

**ERRIN INPUT TO
THE PUBLIC
CONSULTATION
ON THE PAST,
PRESENT AND
FUTURE OF THE
EUROPEAN
RESEARCH &
INNOVATION
FRAMEWORK
PROGRAMMES
2014-2027**



ERRIN European Regions
Research and
Innovation Network

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Introductory remarks

Set up over 20 years ago with a goal to support European regions and cities in enhancing their research and innovation capacities and ecosystems, ERRIN is pleased to share its input to the largest public consultation on the past, present and future of the Horizon programmes 2014-2027.

This input was co-created by a dedicated drafting group composed of a number of representatives from the ERRIN membership following several meetings and exchanges throughout January and February 2023. Feedback was also collected from the wider membership to ensure inclusion of a variety of perspectives. Finally, inputs developed and experiences gathered by ERRIN over the past years further shaped the response to this consultation that is of crucial relevance to the network.

ERRIN's contribution scopes in particular the current Horizon Europe programme and the upcoming Strategic Plan of Horizon Europe 2025-2027. The document is structured around four main areas based on ERRIN priorities: **EU Missions, European Partnerships and funding synergies, widening, and ecosystem approach.**

EU Missions and widening engagement are the two main priorities of the network, and have important potential for strengthening R&I ecosystems across Europe by reinforcing connections between local and regional public and private stakeholders. European Partnerships are crucial for creating new collaborations, offering close links with national governments and are one of the areas where ERRIN members have been exploring funding synergies between R&I and regional funding. Lastly, promoting further multi-stakeholder collaboration and place-based R&I ecosystems should be the overarching basis for building effective EU R&I policy. A cross-disciplinary approach and a broad collaboration between different types of actors, as encouraged through the clusters in Horizon Europe, enable new ways of thinking and solutions to be developed.

1. EU Missions

The EU Missions are a key priority for ERRIN and the network has actively worked on the Missions since the start of their development process. The ERRIN Management Board adopted the EU Missions as one of its priority areas for 2022-2023 and the network has, through its Working Groups, closely followed and contributed to shaping the Missions through various events, input papers and formal and informal dialogues with the European Commission. With the Missions having entered their implementation phase, ERRIN has continued to support its members through, for example, projects contributing to the implementation of the Missions.

The EU Missions present a novel approach to address some of the most pressing challenges faced by people in their daily lives – from polluted oceans, desertification and air pollution to cancer, biodiversity loss and extreme weather events. The Missions have gained strong support among ERRIN members as many of them identify the local and regional level as central to achieving the Mission objectives, while also promoting the ecosystem approach of bringing together all stakeholders to collectively define, develop and implement the solutions needed to achieve the ambitious goals set by the Missions. The ecosystem approach is further strengthened by the Missions' strong focus on social and governance innovation – both at the local level and across governance levels.

The support for the **Mission approach** can be observed at the local level, as it is being adopted by a growing number of cities and regions across Europe. Among the ERRIN membership, regions are

locally developing and implementing Mission-like approaches, or using the EU Missions to accelerate and strengthen the work on the challenges identified by the Missions, such as the acceleration of the work towards climate neutrality. The outcomes of the Mutual Learning Event, jointly organised between the TRAMI project and ERRIN in October 2022, demonstrated that the Mission objectives are also being integrated into local and regional policies and strategies. The Region of Blekinge (Sweden) has integrated the Missions into its Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy and its regional funding programmes, while other regions use the Missions as a framework to shape regional action plans and to mobilise key stakeholders around the challenges identified through the Missions.

While it is important to have clear evaluation and feedback structures in place, ERRIN wishes to remind the European Commission that the Missions represent a significant acceleration of existing ambitions and, consequently, require a long-term approach. Therefore, existing processes and ways of working need to be adapted, and it should be understood that the implementation work requires time to ensure that the results benefit society. The final impacts and results of the Missions on local, regional and national levels will therefore take time to demonstrate. The appointment of a new Commission in 2025 will make the need for a clear and transferable working structure even more pertinent, especially in relation to the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

1.1 Impacts of the EU Missions

Although the EU Missions are in their early implementation phases, ERRIN members can already witness **several positive impacts** that their engagement with the Missions have had on the local and regional level. The Missions have helped placing some of the topics, especially climate neutrality and climate adaptation, higher on political agendas and have raised the ambition to tackle these challenges in cities and regions across Europe. The momentum created by these Missions has already given an impetus to greater cooperation among local and regional stakeholders and has enabled strategic collaboration across departments, sectors and borders. The bold acceleration goals set by the Missions have also helped speeding up the timelines for local actions, ensuring that the local and regional ambitions match the ones set by the Missions.

The calls in the Horizon Europe Mission Work Programme have **further encouraged collaboration between new stakeholders** – opening the door for new actors to join Horizon-funded projects. The funding opportunities presented under the Mission Work Programme have also provided public authorities in cities and regions with human resources and capacities to work on issues crucial to them, which they otherwise would not have the capacity to focus on due to constrained resources.

The EU Missions have contributed to **enhanced international collaboration** between European cities and regions, also beyond the Horizon-funded projects. Some of the Missions have created European communities of cities and regions working towards the ambitious goals set by the Missions – helping them to exchange knowledge and experiences with each other, broaden their European networks, increase their visibility and engagement on the European arena, and strengthen the ambition and political interest in the Missions.

1.2 Areas to strengthen in the further implementation of the Missions

To ensure that the EU Missions meet the challenges and needs faced by the reality on the ground, ERRIN wishes to highlight some areas that should be strengthened as the Missions' implementation moves forward.

The implementation of the Missions requires systemic changes, including the establishment of integrated working structures within the public sector – on local, regional, national and European level, between public sector levels - from the local to the EU, but also between the public sector and other relevant actors in society. This will, in turn, support the need for a more integrated view on different policy fields, which is needed to address the complex challenges presented by the Missions. Local and regional actors from the private sector and academia should also have a greater role in the development and implementation of policies, which will require a shift in the mindset of public authorities.

While EU Missions seek innovation in governance – resulting in more integrated ways of developing policies and implementing measures, as well as in decision making processes involving a broader range of local and regional stakeholders, not sufficient governance innovation has been witnessed on the national and European level. This will, almost certainly, lead to problems in the future when sectoral approaches at higher levels of government will diverge too much from the Mission-driven and integrated local and regional government approach. For the Missions to be successful, ERRIN wants to emphasise the need for such integrated working structures to be adopted on all government levels, including the national and European level.

