

STRATEGIC CLUSTER

ANNUAL WORK PLAN 2026

JULY UPDATE

CLUSTER DESCRIPTION AND KEY PRIORITIES

ERRIN's **Strategic Cluster** combines the activities of the **Policy Working Group**, **Science & Education for Society Working Group** and **Smart Specialisation Working Group**, aligning their efforts to address key EU priorities, strengthen the R&I capacities of the regional innovation ecosystems of the ERRIN members, and reinforce the place-based dimension of EU research and innovation policies and programmes.

In response to competitiveness being a central priority of the European Commission, ERRIN launched a **Competitiveness Workstream** under its Policy Working Group in 2025. This Workstream continues in 2026 as a core element of the Strategic Cluster's activities to strengthen the place-based dimension of EU competitiveness initiatives such as the Competitiveness Compass. As a new element in 2026 the Strategic Cluster explores the role of ERRIN in the area of resilience, security and defence in close collaboration with the ERRIN Management Board.

The Cluster actively monitors and engages with major EU priorities and strategies, including the development of the **Multiannual Financial Framework post-2027** and the future R&I and cohesion policies and funding and their place-based dimension. In 2026, the key focus is on the future **Horizon Europe** programme, the **European Competitiveness Fund** and the **National and Regional Partnership Plans**, alongside the role of **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)** as the basis for their R&I dimension. The Strategic Cluster also follows the key EU policy initiatives linked to Competitiveness Compass, such as the Union of Skills, Innovation Act and the ERA act, as well as coordinates ERRIN's engagement in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027.

Additionally, the ERRIN secretariat works on the [EU Preparatory Action 'Innovation for Place-based Transformation'](#) which offers ERRIN members a concrete opportunity to engage in place-based innovation experimentation and cross-sectoral learning.

More details about each Working Group and the project can be found at the end of this file.

CLUSTER CALENDAR

Note: ERRIN Policy WG meets monthly and there will be a standing point with MFF updates in all Policy WG meetings

Date	Topic	Responsible
15–16 January	Project Matchmaking and Training Lab: Erasmus+ Horizon Europe	SEFS WG
23 January	2026 kick-off cluster meeting: From Danish to Cypriot Presidency – links to place-based innovation	Cluster activity (led by Policy WG)
24 February	Reflection meeting on ERRIN's role in resilience, security and defence	Policy WG

17 March	Internal meeting on MFF post-2027 state of play	Policy WG
23 March	Skills for Competitiveness: how to address skills shortages in Europe's regions?	SEFS WG
14 April	Regions at the core of Europe's future competitiveness and innovation leadership	S3 WG
16 April	The EU Missions and the mission-oriented approach in the next MFF	Policy WG, other thematic clusters
13 May	ERRIN's online Skills for Resilience Talk	SEFS WG
20 May	Towards the European Competitiveness Fund	Policy WG
3 June	From territories to Europe: Place-based innovation in the next MFF	Policy WG, other thematic clusters
18 June	I3 Instrument – a look at the future and the current calls	S3 WG
22 June	Smart Specialisation in the Next MFF: From Policy Commitment to Regional Implementation	
25 June	ERRIN's second Skills for Resilience Talk	SEFS WG
26 June	Internal catch-up on MFF post-2027	Policy WG
8 September	MFF post-2027 state of play: Discussing implementation	Policy WG
6 October	ERRIN's 3rd online Skills Talk: Blue Skills	Joint SEFS and Blue Economy WG
8 October	European Innovation Act, public procurement and technology infrastructures	Policy WG
27 October	Links between NRPPs and ECF	S3 WG, Policy WG
5 November	European Partnerships – way forward	Policy WG
TBC	High-level exchange with the Cabinet Mînzatu: Union of Skills implementation and skills in the next MFF	SEFS WG
December (date TBC)	Internal meeting on MFF post-2027	Policy WG

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

[MFF post-2027 state of play: Discussing implementation](#)

8 September | 10:00-12:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG

Responsible co-leaders: Federica Garbuglia (Policy), Joanna Kubiak (S3)

In-person

The first policy meeting of the autumn will look into the state of play of the European Competitiveness Fund and the Horizon Europe 2028-2034 proposals. It will also be an opportunity to discuss with the European Commission the implementation of new instruments proposed by the next MFF, with a specific focus on the European Competitiveness Fund and tools such as the Single Market Value Chains Builder and the EU Tech Frontrunners.

