.
- 3. A more connected Europe, through the enhancement of mobility.
- 4. A more social and inclusive Europe, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- 5. A Europe closer to its citizens, by fostering the development.

ALENTEJO 2030, which covers five NUTS III regions (Alto Alentejo, Alentejo Central, Alentejo Litoral, Baixo Alentejo and Lezíria do Tejo), stands (in conjunction with the other programmes) as a key instrument for the implementation of the Portugal 2030 Strategy. ALENTEJO 2030 is structured around ten priorities, linked to the Operational Programmes (OPs) or the objectives of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) set out in the regulatory framework for Cohesion Policy (Table 1). ALENTEJO 2030 also includes a priority dedicated to technical assistance. The following table presents the financial allocations for ALENTEJO 2030 by priority and fund.

Table 1. Financial allocations of Alentejo 2030

OP	PRIORIDADES	FEDER M€	FSE (M€)	FTJ (M€)	Total (M€)
OP1	1A - A More Competitive and Intelligent Alentejo	199,4			199,4
	1B - A More Digital Alentejo	35			35
OP2	2A - A Greener Alentejo	294,9			294,9
	2B - Greener Urban Centres in Alentejo	20			20
OP3	3A - A More Connected Alentejo	80,6			80,6
OP4	4A - A More Social and Inclusive Alentejo	32,6	105,9		138,5
	4B - More Social Innovation in Alentejo		5		5
OP5	5A - A More Territorially Cohesive Alentejo	213			213
-	6A - Just Transition Fund			98,9	98,9
-	7A - Technical Assistance		19,0		19
Total		877,5	129,9	98,9	1.104,9

Source: (Alentejo Regional Coordination and Development Commission, 2022)

With the reprogramming, a further 7 priorities were added, 5 of which fall within the European Commission's objectives, namely:

- 1E. Defence;
- 2F. Water;
- 4G. Investment in skills for decarbonisation;
- 4H – Affordable and Sustainable Housing;
- 5H. Affordable and Sustainable Housing;
- 6H – Promoting integrated territorial development through access to affordable and sustainable housing in the Alentejo Litoral region (FTJ);
- 7B. Technical Assistance – FTJ.

Territorial coalitions: who is called upon to shape the vision

In the regional model, territorial coalitions' are primarily:

- CIM/Intermunicipal Communities (sub-regional groupings and a natural platform for integrated strategies);
- Municipalities (particularly in areas such as regeneration/services, local mobility, infrastructure and social responses);
- Sectoral bodies and intermediary organisations (with a role in decision-making /management and the allocation of resources, particularly regarding incentives, employment/skills and just transition);

In thematic or territorial partnerships (as indicated in the table above), involving public, higher education, economic and social actors.

In practice, the model is hybrid: it combines a 'top-down' approach (programme and frameworks) with 'bottom-up' territorialisation (sub-regional strategies and project portfolios), but with varying degrees of local autonomy. All strategies have a partners' council, with varying names but with similar objectives of co-construction and discussion. The Regional Programme has a Monitoring Committee through which all information flows.

Regional tools supporting the strategic vision

The main tools that underpin/organise the vision include:

- ALENTEJO 2030 itself (priorities, objectives and operational rules);

- associated regulations and guidelines (including notices and criteria);
- governance and monitoring mechanisms (e.g. Monitoring Committee);
- operational application and management tools (e.g. Funds Helpdesk and information systems).

The 2025 evaluation highlights, however, that simplification and digitalisation do not always result in effective ease of use, pointing to platform issues and perceived complexity, with an impact on mobilisation and implementation.

Alignment with EU/global and national frameworks

Alignment with European and global agendas is primarily ensured through the Programme's design (objectives and priorities) and through vertical coherence with Portugal 2030 and EU policy objectives. In practical terms, the model tends to integrate:

- aspects of climate transition and sustainability;
- digitalisation (with variation by beneficiary type);
- social cohesion (ESF+ and inclusion/employment measures);
- and, in the case of the Alentejo Litoral, a territorial approach to justice in the transition.

Mechanisms to avoid overlaps and promote coordination

Formally, coordination mechanisms exist (Monitoring Committee and liaison with intermediary bodies and territorial entities). In practice, the risk of overlap arises mainly in the interaction between:

- instruments funded by different funds (ERDF/ESF+/JTF and others),
- parallel programmes and competing timetables,
- and the design of calls for proposals with extended timeframes and multiple priorities active simultaneously.

The 2025 evaluation recommends strengthening the governance model and management capacity, suggesting a need for more effective mechanisms for mobilisation and coordination to reduce friction and accelerate decision-making and implementation.