Achieving the ambitious objectives of the Missions will not only require that the European work force develops new and strengthens existing skills and competences but it will also create an increased demand for transversal skills. In the case of the Mission on 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030, cities will need both a skilled work force that is able to efficiently implement and correctly operate technologies for energy efficiency, as well as workers who are able to connect the dots and look at challenges and solutions in a holistic and integrated way. In other words, cities need people who understand the complexities of the different transitions that a city must go through to achieve the acceleration towards climate neutrality. ERRIN wishes to see more effort and funding being dedicated to this challenge on the EU level in the further implementation of the Missions.

To successfully implement the Missions at the local and regional level, synergies and coordination between the Missions need to be maximised and silos need to be broken. The European Commission should facilitate this from the EU level – joint Mission calls in the Mission Work Programme is a start, but more should be done. Synergies between the Missions and other EU funding programmes, including structural funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and European Partnerships should also be facilitated to ensure funding to develop and implement the solutions needed to achieve the Missions. Strengthened links with existing policies, initiatives and projects should also be ensured.

A well-defined implementation process is still missing in many Missions, which makes it difficult for stakeholders to understand how they can engage in the Missions. The role of the different stakeholders in each Mission is not always clear, resulting in frustration from research-focused stakeholders when many Horizon Europe Mission calls present higher Technology Readiness Level (TRL) needs, whereas public authorities struggle to see a clear role for them in some of the Missions. Clear communication on the benefits of the Missions and each stakeholder's role is needed from the European Commission and the Member States need to engage stakeholders in the Missions, contributing to a further acceleration of ambitions.

As the Missions require strong governance innovation, there is a need to bridge expectations between all key stakeholders. Cities and regions expect support with, for example, establishing a more strategic framework to tackle adaptation, connecting projects and initiatives and developing new or adapting existing solutions. Meanwhile, the research community wish for more Research and Innovation

Actions (RIAs) that allow for basic and applied research at low TRLs. The challenge in the Mission work will be to find ways to get everyone on board and working together towards the same goal.

Finally, the benefits of committing to the [Mission Charters](#), as well as the services provided by the platforms introduced in many Missions are not yet clear to the different stakeholders targeted by the Missions. This both discourages stakeholders from signing up to the Charters, as well as hampers their continued, active involvement after signing them. The current governance structure of the EU Missions, which is developing in a very organic way, is too complex and based on a multitude of projects. In the Mutual Learning Event organised with the TRAMI project, regions voiced their concern that the Missions run a risk of turning into a set of running Horizon projects rather than supporting solid political ambitions. As the implementation process of the Missions is moving forward, there is a need to tighten coordination within the European Commission. Also, each Mission should develop one single platform that collects all the information on policies, instruments, data bases and opportunities in a clear way. Such a platform should also be well connected to the overall EU Mission governance structure.

1.3 Mission specific inputs

Mission on 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030

The Mission on 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 (Cities Mission) is probably the only Mission that, one and a half years into its implementation, can already **demonstrate clear impact and added value**, especially on the local, but also the regional and national level. Led by its Smart Cities Working Group, ERRIN has actively engaged in the development process of the Cities Mission since early 2019 and has contributed to its shaping and implementation through numerous input papers and meetings with the European Commission. Additionally, ERRIN is an active partner in two projects supporting the implementation of the Mission – [NetZeroCities](#) and [MOSAIC](#).

The Cities Mission has **contributed to stepping up local climate neutrality ambitions** and creating a momentum within and among cities - the latter having resulted in the creation of a European community of ambitious cities working together towards climate neutrality. Locally, this momentum has enabled new actors to gather around the table and launch new initiatives, with the ultimate aim to speed up the timeline and achieve greater impact – both in terms of carbon emission reductions, but also societal impact. One example of such new initiatives is the Team for Climate Neutrality and Smart Cities created at Wrocław University (Poland), which brings together scientists to develop and promote solutions related to achieving climate neutrality in the City of Wrocław.

Many cities already have structures in place for **collaborating with local partners of the quadruple helix**, however, the Cities Mission has enabled them to elevate these collaborations to a new level and encouraged them to explore and experiment with new models for multi-stakeholder governance. Within the ERRIN membership, examples of such experimentation can be found. In the City of Groningen (Netherlands), the municipality has teamed up with the University of Groningen and the University of Applied Sciences to co-create new governance models and new forms of effective citizen engagement in light of the Mission. Additionally, the interdisciplinary schools of the University of Groningen are working together with the municipality on the implementation of research projects that contribute to concrete challenges identified by the municipality, aiming to close the gap between

academia and the work on the ground. Meanwhile, the City of Gothenburg (Sweden) is piloting new quadruple helix collaboration structures through the MOSAIC project.

One of the most significant impacts of the Cities Mission is the change in governance, both within cities, as well as between cities and other levels of governance (regional and national). Cities can testify to the breakdown of silos between different municipal departments involved in the work towards climate neutrality, from transport and environment, to waste management and democratic processes. This has enabled new departments, municipal agencies and companies to collaborate and find their role in the Mission. The City of Frankfurt (Germany) has, for example, installed a new Department for Climate Mitigation responsible for energy and environment related issues, which has intensified the collaboration both with research and academia in the city as well as with other cities in the region and the State of Hessen to deliver on the objectives of the Mission.

Meanwhile, [national support structures and platforms](#) have been, or are in the process of being, established in countries across Europe to support cities in achieving the objectives of the Mission. These present **important forums for cities to work together** and jointly discuss their challenges and needs with different national actors, especially with the relevant national ministries, to identify the enablers that will accelerate the transition to a net zero future. In many countries, these platforms also present an opportunity for cities beyond the 112 selected ones to take part of the Mission work and experiences, which is crucial to achieving the second objective of the Cities Mission – climate neutrality in all EU cities by 2050. ERRIN hopes that the establishment of such platforms will become a reality in all European countries, bearing in mind that they should remain bottom-up frameworks to ensure the deployment of place-based solutions and initiatives.