[ERRIN's 3rd online Skills Talk: Blue Skills](#)

6 October 2026 | 9:30-11:00

Responsible WG: SEFS WG and Blue Economy WG

Responsible co-leaders: Joakim P. Berg, Berwyn Davis, Delia Mitcan, Marko Setinc (SEFS), Soren Heinecke (Blue Economy)

Online

This 3rd session in the series of ERRIN online Skills Talks will focus on Blue Skills and aims to introduce the [European Water Academy \(EUWA\)](#), one of the Commission's flagship initiatives designed to bridge the knowledge and implementation gaps in the water sector. ERRIN members will be invited to present their regional skills initiatives aiming at capacity building in areas such as maritime operations, water resilience, waste water management, and water technology and innovation. This session will also offer a space for exchange on the pressing upskilling needs and skills gaps regions face. The output of this session will feed into an input paper which the WG co-leaders will prepare in view of the high-level exchange with the Cabinet of Executive Vice-President Mînzatu on Skills in the next MFF, taking place on 12 November.

European Innovation Act, public procurement and research and technology infrastructures

8 October | 10:00-12:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG

Responsible co-leader: Marie Vaugeois

In-person

Following the expected adoption of the European Innovation Act and the revision of the EU public procurement framework in September, this meeting will discuss these developments alongside research and technology infrastructures.

The event will explore how the reformed public procurement rules could better support innovation and the development of lead markets in Europe's regions, as well as how research and technology infrastructures could accelerate the scaling up of strategic and breakthrough technologies. Building on ERRIN's ongoing work on the European Competitiveness Fund, Horizon Europe, Regional Innovation Valleys, and Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), the discussion will explore how regional and local authorities can leverage their procurement capacity and infrastructure assets to bolster place-based innovation ecosystems and bolster EU competitiveness objectives. The event will also link to the recently launched Charter of Access for Industrial Users to Research and Technology Infrastructures and the CoR opinion on 'A European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures' to be adopted on 12 October.

Representatives from the European Commission, procurement and innovation policy experts, and ERRIN members involved in relevant pilot initiatives will be brought together at the meeting to share experiences and draw up recommendations for regions.

Links between National and Regional Partnership Plans and the European Competitiveness Fund

27 October | 10:00-12:00

Responsible WG: S3 WG, Policy WG

Responsible co-leaders: Raluca Abaseaca, Joanna Kubiak

In-person

This event will explore the links between the National and Regional Partnership Plans and the European Competitiveness Fund. It will consider the role of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) as a potential “bridge” between the two instruments, helping to connect territorial priorities and investment needs with the EU’s wider competitiveness objectives. The discussion will explore how S3 can contribute to ensuring greater coherence and complementarity between national, regional and European-level funding, while supporting strategic investments in innovation and competitiveness.

The session will also focus on how these instruments can be better connected to the European Semester and its strategic priorities. In particular, it will explore how the Semester could better reflect the subnational and territorial dimension of structural reforms and investment, including through a stronger role for regions in the preparation of country reports and country-specific recommendations.

The event will consider different perspectives, including views from the European Parliament and the Council, providing an opportunity to reflect on how the future architecture of EU funding can best connect place-based approaches with European competitiveness priorities.

European Partnerships – way forward

5 November | 10:00-12:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG

Responsible co-leader: Zoé Buyle-Bodin

In-person

Following the call for evidence on future Treaty-Based partnerships finalised in July 2026 and the public consultation on future European Partnerships closed in October 2026, this meeting will explore the latest developments on this topic.