Innovation in policy-making (co-design, scenarios, forecasting)

The model contains elements of participation and consultation, but does not demonstrate the systematic use of forecasting, scenario planning or foresight methodologies as standard practice in territorial planning. Innovation appears to be more closely associated with:

- operational adjustments;
- digital mechanisms and attempts at simplification;
- and thematic instruments (e.g. FTJ), rather than structured processes of long-term strategic co-design. This is a clear area for improvement post-2027.

How the vision is translated into approved strategies (examples)

Typical examples of the translation of the strategic vision into approved strategies/instruments:

- Sub-regional strategies of the CIMs implemented through priorities and project portfolios;
- Territorial Plan for a Just Transition in the Alentejo Litoral, with objectives of economic diversification, professional retraining and sustainability, although the evaluation highlights time lags and implementation constraints (significant delays and very low implementation).

3.2 Territorial focus

Definition of territorial boundaries

As a process of spatialising a strategy, the Territorial Model must systematically express its regional urban fabric, its centres of activity (infrastructure for cohesion and competitiveness) and its mobility and access structure (structural and local connections). In complementarity with the urban matrix, it is essential to express the landscape components of the Region (agro-forestry-pastoral systems, environmental systems and cultural systems). In this regard, it is necessary to consider the territory in an integrated manner, so as to ensure that major transformations driven by business initiatives, particularly those linked to agricultural and forestry activities, where production life cycles do not coincide with natural cycles, do not jeopardise the Region's environmental quality and landscape values. the effort to territorialise public policies (a necessary condition for the success of strategic planning and programming) should result from a combined analysis of the territorial options of the PNPT 2019 and the

territorial model of the PROTs, specifically by promoting the following strategic strands and alignments:

- Structural transformation of the regional economy, bringing new territories and resources to enhance competitiveness, with a focus on strengthening the role of rural areas and their natural systems;
- Structuring of the urban system, based on the main agglomerations (regional urban centres) which are strengthening their role as hubs of regional attractiveness and as drivers of urban subsystems (structural and complementary urban centres) that build the rural-urban relationship, which is absolutely central to increasing territorial resilience and strengthening economies of scale;
- Planning and regulation of rural areas in view of the existing susceptibility to desertification in sensitive parts of the regional territory (with 60% of the Alentejo facing serious or very serious risks);
- Strengthening territorial cohesion in the face of the growing trend of areas experiencing population loss, which is set to intensify by 2030, according to INE projections, largely coinciding with a below-average Synthetic Regional Development Index;
- Developing road and rail transport links across the different sub-regions, extending their connectivity benefits to the whole region;
- Enhancing territorial sub-systems within areas experiencing population loss of less than 15% by 2030, which have the potential to act as hubs for services of general interest and activities promoting cultural heritage;
- Strengthening and deepening cross-border cooperation policies, promoting the development of border areas at the appropriate scale – European macro-regions, bilateral NUTS II regions, inter-municipal cooperation between NUTS III areas and along inter-urban corridors (Eurocities);
- Decentralisation of public decision-making, which implies the need to strengthen inter-municipal and regional solutions to address the challenges of cohesion, sustainability and development. The regional model relies predominantly on administrative and sub-regional boundaries (NUTS III/CIM/municipalities) as a stable reference, complemented by functional territories where policy so requires (e.g. Alentejo Litoral in the FTJ). Thus, territorial delimitation tends to be:
 - administrative (for governance, eligibility and implementation), functional in specific instruments (just transition, sectoral axes, coastal/logistics dynamics).

Functional areas and a place-based approach

Although the basic structure is administrative, place-based approaches are incorporated, particularly when:

- the political issue is territorially concentrated (e.g. just transition in Sines/Alentejo Litoral),
- or when sub-regional coherence is sought (CIM as a platform). However, the adoption of ‘pure’ functional areas (based on flows, daily mobility, catchment areas, etc.) does not appear to be dominant.

Urban-rural links

The Alentejo, due to its low density and limited polycentrism, requires a structural urban-rural approach. In the regional model, these links are addressed primarily through:

- the provision of services and facilities;
- accessibility/mobility;
- value chains (agri-industry, tourism, endogenous resources;
- and strengthening of intermediate centres.

There is scope to make this integration more explicit and measurable (e.g. urban-rural objectives/indicators and services of general interest).

Inter-regional/cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation (particularly with Spain) is relevant to the region, but in the ALENTEJO 2030 model it appears more as a context than as a systematic operational axis within the integrated strategies. This is a clear opportunity to strengthen coherence with European territorial cooperation instruments and with Euro-region dynamics.

