

EU Missions – Looking towards the next EU long-term budget

The European Union faces a dual challenge: strengthening its global competitiveness while addressing major societal challenges. These challenges are complex and interconnected, ranging from climate change and environmental degradation to health threats and social inequalities. Tackling them requires approaches that go beyond fragmented policy interventions, mobilising innovation, investment and new governance models operating across sectors and levels of government.

EU Missions, only at half of their lifetime, have already demonstrated their potential to provide such a strategic and integrated framework. By mobilising public and private actors, orienting research and innovation efforts, and accelerating the development of solutions addressing major societal challenges, Missions accelerate the development, deployment and scaling of solutions addressing Europe's most pressing challenges.

Europe's competitiveness depends on solving complex societal challenges through long-term approaches combining R&I with governance, regulatory and societal innovation. Therefore, support for societal transformation and the EU Missions, and the mission-oriented approach, should be further enhanced.

EU Missions should be supported through a seamless investment journey from research and innovation to deployment and scale-up, across Horizon Europe (FP10), European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPSs). Particularly, the ECF should support the deployment, scaling up and market uptake of solutions developed under EU Missions, complementing FP10. Such alignment is essential to translate Europe's strategic priorities into concrete economic opportunities, strengthening industrial capacity, innovation ecosystems and resilience across European territories.

EU Missions have already proven their value in mobilising place-based innovation ecosystems, bringing together local and regional authorities, research organisations, industry, SMEs and citizens to solve persisting societal challenges and to deliver systemic change. By moving beyond isolated pilot projects and fostering coordinated portfolios of actions, Missions enable solutions to be tested, adapted and replicated across different territories.

The key benefits provided by the EU Missions, and the mission-oriented approach, include:

- **Improved multi-level governance**, connecting EU priorities with national, regional and local implementation.
- **Stronger regional innovation ecosystems**, by enhancing collaboration between the various R&I stakeholders at local and regional levels.
- **Increased and lasting impact**, by aligning innovation efforts through the mission-oriented approach and ensuring effective implementation of European objectives at local and regional levels
- **Support systemic transformation** by moving from fragmented projects to a **portfolio approach**.
- **Addressing the innovation divide** by fostering collaboration between more and less innovative territories. Inclusive innovation ecosystems are a competitiveness imperative – closing the innovation gap and enabling participation of SMEs, start-ups, and smaller actors.
- **Mobilising a broader and more diverse group of actors** and expanding the R&I efforts to a wider group of stakeholders and enhanced collaboration across sectors and disciplines.

- **Creating stable, long-term demand for innovative solutions** by enabling public authorities to act as first movers and coordinated buyers.

Despite the growing interest and engagement at the regional and local levels, the full potential of the EU Missions is not yet being fully leveraged at EU level. While the Mission approach is recognised and appreciated by territories as a powerful framework for delivering systemic change, its integration across EU policies, funding instruments and governance structures remains partial. Strengthening coordination, visibility and political ownership of the Missions within the European Commission and across policy areas will be essential to fully capitalise on the progress achieved so far and to maximise their impact in the next programming period.

In this context, EU Missions should not be seen as thematic initiatives, but as a strategic policy instrument, enabling the local and regional authorities to design, test and refine integrated approaches that can deliver systemic change and strengthen Europe's competitiveness. By linking research, innovation, industrial policy and territorial development, they help ensure that Europe's competitiveness strategy delivers concrete results on the ground.

EU Missions are still at mid-implementation and therefore not yet in a position where their full benefits and limitations can be comprehensively assessed. In this context, it is essential to continue the EU Missions for their planned duration until 2030 to fully capture lessons from both successes and challenges. The mission-oriented approach is an experimental framework to test new ways of combining research, innovation, governance and societal engagement. Interrupting this process prematurely would risk losing the momentum and the impacts created that are critical for future EU, national and local policy design.

Maintaining and strengthening the mission-oriented approach within FP10, the European Competitiveness Fund and the National and Regional Partnership Plans will therefore be critical to enable Europe to scale innovation, mobilise investment and deliver the systemic transformations required for long-term competitiveness and resilience.