Discussions will build on ERRIN contribution to the Call for Evidence on the future Single Basic Act for Joint Undertakings published in July 2026 as well as recent cooperation activities with the CBE JU and the Clean Hydrogen Partnership.

Representatives from the European Commission, European Partnerships, research attachés and ERRIN members involved in different types of partnerships will be brought together at the meeting to share experiences and draw up recommendations.

High-level exchange with the Cabinet Mînzatu: Union of Skills implementation and skills in the next MFF

(exact date and time TBC)

Responsible WG: SEFS WG

Responsible co-leaders: Berwyn Davies, Delia Mitcan, Joakim P. Berg, Marko Šetinc

In-person

Following the [first exchange with the Cabinet of Vice-President Mînzatu in 2025 on the launch of the Union of Skills](#), the SEFS WG co-leaders will organise a bilateral exchange with the Cabinet with the aim of providing a better understanding of the regional dimension for addressing skills shortages, skills gaps and skills investment, and highlight the role of local and region public authorities in the field of Education and Training. This is particularly important to ensure that the public and societal dimensions are sufficiently acknowledged in the roll-out of the Union of Skills and to complement to strong industrial representation in the [European Skills High-Level Board](#). During this exchange, regional evidence and learnings of the first WG meetings of the 2026 (Skills for Competitiveness, Skills for Resilience, Security and Defence, and Blue Skills talks) will be presented for making the case for a strong regional skills component in the implementation of the next MFF programmes and their funding instruments. ERRIN members are invited to provide the SEFS WG co-leaders with their inputs, evidence and recommendations, which will be consolidated in an ERRIN position paper on Skills in the next MFF feeding into this exchange.

WIRE 2026: Future Regions: The Role of Sustainable Innovation in European Competitiveness

2-3 December

In-person in Limerick, Ireland

Hosted during Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union and co-funded by the European Commission through Horizon Europe, WIRE 2026 – the Week of Innovative Regions in Europe – will take place under the theme 'Future Regions: The Role of Sustainable Innovation in European Competitiveness'. The conference will bring together policymakers, researchers, regional authorities, innovation agencies, universities and industry from across Europe to exchange knowledge, strengthen collaboration and contribute to Europe's future competitiveness.

ERRIN is part of the Steering Committee of the WIRE Conference.

Internal meeting on MFF post-2027

December (exact date and time TBC)

Responsible WG: Policy WG

Responsible co-leaders: n/a

In-person

This interactive internal meeting will serve to discuss the state of play of the MFF post-2027 discussions at the end of the year.

PAST ACTIVITIES

Project Matchmaking and Training Lab: Erasmus+ Horizon Europe

15-16 January | 9:00–14:00

Responsible WG: SEFS WG

Responsible co-leaders: Berwyn Davies, Joakim P. Berg

In-person

This hands-on Project Matchmaking and Training Lab was a two-day event, co-organised by EURASHE and ERRIN's SEFS WG, designed to equip participants with the practical knowledge and skills needed to navigate and succeed in Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe funding opportunities. Bringing together funding experts and higher education practitioners, this training lab offered a unique combination of capacity building, inspiration and networking. Participants gained a clear understanding of the objectives, trends and future directions of the EU's major funding programmes and learned practical tips to strengthen their project applications.

The programme featured inspirational talks, insights from several European Union agencies and deep dives into the 2026 Erasmus+ and 2026–2027 Horizon Europe work programmes. Interactive project development labs gave participants the opportunity to brainstorm concrete ideas around proposed themes, while matchmaking activities helped foster new partnerships and collaborations. From the opening icebreakers to the final conclusions, the event was designed to be engaging, practical and forward-looking, ensuring that everyone leaves not only with enhanced skills in proposal writing but also with new connections and project prospects.

