

POLICY BRIEF 3 · TERRITORIAL READINESS

Territorial Readiness for Digital Mobility: Why Low-Density Regions Need Decision-Support Before Attracting Remote Workers

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KEY MESSAGE

Territorial readiness is the missing step between digital-nomad attraction and sustainable local impact. Before a region promotes itself to remote workers, it needs a structured, transparent way to judge whether it can host them well, and to act on that judgement.

The missing step: readiness before attraction

Most digital-nomad strategies jump from ambition straight to attraction. A region decides it wants remote workers, leans on a national visa, and launches a campaign. The step that is routinely skipped sits between intention and action: a sober assessment of whether the territory is actually ready to host medium and long-stay residents in a way that benefits the community. The two preceding briefs in this series establish why this step matters. Demand is broad and bundled, not reducible to connectivity (Policy Brief 1); and attraction without integration risks housing pressure, enclaves and extractive short-term mobility (Policy Brief 2). Readiness is the connective tissue between them.

Attraction visas, marketing, ambition	Readiness the missing step	Integration housing, services, community	Sustainable impact durable local benefit
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Figure 1. Readiness as the connective step between attraction and impact.

What “territorial readiness” means

Territorial readiness is the degree to which a place can host remote workers in a way that is technically viable, locally compatible, socially integrative and protected against foreseeable harm. It is not a ranking of how attractive a destination is to mobile workers; that logic already saturates the market through nomad directories and place-marketing sites. Readiness inverts the question. Instead of asking how appealing a territory is to outsiders, it asks whether the territory is prepared, on its own terms, to turn arrivals into lasting value without damaging what makes it worth coming to. A readiness approach therefore combines territorial capacity, housing conditions, service availability, integration potential and risk safeguards into a structured decision process.

Building on the applicant’s doctoral work on socio-cultural cartography and border territorialities (Marcelino, in preparation), readiness treats a territory not as a set of coordinates but as a lived,

relational and symbolic space, and treats digital platforms as a layer of that space, shaping visibility, reputation and belonging as much as logistics. This reading connects readiness to the broader idea of territorial capital (Camagni, 2009) and territorial cohesion (Medeiros, 2016) in EU regional policy. A place can be ‘on the map’ digitally and still be unready in practice; readiness is about that gap.

Four public dimensions of readiness

For public discussion, readiness can be organised into four dimensions. These are deliberately broad and transparent; they describe what to consider, not how any particular instrument weights or scores them.

1 · Capacity Can the territory physically and technically host medium-stay remote workers? Reliable connectivity, suitable housing, everyday services, transport, and basic health and education provision.	2 · Compatibility Does what the place offers match what this kind of resident needs and values? The fit between local assets (nature, culture, community, affordability) and realistic demand.
3 · Integration Can newcomers become part of local life rather than a parallel circuit? The presence of intermediaries, community openness, contribution channels and cultural mediation.	4 · Risk What could go wrong, and is the territory protected against it? Housing-market sensitivity, displacement risk, over-dependence on a single flow, and the capacity to monitor and respond.

Figure 2. The four public dimensions of territorial readiness.

Why decision-support tools matter

Small municipalities and regional agencies rarely have the time, data or specialist capacity to assess readiness systematically, and the consequences of getting it wrong fall on residents. This is where decision-support matters. The argument is not for automation of judgement but for structure: a transparent, explainable way to bring the four dimensions together so that a decision to attract, or to wait, or to invest first, rests on evidence the community can see and contest. Explainability is essential. Public managers and residents should be able to understand why a territory is judged ready or not, which makes the assessment accountable and locally legitimate rather than a black box. Risk-aware decision-making, which surfaces what could go wrong before it does, is as much a part of readiness as identifying strengths.

What should remain locally negotiated

Readiness assessment informs decisions; it does not make them. Several things must remain in local hands. Whether to proceed, at what pace and on what conditions is a political choice for elected local authorities. How housing is governed, which spaces are opened, and what the community is willing to host are matters for local deliberation. And the meaning of integration in a particular place, what belonging looks like and which traditions are protected, cannot be standardised from outside. A readiness approach should strengthen local decision-making, not substitute for it; its role is to make the trade-offs visible, not to dictate the answer.

A safe self-assessment checklist for readiness

The following questions let a municipality or agency gauge its own readiness at a high level, before any external assessment and without any scoring formula. Honest “not yet” answers are useful findings, not failures.

- ✓ **Capacity.** Is connectivity genuinely reliable in the specific homes and shared spaces we would promote? Is there suitable, working-friendly housing and a realistic level of everyday services?
- ✓ **Compatibility.** Do our actual local assets match what medium-stay remote workers value, and can we describe that honestly rather than aspirationally?
- ✓ **Integration.** Is there a named local intermediary, an openness in the community, and at least one real channel for newcomers to contribute and connect?
- ✓ **Risk.** Have we considered the effect on local rents and housing access, our dependence on a single flow of arrivals, and how we would monitor and respond to problems?
- ✓ **Decision.** Can we explain, to residents and to ourselves, why we are ready (or not), and are we prepared to wait and invest first if the honest answer is ‘not yet’?

Conclusion

Low-density regions are right to see remote work as an opportunity, and the demographic projections make the case urgent. But opportunity is not the same as readiness. The regions most likely to benefit are those that pause between ambition and action to ask whether they can host well, across capacity, compatibility, integration and risk, and that build transparent, explainable support for that judgement. This brief presents the public-policy rationale for a readiness approach. The operational validation of decision-support tools will be addressed in future technical work.

Methodological note

The dataset is exploratory by design. It does not represent the entire population of digital nomads or low-density territories. Its value lies in documenting early demand, testing conceptual assumptions, identifying preference patterns and informing the development of a territorial-readiness approach. This brief is conceptual and prescriptive at the level of public principles; it presents the rationale and dimensions of readiness without specifying any indicator weighting, scoring procedure or system architecture. No causal claims are made.

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