Flexibility of the model

There is flexibility in the design of strategies and projects, but this is limited by:

- eligibility rules and the design of calls for proposals;
- administrative and platform requirements;

- and institutional capacity constraints;

The evaluation shows that criteria and bureaucracy can be overly restrictive in some instruments (particularly the FTJ), reducing adaptability.

Territorial coverage

Coverage is regional (NUTS II comprising 58 municipalities), with territorialisation primarily via CIM (sub-regional). For quantification (km², population, number of municipalities per strategy), it is recommended that a summary table be included at the end of the chapter.

Note on improvements post-2027

There is potential to strengthen the use of functional areas as a structural reference, deepening urban-rural links and encouraging more flexible and adaptive territorial approaches.

3.3 Governance

Regional governance: institutions and responsibilities

Issues relating to governance are frequently raised by regional stakeholders, who highlight difficulties in coordination between the central, regional and local levels of the State Administration and between sectoral and territorial policy instruments. In the management of the territory's strategic resources (river basins, protected areas, land use and occupation, etc.), administrative and regulatory constraints, overlapping competences, and other factors persist; these realities limit the effectiveness and efficiency of policy implementation and resource allocation.

The heterogeneity of the responsibilities and competences of the various levels of public administration (sectoral/territorial; central/regional/inter-municipal/local), alongside the diversity of policy and funding instruments and the need to establish initiative- and project-based partnerships, shifts the constant search for solutions that ensure satisfactory thresholds for the management of instruments and material resources towards coordination and articulation mechanisms.

The Strengthening of Governance Conditions and Regional Collective Action should translate into the general objective of enhancing collaborative governance and strengthening work in areas that bring together the Regional Strategy. Rather than merely representing a response to the identified constraints, it aims to integrate components such as the training/qualification of technical staff and the creation of formal and informal spaces for collaboration, which should

be at the heart of this new approach. This focus on preparing regional actors for a model of collaborative governance and/or collective action also aims to create better conditions for the success of integrated territorial approaches (based on administrative territories or functional territories) and intersectoral approaches that may be approved.

Regional governance bodies – areas of competence and intervention

Alentejo 2030	EREI 2030	POR ALENTEJO 2021-2027
Conselho Regional		
CCDR_Direção		
<i>Intersectoral Coordination Council</i>	<i>Regional Innovation Council</i>	<i>Monitoring Committee</i>
- Technical Coordination - Regional Development and Spatial Planning Services (DSDR/DSOT)	- Technical Coordination - Body for Monitoring Regional Dynamics (OADR)	- Technical Coordination - Coordination and Control Unit (UCC)
- Network of Partners- Regional network for monitoring the Regional Strategy and the Spatial Planning Regional Plans (PROT)	- Network of Partners - Regional Technology Transfer System (SRTT)	- Network of Partners- Regional coordination network for the regular monitoring of the Alentejo ROP 2021-2027

The regional model is centred on:

- CCDR Alentejo, I.P. / Managing Authority (guidance, management and coordination of the Programme);
- Monitoring Committee (monitoring and strategic validation);
- Intermediate Bodies (playing key roles in implementation, selection and monitoring in specific areas);
- CIM and municipalities as key structures for territorialisation and implementation.

The 2025 evaluation highlights the need to strengthen resources and capacity-building within the management structure (including intermediate bodies) and to enhance the role and dynamism of the Monitoring

Multi-level coordination (EU–national–regional–local)

Vertical coordination takes place via the Portugal 2030 framework, fund rules and national guidelines. Regional-local coordination takes place mainly via:

- CIM strategies,
- notices and regulations,
- and technical coordination in preparation and implementation.

In practice, frictions typical of multilevel governance persist: decision-making times, project maturity, and alignment between national timelines and local needs.

Regional networks/platforms for coordination and sharing

Formal mechanisms exist (committees, working groups, technical coordination), but systematic horizontal learning between territories could be strengthened. The INTEGRA project is an opportunity to establish this dimension as an institutional practice.

Administrative capacity and technical support

The 2025 evaluation highlights capacity constraints (human and technical resources) and challenges in the information system and the slowness of analysis. The Balcão dos Fundos tool is central, but usability issues/bugs and complexity have been identified

Territorial governance: local coalitions and organisational structure

Territorial coalitions are largely based on existing structures (CIM and municipalities). Ad hoc structures arise in specific instruments. Capacity varies greatly between territories and entities, affecting equity of access and implementation.