The European Commission's proposal on FP10 also introduces the concept of "Moonshots", large-scale technology-driven initiatives aimed at strengthening Europe's leadership in strategic fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and clean aviation. ERRIN welcomes the definition of Moonshots introduced in Christian Ehler's report on FP10 as "coordinated policy approaches that combine R&I, regulation and investment to achieve clearly defined objectives".

Moonshots have the potential to strengthen Europe's scientific excellence, industrial competitiveness and leadership in key strategic areas. At the same time, their logic differs from the mission-oriented approach, which is grounded in systemic transformation, place-based implementation and strong societal engagement.

Moonshots, EU Missions and European Partnerships should be seen as complementary instruments within the future EU R&I architecture. Ensuring strong synergies between them will be essential to maximise impact. Moonshots should build on, and integrate, the lessons emerging from the EU Missions, including insights on governance models, place-based implementation, stakeholder engagement and scaling pathways. In parallel, EU Missions should be maintained and strengthened to deliver their full potential. Moonshots should therefore complement, and not replace or weaken, the mission-oriented approach, which remains key to delivering systemic change and tangible outcomes across Europe's territories.

To exemplify the benefits and positive impacts of the EU Missions outlined above, this document demonstrates in practice how the five EU Missions have brought tangible impacts across Europe.

Demonstrating impacts of the five EU Missions

Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change

Through the Adaptation Mission, regional and local authorities create stable demand for resilience solutions by embedding climate risk and adaptation requirements into planning, investment decisions and public funding.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) [has highlighted](#) the growing gap between required adaptation investments and the funding currently available across Europe. This underlines the need for sustained, mission-oriented support mechanisms integrated into the EU Competitiveness Framework, rather than one-off project funding. Preventive, mission-oriented adaptation measures are significantly more cost-effective than reacting to climate-related damages ex post.

Strengthening regional governance for climate resilience

The Adaptation Mission has proven particularly effective in strengthening multi-level governance for climate resilience, enabling regional and local authorities to integrate climate risks into strategic planning, investment priorities, and decision-making. By bringing together regional authorities, research institutions, businesses and local stakeholders, the Mission has helped bridge the gap between scientific knowledge, innovation and territorial implementation. It has also supported regions in developing coordinated adaptation strategies, strengthening administrative capacities and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration. The Mission approach also promotes citizen engagement and participatory governance, helping to ensure that adaptation strategies respond to local needs and benefit from strong societal ownership.

In Normandy (France), participation in the Adaptation Mission through projects such as [RESIST](#), [Normadapt](#), [UNDERPIN](#), and [ClimateFIT](#) has strengthened internal administrative capacities and adaptation governance. This has improved the region's ability to integrate resilience criteria into regional planning, investment priorities and funding decisions (e.g. ERDF), reinforcing the political legitimacy of climate investments. Through the [RESIST](#) project, this governance strengthening is complemented by structured collaboration with research organisations, businesses and civil society actors working on climate resilience solutions. The project brings together partners from governance, research, business and civil society, enabling regions to test and adapt solutions through a quintuple helix approach and strengthening cooperation across the regional innovation ecosystem.

In Małopolska (Poland), the signature of the Adaptation Mission Charter and technical assistance from the Mission Implementation Platform (MIP4Adapt) supported the development of the region's first Regional Adaptation Strategy. The process included expert guidance on climate risk analysis, stakeholder engagement and monitoring frameworks, helping embed adaptation into key regional strategic documents and strengthening long-term governance for climate resilience.

Innovation, scaling and transfer: linking Adaptation to Climate Change and the ECF

The Adaptation Mission also supports the development of regional innovation ecosystems capable of designing, testing and scaling resilience solutions.

Many innovations emerging from the Mission Adaptation projects are **ready to be transferred and scaled** across Europe, but require sustained funding and **stronger links with competitiveness and industrial policies**. This highlights the need for a coherent investment journey across Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs), where research and experimentation supported through Horizon Europe can progress towards deployment, replication and market uptake through instruments under the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).