[2026 kick-off cluster meeting: From Danish to Cypriot Presidency – links to place-based innovation](#)

23 January | 10:00–12:00

Responsible WG: Cluster activity led by Policy WG

Responsible co-leaders: Siri Raahede Bentzen

In-person

This ERRIN Strategic Cluster kick-off meeting served to launch the activities of the Policy, Smart Specialisation and Science & Education Working Groups in 2026. It provided an opportunity for all ERRIN members to come together to network and explore the activities planned for this year, while looking into and discussing the developments of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2027 proposal under the Danish and Cypriot Presidencies of the Council with a focus on Horizon Europe. We heard about the state of play after the Danish Presidency and what plans the Cypriot Presidency has for the next six months.

During the event, Working Group leaders presented their annual work plans for 2026 alongside the competitiveness work stream, giving members the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the planned activities and discuss their potential involvement. A networking coffee followed.

[Reflection meeting on ERRIN's role in resilience, security and defence](#)

24 February | 14:30–17:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG

In-person

Europe has been undergoing a period of increased uncertainty with both geopolitical threats and challenges over global competitiveness. These tensions have also been felt by ERRIN members - over 90% of those who responded to the ERRIN member annual survey highlighted resilience, security and defence as strategic priorities in their regions.

This Policy WG meeting offered a space for reflection on ERRIN's role in resilience, security and defence, and how to integrate these considerations better in the network's ongoing work. Together with the invited speakers, we considered how the various elements of this complex topic can fit our ongoing work on competitiveness, thematic Working Groups as well as the revamped Working Group on Climate Adaptation and Resilience.

Internal meeting on MFF post-2027 state of play

17 March | 14:00–16:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG

In-person

This internal Policy WG meeting served as an opportunity to discuss together the state of play of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2027, especially with regard to the next Framework Programme (FP10) and the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF). The event had a highly interactive character - participants were invited to take part in a tour de table to share information, as well as insights from recent meetings and discussions with policy makers.

Skills for Competitiveness: how to address skills shortages in Europe's regions?

23 March | 14:30–16:00

Responsible WG: SEFS WG

Responsible co-leaders: Berwyn Davies, Delia Mitcan, Joakim P. Berg, Marko Šetinc

In-person

This session deepened the understanding of the place-based dimension in the implementation of the Union of Skills, putting skills at the core of the competitiveness debate. The European Commission presented the current state of play as well as emergent EU initiatives to address skills shortages and mismatches, including the Pact for Skills, skills partnerships and some glimpses into the proposed 2028-2034 MFF with relevance to the skills agenda. ERRIN members featured regional skills approaches to increase the territorial competitiveness: Emilia-Romagna region (skills in AI, data science, automation, mechatronics, cybersecurity, energy transition technologies and advanced materials), Stavanger (skills for green industries and energy), Oslo (skills in border regions) and Emmen (MOVE qualification recognised on both sides of the border).

Regions at the core of Europe's future competitiveness and innovation leadership

14 April | 14:00–17:00

Responsible WG: S3 WG

Responsible co-leaders: Raluca Abaseaca, Rozenn Maréchal

In-person

Europe stands at a critical point. As negotiations on the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) advance, the choices made in the coming months will determine whether the European Union strengthens its long-term competitiveness through its territories or drifts towards a more centralised investment model.

This policy roundtable, co-organised by EURADA and ERRIN, reflected on the future role of Smart Specialisation (S3) in the post-2027 EU policy and funding framework. The meeting followed up on the launch of the [Open Letter on the Future of the EU Budget](#), signed by 12 European networks to emphasise the strategic importance of place-based innovation.

The EU Missions and the mission-oriented approach in the next MFF

16 April | 14:00–16:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG, other thematic clusters

In-person

With the Horizon Europe (FP10) and European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) proposals currently under discussion at the European Parliament and the Council, ERRIN held a meeting focusing on the future of EU Missions in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). It provided an opportunity to reflect on the role of the mission-oriented approach in the EU's future R&I policy and funding landscape and built on [ERRIN's recent paper](#), which gathers evidence and concrete examples from Mission implementation in regions, cities and innovation ecosystems across Europe.