The national coordination between cities and the unified voice they represent under the Cities Mission has helped cities in some countries to approach not only the national level, but also private sector actors such as large companies and private banks. In some case, the Cities Mission has also opened up **new funding opportunities** for the climate transition work in cities, not only through Horizon Europe but also on the national level. In Finland, a new national funding programme linked to the Cities Mission has been set up, while some cities in Sweden have received funds to support the coordination and implementation of the Mission.

Although the Cities Mission already presents impressive results and impacts in cities across Europe, ERRIN wishes to put forward suggestions to further improve its implementation and the acceleration towards a net zero future.

In our view, it is of the utmost importance that the [upcoming EU Mission Label provides clear opportunities](#) for better access to EU funding and financing, but for it also to have an impact on national funding opportunities presented to cities. Achieving climate neutrality by 2030 will require significant investments for cities, and a European Commission label without clear content will not suffice. Furthermore, ERRIN members and their local actors engaged in the local mission team count on the support of the European Commission in dialogues with the European Investment Bank and the private sector to obtain the financial resources necessary for the climate transition.

In May 2022, ERRIN presented its key messages for the [Horizon Europe Mission Work Programme 2023](#), but wishes to, once more, highlight a few key points relevant to the Cities Mission. The calls of the Horizon Europe Mission Work Programme should, to a much greater extent, reflect the needs defined by cities rather than the demands of industry and academia. Industry plays a key role in achieving climate neutrality in cities, but this engagement must be in line with the Mission objectives

and leave the leadership role to the cities. Further, ERRIN members wish to see a balance between calls addressing research needs and implementation needs, leaving enough space for innovation, in particular social innovation, governance innovation and process innovation. Finding synergies between the challenges on the ground and the potential of academia is crucial to allow all stakeholders to find their role in the Mission implementation.

The Climate City Contract (CCC) process should effectively be linked to already existing processes and initiatives on the ground. The CCC will present an effective tool for cities to steer their climate work, however, it lacks the political support and commitment from the other governance levels imperative to cities achieving climate neutrality – the national and European levels. ERRIN members are highly disappointed to see that the European Commission and the Member States will not be signatories to the CCCs, as the legal and financial barriers perceived by cities can predominantly be solved on these levels.

Finally, ERRIN members want to emphasise the need for increased support for cities beyond the 112 selected Mission Cities to ensure a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. Currently, cities outside the selected 112 do not experience the added value of the Mission and the Mission's impact in these cities is limited. As previously highlighted, the national support structures and platforms play an important role in the work of including all interested cities in Europe's journey towards climate neutrality. ERRIN wishes to take this opportunity to emphasise the role of the European Commission in keeping a dialogue with the Member States to encourage the effective involvement of national governments in the work.

Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change

ERRIN has actively engaged in the development of the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change (Adaptation Mission) over the past years through the development of input papers and the organisation of events – one of them being a sounding board meeting with the European Commission in 2022 to exchange on the progress of regions towards climate resilience. After providing [input on the Mission Charter](#) to the European Commission, ERRIN also signed the Mission Implementation Charter in summer 2022 and became a Friend of the Mission. Over the next years, ERRIN will support regions in the implementation of the Mission through the [Pathways2Resilience](#) and [RESIST](#) projects.

In response to the large interest among the ERRIN members in the Adaptation Mission, **ERRIN has created an [Adaptation Task Force](#)** led by the members that currently brings together some 30 regions from across Europe. This wide geographical spread reflects a variety of climate change-related challenges, but also different stages of development and implementation of solutions in the regions. The Adaptation Mission has contributed to placing the issue of adaptation to climate change high up on the public and political agenda, also at the local and regional level. With cities and regions constantly being confronted by limited resources and high competition among priority topics, the Mission has succeeded in bringing the topic of adaptation to the forefront of discussions and creating a momentum across Europe. Moreover, the Mission allows regions and communities to work on the topic of adaptation in a more long-term and strategic way, enabling the integration of adaptation aspects into local and regional investment and planning decisions.

The **Community of Practice (CoP)**, consisting of Mission Charter signatories and launched under the Mission, has the potential to play an important role in matchmaking, knowledge exchange and peer learning between the involved regions and communities. The CoP could also give regions access to existing climate related tools at EU level and/or in other Member States and help exploit new

solutions. ERRIN hopes that the European Commission will harness the full potential of this group of ambitious and motivated communities and regions and provide them with the necessary support to move towards climate resilience.

ERRIN members have voiced their concern over the lack of a clear process in the Adaptation Mission. The Mission fails to present concrete steps that regions can take to move towards the Mission objectives, particularly after signing the Mission Charter. ERRIN hopes that a clear process on how to concretely engage in and implement the Mission – both for Charter signatories and non-signatories, will become more evident as the Mission moves forward in its implementation.

The funding opportunities presented under the Adaptation Mission have enabled regions and communities to dedicate additional resources to their adaptation work. One example of this is the [RESIST project](#), in which ERRIN together with a number of its member regions will implement large-scale demonstrations to tackle key climate challenges. These projects are valuable for regions as they enable them to test new technical, social and governance solutions, while promoting cross-sector and multi-stakeholder collaboration. In our view, the call (HORIZON-MISS-2021-CLIMA-02-04) under which the RESIST project was funded can be seen as a great example as it encouraged all ecosystem stakeholders to take part in the project and the large-scale demonstrations, while also tackling the challenge of innovation divide by asking for one of the demonstrators to be from less developed region.

The Adaptation Mission has contributed to improving regions' understanding of how they can involve citizens and the private sector in the work on climate adaptation, as well as providing insights into financial elements that can support the work. Further, the Mission presents opportunities for collaboration across municipal and regional departments and for the generation of new know-how and innovations on the local and regional level.

ERRIN members wish for increased and better access to funding opportunities that support regions and communities in the implementation of the Mission objectives, including funding that aims to support the replication of best practices. Access to data and technical assistance for the implementation of adaptation strategies, their assessment and the monitoring of progress are further needs presented by the ERRIN membership.

Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030

ERRIN has in the past provided inputs to Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 (Ocean and Waters Mission), notably through a [dialogue with the European Commission](#) on the role of regions in the lighthouse basins and through [input on the Mission Charter](#).