Without the Mission framework, **these solutions would remain fragmented pilots**, with limited transferability and no clear pathway to scale. Likewise, without a strong ecosystem approach involving regional authorities, research organisations and other local stakeholders, innovations risk remaining disconnected from territorial needs, lacking societal buy-in and therefore failing to be replicated across regions.

The **RESIST project** is a clear example: regional authorities played a crucial role in co-defining solutions, adapting them to territorial needs and ensuring implementation and ownership. Cross-regional cooperation has enabled the transfer and contextualisation of innovative resilience solutions, directly supporting both **innovation ecosystems and regional competitiveness**. The project also places strong emphasis on citizen and stakeholder engagement. Across the demonstrator regions, adaptation activities involve citizens, local communities and sectoral stakeholders through workshops, awareness campaigns, co-creation experiments and demonstration activities. In **Catalonia (Spain)**, for example, more than 1,300 citizens have participated in resilience awareness sessions, participatory workshops and community dialogues on climate risks.

In **Bremen (Germany)**, participation in [Pathways2Resilience](#) has enabled the city to access cascade funding and technical assistance through an accessible application process. The project provided tools, guidance and peer-learning opportunities that supported the development of integrated adaptation strategies and strengthened cooperation between local authorities, research institutions and civic actors.

In **Southwest Finland**, participation in the [RESIST](#) project and cascade-funded initiatives such as [CLIMAAX](#) and [SpongeWorks](#) has strengthened regional innovation ecosystems for climate resilience. Through technical exchanges, peer-learning activities and pilot actions, regional actors have gained access to tools and methodologies that support the development and replication of adaptation solutions across the Baltic Sea region.

Framing climate adaptation as a competitiveness driver

Climate adaptation should not be seen as a cost, but as a **strategic investment in Europe's competitiveness**. Adaptation actions strengthen **competitiveness, security and innovation** at EU level, because it reduces exposure to climate impacts while enabling resilient economic development. Regional experience from the EU Adaptation Mission shows that resilience **drives innovation, strengthens governance and reduces long-term economic risks**.

Framing resilience as a competitiveness asset allows us to mainstream nature-positive and resilience solutions into regulation, planning and public procurement, while reducing future costs linked to climate impacts on infrastructure, supply chains and local economies.

In the **Azores islands (Portugal)**, participation in [Regions4Climate](#) has supported technology-based innovations to reduce vulnerability to extreme events, positioning the region as a **test environment**

for **resilience solutions** and demonstrating how fragile territories can become **innovation pilots rather than lagging regions**.

In the **Greater Copenhagen area (Denmark)**, the [Pathways2Resilience](#) project enabled the Zealand Region to conduct its first comprehensive climate risk assessment for the health sector. The findings highlighted major vulnerabilities and triggered new partnerships and planning processes, illustrating how adaptation investments can drive innovation in essential public services.

In **La Réunion (France)**, participation in the Adaptation Mission supports the development of the RISC-RA Climate Risk Atlas, combining climate projections with local exposure and vulnerability data. By linking regional authorities with scientific partners such as the University of La Réunion, CNRS and Météo-France, the initiative strengthens the research–policy interface and positions the island as a living laboratory for climate resilience solutions relevant to other European territories.

In **Uusimaa (Finland)**, participation in the Regions4Climate project has strengthened the region's capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change. In 2025, the main product of the Uusimaa sub-project was completed: a digital twin illustrating the urban heat island phenomenon. The tool covers the municipalities of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and visualises surface temperatures measured by the Landsat satellite on hot days as a regional 3D model. The model includes an updated grid dataset describing heat vulnerability, revealing the areas where heat affects residents the most. The digital twin not only identifies the hottest areas but also enables the simulation of adaptation measures (such as adding green areas or implementing cooling solutions) and shows how these actions reduce heat vulnerability. This allows measures to be targeted fairly and effectively across the region. Together with other adaptation projects, Regions4Climate enables Uusimaa Regional Council to make a strong investment in climate adaptation in the coming years, building a foundation for a safer, healthier and more socially sustainable Uusimaa. The applications developed in the project will be used in the implementation of the Climate-resilient Uusimaa 2030 roadmap and in further developing heatwave modelling for the region.