ERRIN's online Skills for Resilience Talk

13 May | 10:00–11:30

Responsible WG: SEFS WG

Responsible co-leaders: Berwyn Davies, Joakim P. Berg; Delia Mitcan, Marko Šetinc

Online

ERRIN's first online Skills for Resilience Talk took a place-based perspective and aimed to gain a deeper understanding of emerging capacity-building activities across Europe's regions to increase territorial resilience. Several ERRIN members presented regional initiatives to align education, research, industry and public actors around resilience skills. With initiatives ranging from capacity building to address the impact of climate change (Normandy and Balearic Islands), local Security and Safety Campus (Assen), university-led public-private partnership for regional resilience (Lineus University), to the Resilience and Security Programme of Eindhoven University of Technology, this session demonstrated that regions are increasing skills investments in building territorial resilience. The membership expressed interest in exploring how these initiatives can be scaled.

[Towards the European Competitiveness Fund](#)

20 May | 13:30–15:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG

Responsible co-leader: Marie Vaugeois

In-person

Following the publication of the European Commission's European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) proposal back in July 2025, the release of the draft European Parliament's report on the topic on 20 April this year and the deadline for amendments on 11 May, this Policy Working Group aimed to take stock of the current debate on the ECF and reflect on the role of local and regional governments and place-based innovation ecosystems in the proposal.

ERRIN, together with the members, has been active in preparing inputs and recommendations to the ECF proposal and following the release of the draft European Parliament's report, we have developed the [third iteration of our amendment proposals](#) before the deadline of 11 May.

[From territories to Europe: Place-based innovation in the next MFF](#)

3 June | 10:00–12:00

Responsible WG: Policy WG, other thematic clusters

In-person

The [Preparatory Action on Innovation for Place-based Transformation](#) launched last year, helps territories maximise their innovation potential through awareness raising, capacity building and experimentation. After one year of practical implementation of the Action, this event - organised jointly by ERRIN and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission - aimed to create a space for reflection on the experiences gathered so far across participating territories, discuss what has been learned, and how these lessons can inform future policy design. As place-based innovation is the backbone of Europe's competitiveness, the event explored how place-based transformative innovation can be integrated in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and its programme architecture.

[I3 Instrument – a look at the future and the current calls](#)

18 June | 14:00–16:00

Responsible WG: S3 WG

Responsible co-leader: Mirva Männikkö

In-person

This Smart Specialisation Working Group meeting focused on the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument, drawing attention to the experiences from using the initiative up to date, and reflecting on its future. Enriched by practical regional insights from applying to the I3 Instrument so far, the event also offered information on the currently open calls for proposals running from 13

May to 12 November 2026. Finally, it served to explore more broadly how to create a more strategic interregional collaboration and complementary value chains through smart specialisation strategies (S3).

Smart Specialisation in the Next MFF: From Policy Commitment to Regional Implementation

22 June | 17:30–19:30

Responsible WG: S3 WG

In-person

Ahead of the S3 Conference, which took place on 23-24 June in Brussels, the Network for Experts on Smart Specialisation (NESS) organised a side event together with ERRIN. It created a focused space for regional practitioners, networks and stakeholders to discuss how Smart Specialisation can remain a practical delivery framework for regional innovation, interregional cooperation and European competitiveness in the next MFF. Building on the joint [Open letter on the Future of the EU budget](#) from March this year, which advocated for the future of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), the discussion connected the broader policy debate with the practical realities of implementation in regions.

ERRIN's second Skills for Resilience Talk

25 June | 10:00–11:00

Responsible WG: SEFS WG

Responsible co-leaders: Marko Šetinc, Berwyn Davies, Delia Mitcan, Joakim P. Berg

This session took a deep dive into skills development for security and defence. ERRIN members learnt about the Committee of the Regions Working Group on Defence, which considers the regional dimensions in the EU Defence and Security policy landscape. Since numerous skills gaps and needs have already been identified by regions, skills development has emerged as a future area of work. It is expected that skills will most likely feature among the priorities for the second term of the Working Group mandate that will run from 2028–2030. The session also featured an interesting regional example from Östergötland Region in Sweden, presenting Linköping University's a short challenge-based multi-disciplinary programme aiming at create an innovation ecosystem for total defence that includes students, researchers, business, organisations and authorities.