Areas for improvement post-2027

Participation is frequently mobilised during the design phase and at consultation stages, but tends to be less systematic throughout the entire cycle (implementation and monitoring). This is an area to be strengthened through more stable models of territorial engagement and feedback.

Areas for improvement post-2027

Strengthening more collaborative governance models, with continuous participation and greater territorial capacity-building, emerges as a strategic priority

3.4 Cross-sectoral integration

How integration is promoted

The programme's design and priorities encourage thematic integration (green/digital/social), and territorialisation via CIM tends to promote integrated portfolios. However, in practice, integration is often limited by:

- the sectoral design of calls for proposals,

- eligibility requirements,
- difficulties in inter-departmental and institutional coordination.

Integration from the outset

There is integration at the framework level (priorities/objectives), but not always at the operational level (calls for proposals and criteria). The 2025 evaluation highlights issues regarding the clarity and appropriateness of criteria, as well as bureaucracy across different instruments, hindering integrated approaches on the ground.

Policy combinations and synergies between funds

The model is multi-fund (ERDF/ESF+/JTF). Nevertheless, effective functioning ‘as an integrated package’ could be strengthened: synchronisation of calls for proposals, complementarity of eligible expenditure and coordination with other instruments.

Monitoring of integration

Monitoring tends to focus on operations and programme indicators, whilst monitoring of the ‘integrated strategy’ as such (combined territorial impacts) is less evident. There is scope for methodological development post-2027.

Most frequent themes

Climate transition/energy, competitiveness and innovation, employment/skills, social inclusion and just transition (Alentejo Litoral) appear as recurring themes, but with variation by instrument and territory.

Points for improvement post-2027

There is scope to strengthen operational mechanisms for cross-sectoral integration and the effective assessment of synergies between policies.

3.5 Funding and finance

Sources of funding

ALENTEJO 2030 mobilises the ERDF, ESF+ and JTF, with a total allocation of approximately €1.104 billion (2025 estimate), supplemented by national frameworks where applicable.

Multi-fund approach and combination

A multi-fund structure exists, but operational combination and simplification for beneficiaries are not always fully realised. The FTJ, in particular, presents significant constraints (bureaucracy, restrictive criteria, high minimum investment, lack of flexibility and time lags).

Simplification and administrative burdens

Despite the focus on simplification and the Funds Helpdesk, platform constraints and process complexity are cited. This particularly affects entities with lower administrative capacity.

Innovative financial instruments

The model is predominantly grant-based. The use of innovative financial instruments (revolving funds, guarantees, PPPs) does not appear to be a dominant feature of the integrated territorial design, although this could present an opportunity (particularly in energy and innovation).

Resource adequacy vs ambition

The 2025 assessment indicates that overall implementation remains low relative to ambition, with factors such as late start-up, institutional capacity and delays in analysis. In the FTJ, the alignment between the design and territorial needs is particularly critical

Areas for improvement post-2027 The diversification of financial instruments and administrative simplification are key areas for improvement.

3.6 Monitoring

Monitoring of operations vs monitoring of strategy

The model provides for programmatic monitoring (operations, payments, indicators), but the challenge lies in monitoring **the integrated territorial strategy** (combined effects, territorial transformation). This aspect remains limited.

Systems and indicators

Indicators are defined at programme level, making it difficult to capture complex and cross-sectoral territorial impacts. The evaluation highlights cases where indicators are unsuitable for the nature of the projects.

Data collection/analysis and feedback capacity

Data and information systems capacity is a sensitive issue. There are recommendations to strengthen resources and capacity building. The feedback loop (monitoring → strategic adjustment) could be made more systematic and transparent..

Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement in monitoring and evaluation does not appear to be a widespread or institutionalised practice, presenting an opportunity to improve adaptive governance.

Post-2027 improvement note

The development of strategic monitoring and continuous learning systems represents a key challenge.

3.7 Transformative capacity

The regional model contains ambitions for transition (green/digital/fair), but transformative capacity depends on coherence between:

- Vision;
- Rules and instruments;
- Implementation,
- Learning and adjustment.

The 2025 assessment highlights that, in instruments such as the FTJ, there is a risk of results falling short of transformative potential due to a restrictive design and delays. Experimentation and pilot schemes exist, but not as a systematic mechanism of the regional model. There is an opportunity to:

- strengthen spaces for innovation (territorial pilot schemes),
- scalability and transfer between territories,
- and instruments for co-design and foresight.

The regional model incorporates transformative elements, particularly in the context of just transition and sustainability. However, transformation tends to be incremental, with limited institutional experimentation.