In order to achieve the objective to protect and restore our seas, waters and oceans by 2030, the Ocean and Waters Mission should further develop its multi-actor and integrated approach, bringing together all relevant stakeholders at European, national, regional and local levels and across sectors. Currently, the Mission does not present a clear process and it is difficult for stakeholders, including regions, to see the added value of getting involved in the Ocean and Waters Mission. Therefore, ERRIN wishes to see more clarity on the role of regional and local stakeholders within the Mission and around the support services that will be provided to the stakeholders adhering to the Mission Charter. More effective and extensive communication would also be needed by the European Commission to mobilise regional and local actors.

Furthermore, the stakeholders of the regional ecosystems do not see themselves reflected in the calls in the Horizon Europe Missions Work Programme, which often are too prescriptive and do not reflect local needs. This results in low engagement and interest from some of the key Mission stakeholders, as they do not see how the Mission can act as a tool to support their activities and work. ERRIN wishes to remind the European Commission that, although the Mission goes beyond the funding opportunities provided by Horizon Europe, the image of the Mission strongly relies on the themes selected and defined by the Mission-related calls.

ERRIN would also like to raise concerns about the rigid and narrow thematic basin approach in the Oceans and Waters Mission. ERRIN members see the division of the Mission into different sea basins, each with specific and narrow priorities, as a barrier to their participation. A more flexible and open approach would be welcomed, as this would allow regional stakeholders to define their needs and the problems to be addressed in a specific geographical location. ERRIN hopes that the second phase of the Mission's implementation will effectively address these elements, allowing local and regional ecosystems to propose their solutions to tackle the key objectives defined by the Ocean and Waters Mission.

ERRIN wishes for the European Commission to further value and clarify the role of cities and regions in the Mission. Further clarification on how the process of becoming an Associated Region in the Horizon Europe calls for proposals will work in practice would also be welcomed. It is also unfortunate that cities and regions are not considered as demonstrators. As co-design and co-creation are key elements in the Missions, it would be important to engage the relevant actors in the development process from the start and not only as replicators. In addition, the Mission should, to a greater extent, support synergies and create better links with other regional activities, such as priorities under the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies, other strategies, as well as other funding sources.

Finally, ERRIN welcomes the dialogue that has been initiated with the Mission Secretariat and looks forward to continuing it to further explore how regions and cities could be effectively involved in the Mission.

Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe

The Mission A Soil Deal for Europe (Soil Mission) has great potential to structure the soil-related activities and work taking place in European regions and cities, while also creating links to some of the other Missions, notably the Adaptation Mission, Cities Mission and Ocean and Waters Mission. ERRIN recognises that the Soil Mission still is finding its feet and has not yet proceeded as far as some of the other EU Missions in its implementation.

ERRIN hopes that the Soil Mission will, through its future Manifesto, be able to present a clear process where all relevant stakeholders are able to recognise their role and how they can contribute to achieving the objectives of the Mission. The Mission will need to provide adequate support to regions, cities and their local ecosystems for the implementation work, which should respond to their identified needs and challenges.

ERRIN members wish for more space for bottom-up approaches to achieve soil health, climate-smart and sustainable soil and land management across sectors, within the frame of the Soil Mission and the Soil Health Law. The notion of 'one size fits all', for example in terms of the uniform definition of a living lab or an absolute indicator on a soil health metric, across all soil/land uses in Europe is likely

not supporting the rich innovation capacity of bottom-up actions undertaken across European regions to achieve the Mission goal.

In terms of funding opportunities under the Horizon Europe Missions Work Programme, ERRIN members hope to see a wider range of soils being covered by the calls. The calls focus currently too heavily on agricultural soil, while also other types of soils should be addressed, for example industrial soils or urban soils in general that can provide both increased economic development, biodiversity, and life quality in EU cities.

In addition, ERRIN would like to see further development of synergies between the Mission and the various soil health policies and actions at EU, national and regional levels will be further developed. In this sense, ERRIN welcomes that 18 out of 28 Strategic Plans related to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) include explicit links to the Soil Mission. This type of synergies could be further developed also under other EU Missions.

Cancer Mission

Even though healthcare in the European Union is predominantly a competence of the Member States, regional and local authorities share responsibilities and competencies in the sector as some countries in Europe are organised in a decentralised management system. Regional and local authorities and actors thus need to be explicitly considered in the further development and implementation of the Cancer Mission. Since regional and local authorities are key in implementing research results and in deploying and sustaining innovation, their needs and contribution should be considered early on when identifying future priorities and activities deriving from the Cancer Mission. In addition, the role of the regional and local stakeholders in the National Cancer Mission Hubs should be well defined. This will enable the Mission's activities to be integrated and coordinate among relevant stakeholders, as well as to raise awareness of the Mission at regional level and local levels.

Currently, the Cancer Mission is disconnected from the other Missions and initiatives, whilst being large-scale, research focused and technical. For these reasons, regional stakeholders do not see the clear added value in the calls. Additionally, by removing all cancer calls from the health cluster, it is felt that projects, such as RIAs, are now missing from this area. Transferring calls from the thematic cluster under EU Missions Work Programme is not enough to reach the objectives set by the Mission.

Whilst it is felt that the Mission is indeed doing good work, the timely transition from project to impact is not yet clear within the Cancer Mission. There is a need to accelerate the results, impacts, and scalability of all of the past and future projects within the Mission to ensure that the aims of the Mission are met. ERRIN would like to see stronger connections with related European partnerships, structural funds and other initiatives related to health improvement and health systems reforms.

1.4 Recommendations

- Missions are a new concept that is not yet fully understood by all stakeholders. Therefore, **better communication** on the benefits of the EU Missions as well as their role and links to other initiatives is still needed. We therefore recommend that further joint communication to raise awareness of the potential and ways to engage in the Missions is organised at EU, national, regional and local levels.