Internal catch-up on MFF post-2027

26 June | 11:00–12:30

Responsible WG: Policy WG

Responsible co-leaders: n/a

In-person

This internal Policy WG catch-up offered an opportunity to discuss together the state of play of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2027, at a time when the draft European Parliament

reports on the next Framework Programme (FP10), the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) are out and the deadlines for amendments have passed. This interactive exchange also served as a wrap-up of ERRIN's advocacy work in the first half of the year, before the summer break and further activities ahead.

OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTPUTS FROM ERRIN PROJECTS

- Preparatory Action 'Innovation for Place-based Transformation'
 - 2–3 March: In-person workshop of the NEB Experimentation Journey in Florence (closed event)
 - 16–20 March: In-person workshop of the Reduction of Reliance on Fossil Fuels Experimentation Journey in Vaasa (closed event)
 - 2 June: Presentation of the Preparatory Action at Berlaymont and announcement of four new thematic Experimentation Journeys
 - Work in progress:
 - 10-11 September: High level in-person workshop of the Circularity Experimentation Journey in Dalarna Region (closed event)
 - 15-17 September: In-person workshop of the Digital Services and Health Experimentation Journey in Ireland (closed event)
 - 20 October: In-person workshop of the Territorial Preparedness Experimentation Journey in Podkarpackie (closed event)

OTHER ISSUES/TOPICS TO BE MONITORED:

- Engage with the Cypriot and Irish EU Council Presidencies
- Engage in the European Research and Innovation Days on 10-11 November
- Exchange between the Strategic Cluster co-leaders and the ITRE Secretariat and/or the STOA Panel
- Follow the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027:
 - ERA Structural Policy: Upscaling knowledge valorisation capacities
 - ERA Structural Policy: Strategic Energy Technologies Plan as a key component of ERA
 - ERA Structural Policy: Improving the articulation between R&I and Higher Education within ERA unleashing the full potential of European R&I ecosystems:
 - Workshop “Higher education institutions as Ecosystem Anchors” on 1-2 June 2026 – ERRIN supported the event organised by European Commission, YERUN, Coimbra and EURASHE – Learn more [here](#)
 - Explore collaboration and mutual exchange with the Regional Innovation Ecosystems Group of the [FOR-EU4All](#) Community of practice gathering all European University Alliances; [UniLion](#), [EURASHE](#), [YERUN](#)
 - ERA Structural Policy: Improve EU access to excellence

- ERA Action: Accelerating R&I investments for Europe's industrial transformation and competitive sustainability
- Map regional and local priorities and investment needs under the future European Competitiveness Fund – [exercise](#) started with ERRIN Members in April 2026
- Tighten contacts with European Commission DG BUDGET, DG GROW and DG SEC-GEN related to MFF and competitiveness
- Explore allies to support for place-based R&I ecosystems
- Follow up with EIT on the role of place-based innovation ecosystems
- Mobilise industry stakeholders in regional innovation ecosystems – different approaches and mutual learning
- Further assess and provide recommendations to interregional collaboration instruments for innovation (I3 Instrument, Thematic S3 Partnerships, Regional Innovation Valleys, Innovation for Place-based Transformation, INTERREG)
- Follow the S3 Community of Practice (including the annual S3 Conference on 23 June)
- Follow the I3 Support Facility (including the annual I3 Instrument Forum on 1 October)
- Follow the European Innovation Council (including the EIC Summit on 3-4 June)
- Follow other skills-related initiatives: Skills Observatory, Harnessing Europe's Talent initiative (talent development and retention in regions facing a development trap), EIT Skills Academies, skills for Smart Specialisation and the ERRIN's Culture and Creativity Cluster Skills workstream.