ERRIN and its members are actively involved in several Horizon Europe projects that directly contribute to climate resilience. These initiatives demonstrate how regional ecosystems can co-create, test and scale adaptation solutions through mission-oriented, multi-level governance approaches:

- [RESIST](#) shows how regions can deploy and replicate science-based adaptation solutions across Europe through digital tools, participatory governance and cross-regional cooperation.
- [Pathways2Resilience](#) supports 100 regions and cities in developing systemic adaptation pathways and investment plans, linking governance reform with financial planning and project pipeline development.
- [AdaptationHubs](#) strengthens national coordination by establishing 27 National Adaptation Hubs, fostering peer learning, alignment of methodologies and improved access to EU climate tools.

Together, these experiences demonstrate the added value of structurally integrating mission-based approaches into the future European Climate Resilience Framework and scaling up territorial innovation ecosystems across Europe. Ensuring continuity of the Mission approach beyond individual project cycles will be essential to capitalise on accumulated expertise, maintain governance structures and enable the large-scale deployment of solutions tested through Mission projects.

At the same time, stronger synergies between the Adaptation Mission and the Cities Mission should be further developed, particularly in urban areas where mitigation and adaptation challenges are

closely interconnected. As cities act as key implementation hubs for climate action, integrating resilience and climate neutrality strategies will be essential. If the [EU Agenda for Cities](#) is to become the landing zone for Cities Mission activities beyond 2030, both mitigation and adaptation dimensions should be better aligned. This represents a key lesson emerging from the implementation of the two Missions and should be further acknowledged and operationalised in future EU policy frameworks.

Mission on climate-neutral and smart cities

The Cities Mission demonstrates how mission-oriented governance can strengthen European competitiveness and support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by accelerating the deployment and scaling of clean technologies, mobilising innovation ecosystems and creating new investment opportunities.

Cities play a crucial role as place-based innovation laboratories, where new technologies, governance models and business partnerships can be tested and deployed at scale. Through instruments such as Climate City Contracts (CCCs) and related Investment Plans, and with the support of the national platforms, the Mission helped align local innovation ecosystems with European climate priorities.

By **aggregating demand, coordinating investment pipelines and mobilising public-private partnerships**, Mission Cities are creating markets for European clean technologies while strengthening local industrial capacity.

Creating demand for European Clean Technology through public procurement

Public procurement is one of the most powerful tools available to cities to shape markets and stimulate innovation. Through coordinated procurement strategies, Mission Cities are creating predictable demand for clean technologies, helping European companies scale production and reduce costs.

For example, the City of **Warsaw (Poland)** is bringing together several municipal entities, from housing companies to public service providers, to coordinate electricity procurement to establish a joint renewable-energy purchasing group. By aggregating demand, the city can negotiate better prices while sending a strong market signal to domestic renewable energy producers, stimulating investment in green power generation. This aggregation of demand helps lower costs, reduce risk, and shape Poland's energy market towards renewable supply, demonstrating how local coordination can unlock national-level impact.

Similarly, **Oslo (Norway)** has transformed the construction sector by requiring zero-emission machinery and vehicles on municipal construction sites. By embedding these conditions into procurement procedures, the city created a stable demand for electric construction equipment, encouraging manufacturers to scale production and accelerating the transition to fossil-free construction.

Gothenburg (Sweden) uses public procurement to de-risk market entry for innovative materials. The City of Gothenburg's Innovation Programme for Fossil-free Construction Hoppet (Eng. the Leap/Hope), brings together public and private actors across the construction value chain to pioneer fossil-free, low-carbon building materials. Using municipal procurement and demonstration projects, such as Sweden's first fossil-free preschool completed in 2021, as real-world testbeds, the city de-risks market entry for innovative materials, builds local supply chains, and stimulates demand for sustainable construction. By turning its role as a major public procurer into a driver of innovation and market

transformation, Gothenburg accelerates the adoption of climate-neutral materials, strengthens industrial capacity, and embeds decarbonisation directly in the local construction economy.