- A **clear governance and coordination structure** is needed for the five EU Missions as well as **well-defined implementation processes** outlining how various stakeholders can get engaged in the Missions, especially beyond Horizon Europe projects. All Missions need to develop a single platform containing all relevant information about instruments, data, networks, cooperation and opportunities.
- Further **collaboration** is needed across governance levels as well as stronger commitments from the national and EU level to address key issues around the Missions' implementation, notably related to regulations and funding.
- The funding opportunities presented through the Horizon Europe Mission Work Programme be strongly in line with the Mission objectives and based on local and regional needs, while ensuring that industry and academia have a clear role in the Missions' implementation.
- More funding should be dedicated to **skills development, governance innovation, social innovation and process innovation** in order to bridge the gap between research needs and implementation needs.
- **Synergies** between EU Missions and other funding (EU and national funding programmes), as well as with policies, projects and initiatives should be further explored and strengthened.
- In light of the upcoming calls, ensure that the budgets allocated to the EU Mission calls are high enough to address their ambitious goals and expected impacts, as well as announced well in advance allowing enough time for preparing for these ambitious, multi-stakeholder projects.

See [ERRIN messages](#) for Horizon Europe Missions Work Programme 2023 and [webpage](#) on ERRIN's EU Mission work.

2. European Partnerships and funding synergies

ERRIN has been a strong advocator for further engagement of local and regional actors in the European Partnerships, and their governance structures. In the areas where regional smart specialisation (S3) partnerships mirror European Partnerships, for example in clean hydrogen or batteries, there is great potential to further engage these actors in related European Partnerships.

Governance is particularly an issue when it comes to the **Institutional Partnerships**. Some of the partnerships have explored and opened part of their governance structures to regions. For example the Clean Hydrogen JU Stakeholders Group involves representatives from the European Hydrogen Valleys S3 Partnership, which brings together more than 60 European regions. This encourages regions to explore synergies between EU and regional funds as well as provide inputs on future topics. However, this seems to be the only Institutional Partnership which has taken such a step, as the involvement of regions in the governance structure is left up to each Partnership.

Moreover, despite being a very positive first step, the involvement of regions in the Stakeholders Group is still very formal and does not give them the possibility to properly have a say in the definition of the future calls of the Clean Hydrogen JU. The European Commission should therefore consider setting common minimum requirements in terms of regional involvement for all Institutional Partnerships and give regions the possibility take a more active role. This would facilitate the involvement of regional stakeholders and smaller companies / SMEs in the projects financed by the Partnerships, as well as create links between R&I priorities of the regions and these Partnerships,

including funding synergies as ERDF or regional funds are used to support complementary projects and themes.

Co-funded Partnerships are possibly the easiest form of European Partnership for regions to participate in as full partners. In the Co-funded Partnerships, countries and regions can commit side by side some of their own funding to support their innovation actors to participate in transnational projects. This is a very important principle and clearly demonstrates the emphasis regions place on transnational and interregional innovation collaboration. This is also a potential growth area.

The experiences from regional authorities are positive, for example when it comes to the **Clean Energy Transition Partnership**. Regions are able to decide on the eligibility criteria for the funding that they are providing (e.g. Pays de la Loire, Basque Country, Scotland). This ensures that the amount invested into the partnership comes back to the relevant stakeholders in the region. Having multiple agencies involved makes it possible for different types of actors to benefit from the funding, thus ensuring support to the whole ecosystem. The regional authority is also likely to have a good understanding of, and relationship with, the relevant regional innovation ecosystem, and can therefore help to ensure that the right actors from the region can benefit from the funding. The downside of this is that from the user perspective, co-funded partnerships have a complicated set of rules, which are laborious for the applicants.

However, as the ability to fund different actors (e.g. city administration, university, SME) depends on the agency that takes part in the Partnership, this can limit the impact of the funding especially if only one agency gets engaged and only one type of actor group can benefit from funding. This was identified as a barrier in the **Driving Urban Transition Partnership (DUT)** in some countries, particularly as the objective is to also support implementation of the Cities Mission, requiring new governance models between the quadruple helix actors. At the same time, the approach of the DUT Partnership is very positive as it takes a much broader perspective than other European Partnerships that are often linked to only one sector or a technology.

Despite the work done in terms of simplification of the European Partnerships, both accessibility and transparency of all Partnerships have not significantly increased. It is not possible to get an overview of the current activities linked to the European Partnerships via a single website. Currently, it is necessary to navigate the almost 50 European Partnerships individually, by finding each of the dedicated websites. Also, communication related to opportunities under Co-funded Partnerships remains uncoordinated and largely depends on national funding agencies. ERRIN wishes for broader, EU-level coordinated communication about the calls published by Co-funded partnerships.

At the same time, the integration of calls from the Co-Programmed Partnership in the Funding & Tenders portal has been perceived as very positive. Further requests to create a single repository of Work Programmes related to all European Partnerships was also proposed. As well as the possibility to export statistics related to engagement in the European Partnerships, allowing a more complete picture of participation in Horizon Europe, including Co-funded and Institutional Partnerships, in addition to the Co-programmed ones.

ERRIN members have been interested in creating strong synergies between research and innovation funding and structural funds especially in light of European Partnerships and EU Missions. ERRIN has been engaging in the discussions around [funding synergies](#) and organising related activities, for example, around European Partnerships and EIC. Discussions have been focusing on the use of

structural funds in co-funded partnerships and how the partnerships can be used as a means to further coordinate regional and national research and innovation agendas, or making synergies between Horizon Europe and ERDF operational. Even if synergies are in theory permitted, without clarity on operational rules this is not possible in practice. For the moment regions are co-funding European Partnerships with their own funds, and not with structural funds.

The Guidance document on funding synergies published last year was an important first step. Additionally, the Czech Council Presidency event on funding synergies last July was also greatly anticipated by the regional R&I community. At the same time, the guidance document needs to be operationalised – and communicated and discussed with the Managing Authorities. The timing with the development process of this document has also been an issue. Most regions already had their ERDF operational programmes approved, or about to be approved, when the guidance document was published. Therefore, it is crucial to start linking discussions on funding synergies now with the mid-term reviews of both Horizon Europe and Cohesion funds.