MORE INFORMATION: LEADERS AND PROJECTS

Policy Working Group



The [Policy Working Group](#) works closely with the Management Board and the leaders of the other Working Groups to position ERRIN on cross-cutting policy issues. The Working Group follows closely the overall research and innovation policy, in particular the Horizon Europe framework programme, from an overarching perspective and ensures coordination of horizontal programme aspects. The Working Group also focuses on the preparations for the next European framework programme for R&I (FP10), implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) as the renewed policy framework and agenda for research and innovation, as well as the New European Innovation Agenda, especially strengthening ecosystems and the "Regional Innovation Valleys" initiative.

LEADERS

- **Helene-Olesja Betuch**, Representation of Saxony-Anhalt to the EU, Helene-Olesja.Betuch@lv-bruessel.stk.sachsen-anhalt.de
- **Maria Bilbao de Azpiazu**, Basque Country EU Office, m-bilbaoazpiazu@euskadi.eus
- **Zoé Buyle-Bodin**, Region Normandie, zoe.buylebodine@normandie.fr
- **Federica Garbuglia**, Emilia-Romagna Region Delegation to the EU, federica.garbuglia@art-er.it

PROJECTS

- [Innovation for Place-based Transformation EU Preparatory Action](#)

Competitiveness work stream (together with Policy Working Group)

Competitiveness has been set as one of the top priorities of the new European Commission, also with regard to the planning of the next Multiannual Financial Framework post-2027. Following these developments, the cluster will work on defining ERRIN's **workstream tackling innovation and competitiveness**, building on the previous work of the Innovation and Investment Working Group.

LEADERS

- **Siri Raahede Bentzen**, South Denmark, srb@southdenmark.be
- **Marie Vaugeois**, Occitanie Europe, marie.vaugeois@occitanie-europe.eu
- **ERRIN** [Management Board](#)

Science & Education for Society Working Group



The [Science & Education for Society Working Group](#) addresses topics related to the concept of place-based universities and engagement with society, industry and citizens, while also working on the role of education (both VET and Higher Education) in the Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3) as well as education and skills for research and innovation. The Working Group facilitates information sharing and knowledge development and aims to strengthen existing and build new relationships with the EU institutions. Facilitating project development is also part of the Working Group's scope. For this purpose, the Working Group assesses the interest of the membership and supports the members in the most efficient way in building consortia, primarily with the ERRIN online tool for project development.

LEADERS

- **Joakim P. Berg**, Oslo Region European Office, joakim@osloregion.org
- **Berwyn Davies**, Welsh Higher Education Brussels – Welsh Government, berwyn.davies@uniswales.ac.uk
- **Delia Mitcan**, Brainport Eindhoven - Eindhoven University of Technology, d.mitcan@tue.nl
- **Marko Šetinc**, Slovenian Business and Research Association, marko.setinc@sbra.be

Smart Specialisation Working Group



The [Smart Specialisation Working Group](#) aims to monitor and contribute to key policy developments related to smart specialisation strategies (S3) by enhancing dialogue with relevant EU institutions and stakeholders. The goal is to strengthen the regional perspective in the wider smart specialisation agenda and facilitate interregional cooperation. The Working Group actively engages in the debate around shaping the cohesion policy post-2027 and the future of S3. It also follows different interregional collaboration instruments for innovation, their state of play and upcoming opportunities.