Building local industrial capacity: the role of Public-Private Partnerships

Mission Cities also play a key role in strengthening Europe's industrial ecosystem by facilitating partnerships between local authorities, businesses and research organisations.

Many Mission Cities are structuring public-private partnerships that leverage private financing and implement large-scale projects, particularly in the field of renewable energy production.

Through the [NetZeroCities](#) Pilot Cities Programme, **Dijon Métropole (France)** created a public-private company called "SEM ENERGIE", jointly owned 50% by the local authority and 50% by a private investor, Meridiam. This company makes it possible to leverage private financing to develop renewable energy projects across the Dijon Métropole area. The project also enables the local authority to provide its industries with decarbonised heat at a competitive price.

In **Lund (Sweden)**, cross-sector collaboration has enabled the development of innovative district heating systems using waste heat from the MAX IV research facility. By integrating research infrastructure, urban planning and energy systems, the [COOLDH](#) project provides reliable low-carbon heating for future urban development while strengthening energy security and industrial competitiveness. Together, these efforts show how coordinated cross-sector action can transform experimental solutions into scalable, practical benefits for the whole city.

Espoo (Finland) is transforming the region's district heating system by phasing out fossil fuels and replacing them with smart, electricity based and waste heat solutions. As one of the Espoo Clean Heat programme's flagship initiatives, the joint Microsoft-Fortum project will recycle waste heat from two hyperscale data centers into the district heating network, ultimately covering about 40% of Espoo's heating demand and replacing coal based production, thus reducing CO2 emissions by approximately 400,000 tonnes per year. The project is also one of the largest ICT investments in Finnish history and will generate significant economic benefits. Locating the data centers close to the existing district heating network further minimises the need for large-scale energy infrastructure, improving overall efficiency. Altogether, the initiative addresses Espoo's largest emission source while supporting the city's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2030.

Mobilising innovation ecosystems and SMEs

Mission governance enables cities to mobilise entire local ecosystems around shared climate objectives, creating **opportunities for SMEs, start-ups and research organisations to participate in the transition.**

Valencia (Spain) has demonstrated how mission governance can mobilise entire ecosystems through shared ownership models. Its Mission Alliance brings together more than 150 organisations representing approximately 20,000 businesses, creating strong policy coherence across sectors and strengthening local industrial capacity. Participatory processes such as the Urban Forum Valencia 2030 have further strengthened stakeholder engagement and ownership of the transition. This shift from top-down policy to shared ownership enhances trust, legitimacy, and delivery capacity across election cycles thus providing a foundation for sustained transformation.

Similarly, **Guimarães (Portugal)** has mobilised SMEs through its Climate Pact initiative, under which companies voluntarily commit to reducing emissions. The initiative is coordinated by the Landscape Laboratory, a collaboration between the municipality and two universities, that provides data, tools and technical support to help companies translate these pledges into measurable actions e.g., through carbon footprint assessments. Building on this first wave of frontrunners, Guimarães is now expanding participation through its Guimarães 2030 platform, turning climate ambition into a collective business movement. This approach demonstrates how trust, practical assistance, and shared commitment can align local competitiveness with Europe's climate goals, mobilising SMEs not through regulation, but through partnership.

Finally, **Valladolid (Spain)** has transformed its climate strategy into a citywide movement through its Mission Valladolid initiative, part of the EU Cities Mission. The city created a "Climate Agreement", inviting local companies, universities, associations and public entities to become "Mission Ambassadors." By 2024, 160 organisations had joined, each committing to measurable actions such as cutting emissions, improving energy efficiency or greening operations. The city supports them with targeted incentives — including €600,000 in Decarbonisation Grants for pilot projects and €100,000 in consultancy support to help SMEs prepare investment plans. This model builds shared accountability: businesses and institutions contribute concrete projects while the municipality provides coordination, technical help and limited financial backing. It shows how governance frameworks can convert private sector interest into measurable decarbonisation outcomes.