2.1 Recommendations

- Increase **transparency** related to all European Partnerships: who is part of the partnership, what is the state of play, and how can stakeholders get engaged?
- **Open up** the European Partnerships to local and regional actors in a structured way beyond the co-funded partnerships.
- Use European Partnerships as a **way to explore funding synergies** between R&I funding and structural funds and learn from the other EU funding programmes that have already started testing such an approach, in particular Digital Europe Programme and EDIHs.
- Co-funded Partnerships: allow regional authorities to join as equal partners in partnerships with national governments.
- Co-programmed Partnerships: ensure public authority engagement to make better links with actual needs on the ground, ensuring that the new services and products developed are fit for purpose.
- Institutionalised Partnerships: build on the experience of the Clean Hydrogen Partnership to ensure an effective link with regional stakeholders (Hydrogen Valleys)

3. Widening

Widening is another crucial topic for ERRIN, as the second priority area of the ERRIN Management Board for 2022-2023 and theme of the dedicated Management Board Task Force set up in 2021 in line with the network's 20th anniversary priorities. The overarching objective of the Task Force is to achieve a more inclusive ecosystem approach in R&I by raising diversity in regional research and innovation activities, as well as deepening engagement where collaboration between different stakeholders needs further encouragement. Following this aim, the network has organised multiple meetings, engaged in dialogue with the European Commission, and has taken practical steps for higher engagement internally.

As the innovation divide continues to grow, **widening measures remain of strategic importance** to increase participation from underperforming countries, also in the context of the New European

Innovation Agenda. Low engagement of stakeholders from the widening countries in the Horizon programmes has been one of the key bottlenecks on the way to realising the full potential of the European R&I ecosystem as a whole, and remains the rationale for the widening part of Horizon. Therefore, it is important to design Horizon measures in a way that allows partners with relevant expertise and capacities from all across Europe to be actively involved, and to explore the untapped potential that exists in the widening countries.

The narrative around tackling widening should also be revisited to further facilitate engagement of various actors across Europe in the programme. Rather than having a narrative with excellent actors and the ones lagging behind, it would be important to emphasise more mutual learning and how to breach that gap. Current collaborative schemes in widening (except Excellence Hubs) use the concept of “leaders” from non-widening countries transferring their knowledge and skills to the “followers” from widening countries. The schemes thereby reinforce the dichotomy and promote the self-identification of researchers in widening countries as “followers”, even if they would be coordinators. Instead, researchers from widening countries need to learn to identify themselves as leaders or emerging innovators. This can also help more developed regions understand the added value of involving partners from the widening countries in project consortia.

3.1 Understanding the reasons for low engagement

It is crucial to examine reasons for the limited involvement of widening countries in Horizon in more detail, including evaluating the outcomes of the widening activities so far, in order to better design calls that could further encourage widening actors to apply and allow them to improve the regional and local R&I capacities. Sharing the findings in this area by the European Commission would also be important to allow other stakeholders to support engagement goals with more targeted activities geared towards widening countries.

Reasons for low engagement appear to be largely systemic, which results in the need for introducing further support measures or revising the support measures currently in place. Specific barriers for involvement include factors such as: support offices not being well developed yet, insufficient support in the project preparation phase (need for experienced support staff and additional well-tailored funding), relatively slow decision-making processes compared to the flexibility required to better support project preparation, and focusing on a few big actors instead of the wider ecosystem.

More sensitive points also arise, such as easier access to funding opportunities from other (national) sources coupled with a limited capacity of the ecosystem, as well as the issue of fair division of the widening budget between countries. These factors are combined with general low confidence levels of widening countries potential applicants, especially when looking at more experienced partners, fear of lack of support, language barriers, feelings of discouragement after several unsuccessful applications and lack of cooperation between researchers, especially cross-country.

Another problem can be a limited knowledge of Horizon Europe and the wider research and innovation policy objectives, for example the ERA, by many widening countries applicants. This might lead to stakeholders not fully grasping what the projects are set to achieve. Moreover, partners from the widening countries are less present in international (formal and informal) networks that facilitate establishing contacts and build lasting relationships with institutions and organisations that are potential projects partners.

All these points should be carefully considered and addressed when preparing for the Strategic Planning 2025-2027.

In addition, more efforts on the national level with regard to widening in Horizon are necessary for long-term, sustainable change, as highlighted in the report of the European Court of Auditors from 2022. Measures such as the policy support facility and actions to support NCPs and their networks are important. There is strong diversity among Widening countries and in some, the obstacles to Horizon participation stemming from national policy are extreme.

3.2 Adjusting the WIDERA Work Programme

When reflecting on the WIDERA Work Programme it should be asked what types of calls could further encourage widening actors to develop projects and allow them to improve the regional and local R&I capacities.

There exists quite a good mix of calls in the widening portfolio. However, some of its elements could be fine-tuned. Firstly, it is important to ensure that it includes standard types of calls, especially **Twinning**, that could be taken up by partners that do not have considerable previous experience in Framework Programmes. Twinning is also seen by the widening actors as an instrument allowing the possibility to engage in deeper partnerships with leading European institutions, as well as exchange knowledge and skills to pursue excellent R&I. However, more focus on research in addition to networking activities could be beneficial. An increase in the budget per project of Twinning calls should be considered, and a separate budget for the top-class partner should be introduced to provide incentive for institutions from non-widening countries to participate. The fact that there is sometimes more interest in working with relevant partners on specific thematic areas under Pillar 2 than under the Twinning call should also be noted and addressed.

It seems that further evaluation of the **Hop on Facility** instrument is needed. It is an interesting concept as it offers access to already-approved projects. However, it is regrettable that participation is limited to only one widening partner per project. This is very limiting, including with respect to the potential impact. Many projects already have a partner from a widening country, which practically excludes them from using the instrument. The tool can also have a discouraging effect for consortia to include partners from the widening countries in projects from the very beginning. Furthermore, the practical arrangements are quite burdensome as finding contact details to the consortium's coordinator is not always straight-forward without Commission's assistance, and coordinators need to go through an additional approval process after an often long and difficult project application procedure.

Pathways to synergies seems to have a good potential as widening countries have a limited share of the Horizon Europe programme, but are important beneficiaries of the cohesion funds. However, the take up is limited and more examples are certainly needed. Smart specialisation can be an important facilitator here.

Teaming and **ERA Chairs** are seen as tools with good potential to enable organisations to upgrade their governance, management, institutional culture and internal R&I support to create conditions in which excellent R&I could thrive.

Regarding **ERA Fellowships**, the number of these fellowships offered should be higher. The brain drain phenomenon in the widening countries, with the researchers often leaving to complete their fellowships in Western Europe or leave to Western Europe to increase their chances of receiving an ERA Fellowship remains an issue to address. Greater targeting of ERA Fellowships researchers in the widening countries should be considered. This could increase the number of projects from the widening countries and encourage researchers from Western Europe to move to the widening countries.