Note on improvements post-2027

- Strengthening experimentation, pilot projects and the scalability of innovative practices will be essential to increase the model's transformative capacity.

3.8 SWOT analysis of regional territorial tools



4. Conclusions

The assessment of the regional model for developing territorial strategies in the Alentejo reveals a governance and programming framework that is consolidating, firmly anchored in the Alentejo 2030 Regional Programme as the main policy framework. The regional model reveals significant progress in the adoption of integrated territorial approaches, aligned with the principles of the European Union's cohesion policy, but also exposes structural and operational limitations that need to be addressed systematically, with a view to the post-2027 period.

The conclusions that follow summarise the main lessons learnt throughout the analysis of the seven modules, translating them into practical implications for the INTEGRA project and preliminary recommendations for improving regional public policies.

4.1 Implications for INTEGRA's future activities

Good practices and priorities for policy improvement

The Alentejo regional model presents a set of relevant good practices, with potential for transferability to other regions, namely:

- The existence of a clear regional strategic framework, embodied in Alentejo 2030, which serves as a cross-cutting reference for the design of integrated territorial strategies;
- The adoption of territorial instruments recognised by cohesion policy, such as integrated territorial-based approaches, aligned with climate, social and cohesion objectives;
- The gradual strengthening of inter-institutional coordination, particularly between regional and local levels, in the context of the programming and implementation of funds;
- The progressive incorporation of criteria for cross-sectoral integration and coherence with European agendas, such as the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals.

At the same time, the assessment highlights clear priorities for improvement, which are particularly relevant to the post-2027 debate:

The need to strengthen the long-term strategic dimension, moving beyond an approach that remains heavily focused on programming cycles and financial execution.

- The consolidation of stable coordination mechanisms between territorial strategies, in order to avoid fragmentation, overlaps and redundancies;

- Strengthening the administrative and technical capacity of territorial actors, particularly at local level, to design, implement and monitor integrated strategies;
- Improving strategic monitoring systems, going beyond financial and operational monitoring, and focusing on territorial outcomes and impacts.

Focus on mutual learning activities

The Alentejo experience offers a significant contribution to mutual learning within the INTEGRA partnership, particularly with regard to:

- The coordination between a **strong regional programme** and differentiated territorial strategies in low-density areas;
- The management of **territorial balances** in a context marked by demographic, climate and accessibility challenges;
- The progressive integration of objectives relating to just transition, sustainability and social cohesion into territorial development strategies.

At the same time, the assessment identifies areas where the region could benefit from exchanges with other European regions, namely:

- Advanced models of multi-level and multi-sectoral governance;
- Innovative tools for co-design, strategic forecasting and scenario building;
- Monitoring and evaluation systems focused on territorial impacts;
- Experimentation mechanisms and pilot projects with potential for scalability.

These areas provide a solid foundation for guiding the Alentejo's active participation in the INTEGRA project's mutual learning activities, study visits and workshops.

4.2 Lessons learnt and preliminary recommendations for policy improvement

Strengths and weaknesses of the regional model

Strengths

- Existence of a robust regional policy instrument (Alentejo 2030) that structures territorial intervention;

- Consistent alignment with EU strategic frameworks;
- Accumulated experience in implementing integrated strategies funded by European funds;
- Consolidated institutional relations between the CCDR and territorial actors.

Weaknesses

- Predominance of a procedural and programmatic approach, to the detriment of a long-term strategic vision;
- Fragmentation between territorial instruments and strategies;
- Uneven administrative capacity across territories;
- Monitoring still focused on outputs and implementation, with limited impact assessment;
- Stakeholder participation is not always systematic throughout the entire policy cycle.

Preliminary recommendations for future strategic development

Based on the analysis carried out, the following preliminary recommendations have been identified, to be further developed and validated throughout the INTEGRA project:

1. Strengthen the strategic and transformative dimension of territorial strategies, promoting long-term visions aligned with the dual green and digital transition;
2. Develop structured coordination mechanisms between territorial strategies, ensuring coherence, complementarity and efficiency.
3. Invest systematically in the institutional and technical capacity-building of territorial actors.
4. Move towards integrated strategic monitoring systems, focused on territorial results and impacts.
5. Promote approaches to experimentation, institutional innovation and pilot projects, with potential for replication and scalability.
6. Strengthen the structured participation of stakeholders and citizens throughout the entire policy cycle.

These recommendations provide an initial roadmap for improving regional policies, which will be progressively refined through inter-regional benchmarking, mutual learning activities and an update of the regional assessment at the end of the project, thereby contributing to a more robust preparation of the Alentejo regional model for the post-2027 period.

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