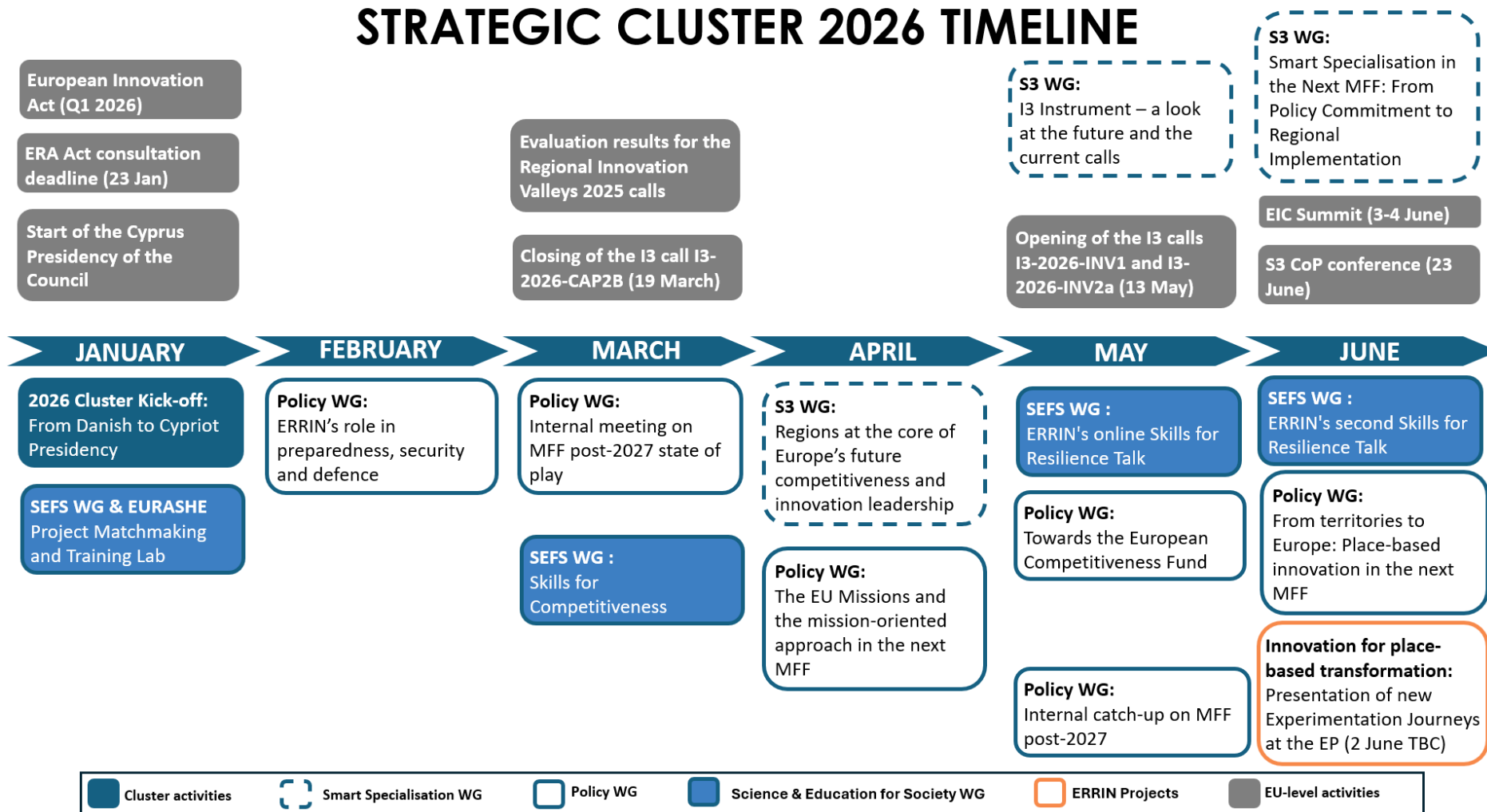
LEADERS

- **Raluca Abaseaca**, North-East Romania Regional Development Agency, raluca.abaseaca@adrnorddest.ro
- **Joanna Kubiak**, Wielkopolska Region, joanna.kubiak@wielkopolska.eu
- **Mirva Männikkö**, West Finland European Office, mirva.mannikko@westfinland.be
- **Rozenn Maréchal**, Delegation of the Brittany Region, rozenn.marechal@bretagne.bzh

ERRIN CONTACTS

			
Policy	Policy	Smart Specialisation	Science & Education for Society
EWA CHOMICZ ewa.chomicz@errin.eu	PIRITA LINDHOLM pirita.lindholm@errin.eu	EWA CHOMICZ ewa.chomicz@errin.eu	ASTRID HANNES astrid.hannes@errin.eu

STRATEGIC CLUSTER 2026 TIMELINE



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