Calls relating to regional ecosystem thinking, which often underline the importance of engaging quadruple helix stakeholders in projects – such as Excellence Hubs, European Excellence Initiative, ERA Talents – are important, as they can be useful for mobilising the broader R&I ecosystem and support the leadership role of actors in the widening countries. **Excellence Hubs**, for example, require involvement of various actors from the same territory, which entails mutual support in access to good-quality consortiums – an important aspect, especially for those with less experience in the Horizon Europe Programme and its predecessors.

Furthermore, there is a need for such schemes and actions supporting R&I activities, which would not include the requirement of participation from non-widening leaders. This will allow researchers to drive the projects, instead of managers, especially in the twinning and teaming project architectures. Through such projects, researchers could upscale their activities and learn how to drive collaborative research, creating examples and experiences needed to overcome the gap in leadership ambitions and abilities.

Building capacity among potential future widening project leaders requires greater support in general. For example, a dedicated facility could also be created that would enable shadowing of project leaders through a rotating or shared leadership model (“Hop on Project Leader”). Most of the figures show that even when participation from the widening countries in Horizon projects is increasing, project leadership is not improving when non-widening and widening countries are compared, making it an important issue to address when setting out to bridge the innovation gap in a sustainable way.

The research community in widening countries would also appreciate having more research and innovation actions (RIA) and innovation actions (IA) to complement the recurrently used CSAs. RIAs and IAs would allow the pursuing of concrete R&I activities in collaboration with partners from the widening countries, as well as across EU and beyond.

It is clear that the design of new calls and support measures would need a much stronger engagement from the widening actors in order to design measures that function and are actually targeting stakeholders in widening countries.

Finally, one of the underlying issues in the WIDERA Work Programme is linked to the fact that widening and ERA are very different in their nature, and yet they are combined in the same work programme. The question should be asked whether this is the right way forward and is it possible to address these issues together? Combining such different areas in one Work Programme makes their management highly complex and the Programme Committee very unfocused and uncoherent.

3.3 Looking beyond WIDERA for greater impact

Following evaluation of the activities so far, and reasons for continued lower engagement of the widening actors, reflections that span beyond the WIDERA should be made to move closer to achieving the widening objectives.

Addressing the different reasons for low engagement is key. For example, it should be considered how the knowledge of Horizon Europe and the wider research and innovation policy objectives (e.g. the ERA) could be increased among the widening countries applicants. It should also be examined what support measures would need to be developed (or existing measures revised) to achieve a better impact. The role of the NCPs could be important in this context.

Another crucial point would be to include widening elements across Horizon programme as a cross-cutting issue, in particular under pillar II of Horizon Europe. The representation of widening countries in selected calls could be connected to user engagement, e.g. as demonstrators.

It is good to see elements of the widening approach outside of the widening priority, and even outside of the Horizon. However, lessons should be learnt from these programmes as e.g. in the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument as it seems that some overly strict rules hinder engagement of certain type of regions.

While the majority of R&I actions in Horizon Europe are targeting defined topics, there are also examples of collaborative schemes that allow bottom-up defined proposals in R&I – e.g. ERC Synergy Grants or EIC Pathfinder. The architecture of ERC Synergy Grants and/or EIC Pathfinder with some participant and/or budgetary restrictions would provide a significant boost to leading labs and researchers in widening countries, offering them leverage in their institutions, and serving as a potentially important incentive for international recruitment of new R&I leaders.

Looking at the widening efforts even more broadly, founding a yearly European policy forum for regional and local R&I ecosystems should be considered. Creating such a meeting place for in-depth dialogue on R&I practices and challenges across European regions could build on the Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE) and link with the New European Innovation Agenda objectives under Flagship 3. This revamped WIRE would allow policy makers, public authorities, academia and businesses to meet, exchange, further develop and strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and create connections between them, making the EU R&I ecosystem more coherent as a whole.

3.4 Recommendations

- Address reasons for lower engagement of widening countries and further engage the research and innovation community in the widening countries to co-design measures and calls tackling innovation divide
- Introduce further support measures at national level
- Include widening elements across Horizon programme as a cross-cutting issue (especially under Pillar II). This could be done via specific criteria, for example, by ensuring representation from widening countries in selected calls through user engagement, by asking demonstrators or pilots to cover stakeholders from the widening countries

- Propose an adjusted approach to WIRE as a European policy forum for regional and local R&I ecosystems
- Proposals with regard to specific calls:
 - Twinning: increase the budget per project, introduce separate budget for the top-class partner
 - Hop on Facility: allow more than one widening partner per project, make contact details to consortium coordinators easier to find, simplify approval process for the new widening partner
 - Pathways to synergies: link further with smart specialisation
 - ERA Fellowships: increase number of fellowships, greater targeting of ERA Fellowships to scientists in the widening countries

4. Ecosystem approach

Building an effective European research and innovation policy depends on strong interconnected research and innovation ecosystems embedded in regions and cities. Innovation happens in places and there are specific local conditions that enable ecosystems to flourish. ERRIN supports enhancing local and regional ecosystems and working towards achieving a less fragmented European innovation ecosystem. Supporting collaboration between different stakeholders – public administrations, universities, research organisations, companies, clusters and civil society – at regional level to strengthen ecosystems, as well as collaboration between ecosystems, are both essential to reach that goal.

The current Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027) places increasing importance on the place-based dimension and includes several programmes and instruments that are developed around ecosystem thinking requiring the engagement of multiple stakeholders and embracing quadruple helix or quintuple helix collaboration. Digital Innovation Hubs (Digital Europe Programme), European Innovation Ecosystems Action (Horizon Europe) and Interregional Innovation Investments – I3 (ERDF), are examples of such developments. ERRIN has actively [contributed](#) to all these instruments.

The future initiatives proposed by the Commission should provide added value to the innovation ecosystems support measures already implemented in the framework of Horizon Europe and other aforementioned programmes. After the first rounds of calls, there is a need to assess how to further improve those instruments and programmes – ERRIN is happy to engage in this process.

Furthermore, the EU Missions have been selected as one of the main priorities of the ERRIN network and active [work](#) on them is ongoing because of their strong ecosystem approach, as ambitious time-bound targets require new collaborative models and enhance stronger collaboration among ecosystem actors. In addition, EU Missions, especially the four Green Deal missions, have a strong place-based dimension and will be implemented in regions and cities.

On 5 July 2022, the European Commission adopted the [New European Innovation Agenda \(NEIA\)](#) that aims at positioning Europe at the forefront of the new wave of deep tech innovation through 25 dedicated actions under five flagships. One of the five flagships – the flagship three – puts an emphasis on regional innovation and will support the creation of 100 Regional Innovation Valleys and help Member States and regions direct at least EUR 10 billion to concrete interregional innovation projects.



This flagship is also expected to support Member States in fostering innovation in all regions through the integrated use of cohesion policy and Horizon Europe instruments.

During this financial framework, the regional perspective has become more visible in several programmes and instruments that are developed around ecosystem thinking and require the engagement of multiple stakeholders. The challenge that we still face is that those initiatives come with various perspectives and programmes, and often cater for a particular stakeholder group even if the ultimate objective is to support multi-stakeholder approaches. Therefore, ERRIN also sees the New European Innovation Agenda as an important step in bridging research and innovation – and related stakeholders. The Innovation Agenda should further connect the dots with European Research Area (ERA) Forum and related policy agenda as well as innovation related initiatives and programmes such as European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) action, Joint Cluster Initiatives or Digital Innovation Hubs, thus further structuring the complex landscape of emerging ecosystem driven funding programmes and instruments. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, but maybe to articulate and focus certain initiatives better and make them further connected and known by larger number of actors.

Regional Innovation Valleys are one example of an initiative with a considerable potential, which could benefit from more precise definition, establishing links with other undertakings and translating its proposals into actionable priorities. The Innovation Agenda mentions their connection with the **Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) Pilot Action** – this link should indeed be exploited. PRI could serve as a learning experience, but it could also help to spread NEIA ambitions more widely and implement steps towards achieving them. With its special character relating both to R&I and cohesion policy, this initiative could be extended beyond the time of the Pilot and the Regional Innovation Valleys call to strengthen regional ecosystems and linkages between them from a complementary angle (similar to the one of the I3 Instrument).

ERRIN calls for a stronger attention towards exploring place-based strategic policymaking tools and methods such as the PRI Pilot. Due to the regional commitment to base this work on smart specialisation (S3), the ecosystem approach must be rooted in national and regional S3 strategies, but enhance and welcome the broader perspective introduced by the PRI. This means a policy framework that acknowledges S3 as a part of PRI within other policies and political areas and applies stronger links within the overarching policy framework for research and innovation. ERRIN also welcomes the PRI through its focus on the much needed drive for stronger multilevel cooperation around innovation, synergies between funding instruments, its focus on the green and digital transition and its ways of using a mission-approach to tackle place-based challenges identified by S3 strategies through joint actions and initiatives where more levels of governance work together and more actors are jointly cooperating.

Finally, ERA Policy Agenda includes a dedicated action (Action 15) on **'Building up regional and national R&I ecosystems to improve regional/national excellence and competitiveness' (ERA Hubs)**. This action is important as it recognises the value of the multi-stakeholder approach as a crucial element in the ERA policy agenda. It would also ensure better coordination between levels of governance. Even if two pilot projects to test the ERA Hubs concept have been launched, this action is still in a development phase under the ERA Forum. ERRIN encourages taking this action forward quickly and using it as a means to support organisations – and people – who can bring together different stakeholders, join up public and private spheres and break existing silos among sectors, disciplines and funding instruments. When available, ERA Hubs could be used to reinforce existing structures that are already embedded locally and able to provide support and services to all

stakeholders within quadruple / quintuple helix. If such organisations or structures do not exist yet, the best fitted ecosystem stakeholder should be identified to take on this role.

4.1 Recommendations

- Strengthen attention towards **exploring place-based strategic policymaking tools and methods** such as the Partnership for Regional Innovation (PRI) based on smart specialisation (S3)
- Implement, more broadly in Horizon Europe, **calls that engage the whole regional and local ecosystems**
- Involve cities and regions as **demonstrators** to tackle needs and challenges on the ground
- Identify and reinforce **ecosystem connectors** with an ability to bring together different stakeholder groups (representing various interests, knowledge on support frameworks)

Overall remarks

Promoting research and innovation requires **exchange of ideas and knowledge between the EU and the rest of the world**. Our dependence on such an exchange was made particularly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic when vaccines were developed. In today's geopolitical situation, it remains important that research and innovation channels are kept open. The challenge is to ensure that the measures taken to strengthen security and EU autonomy do not conflict with the need to maintain and expand international research and innovation cooperation.

The **importance of public sector innovation** should be further emphasised in the next framework programme. Public actors have an important role when it comes to working in a challenge-driven manner, identifying needs, obstacles and serving as testing grounds for new solutions. The public sector also has a great ability to promote and drive innovation through innovation procurement, something that should be increased and further emphasised in the future.

While we are assessing the feedback from the first years of Horizon Europe and making proposals for the future R&I priorities, other EU programmes are also soon facing mid-term reviews. This should be seen an **opportunity to increase synergies and links** between the different programmes, and also to reflect on how the cohesion policy post 2027 could have a stronger R&I dimension, tackle bottlenecks related to funding synergies and to further increase the innovation potentials across EU.

Excellence, in terms of competitive funding, remains as an important principle for the network. Nevertheless, a common definition of excellence would be useful when working towards 10th Framework Programme (FP10) in order to further embed and facilitate dialogue between different R&I stakeholders. This would also enable modernising the concept to take into account elements such as impact, and making our R&I ecosystem less fragmented.



[ERRIN](#) (European Regions Research and Innovation Network) is a Brussels-based platform that gathers around 120 regional organisations in more than 20 European countries. ERRIN aims to strengthen the regional and local dimension in EU Research and Innovation policy and programmes. ERRIN supports members to enhance their regional and local research and innovation capacities and further develop their research and innovation ecosystems.

The ERRIN members primarily collaborate through 13 Working Groups (WGs), covering both thematic areas and overarching policy issues. The WGs are based on members' priorities and current funding opportunities. The WGs meetings are at the heart of ERRIN's activities, as this is where our members meet regularly to exchange information, present regional examples, build new partnerships, develop joint projects, network and much more.

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