De-risking innovation deployment through public and private finance

Through Climate City Contracts and investment planning processes, Mission Cities are developing **pipelines of bankable projects** capable of attracting both **public and private finance**.

For instance, **Bristol (UK)** has mobilised over £1 billion in investment through the Bristol City Leap partnership, combining public-private investment in renewable energy infrastructure, district heating networks and building retrofits. At the same time, citizen-investment platforms allow residents to invest directly in local climate projects, strengthening public support while mobilising additional financing.

In **Gothenburg (Sweden)**, the city negotiated a sustainability-linked loan, where the municipality's borrowing costs are directly tied to ecological and social performance targets. This creates market incentives for sustainable development without increasing public spending. Under this arrangement, the city commits to measurable goals such as reducing energy use in municipal buildings, electrifying its vehicle fleet, expanding renewable district heating, and improving conditions in vulnerable neighbourhoods. If the city meets these targets, it receives a lower interest rate on its loans, while missing them can lead to higher costs or penalties. In 2024, Gothenburg met two of its four targets and secured a reduced interest rate for the third consecutive year. This shows how public authorities can use market-style incentives embedded in their financing arrangements to drive sustainable outcomes - without necessarily adding extra public spending.

Additionally, **Nantes Métropole (France)** is pioneering a regional approach to managing residual emissions, that is, the emissions that cannot be eliminated locally even after strong reductions. With support from NetZeroCities, the city is developing a multi-level governance and finance framework that brings together local authorities, regional actors and investors to fund carbon sequestration and nature-based solutions such as sustainable agriculture and ecosystem restoration. These projects not only compensate for unavoidable emissions but also deliver co-benefits including improved flood protection, enhanced biodiversity and new leisure-based economic opportunities. Together, these

efforts show how coordinated regional action can address climate challenges that extend beyond a city's administrative boundaries.

Finally, by developing innovative financial tools with the Climate City Capital Hub, **Marseille (France)** leverages its capacity to finance large-scale infrastructure for the green transition while boosting the ecosystem of local and regional companies that implement its infrastructure projects. Without the use of innovative financial instruments such as green bonds, its public investments would not have the same scale for the local economic fabric.

Strengthening multi-level governance and systemic transformation

One of the key strengths of the Cities Mission lies in its ability to **connect local experimentation with national and European policy frameworks**.

In countries such as **Finland and Romania**, there are some examples of turning local experiments into national reform signals. In Finland, Mission Cities such as Tampere, Turku and Espoo are coordinating through national networks to identify areas of common interest and barriers with the aim of proposing regulatory measures that would enable faster decarbonisation. In Romania, cities including Cluj-Napoca and Suceava are collaborating to align urban energy and mobility planning with national policies. By aggregating local evidence and shared reform priorities, these city alliances transform isolated pilots into coordinated national market signals, helping governments design regulations and incentives that make clean technologies commercially viable at scale.

Through the CitiES 2030 national platform, **Spanish Cities** are joining forces to create a unified market for large-scale residential retrofitting. Supported by national coordination and philanthropic co-funding, these cities are aligning regulations, aggregating demand, and building common supply-chain and financing solutions. Private energy companies are also engaged, investing proactively in next-generation energy systems and district renovation projects. This coordinated approach turns scattered pilots into a coherent national market signal - lowering costs, de-risking private investment, and accelerating the scale-up of European clean-technology solutions for homes and buildings.

In this context, the [CapaCITIES 2.0](#) project plays a key role in strengthening multi-level governance structures supporting the Cities Mission. As a dedicated support action for national and regional authorities, the project aims to enhance their capacity to coordinate and accelerate urban climate transitions. Building on the first CapaCITIES initiative, it brings together a large transnational alliance of public authorities and stakeholders to co-design governance frameworks, facilitate peer learning and address country-specific regulatory, financial and coordination barriers. By supporting the development of national platforms, fostering collaboration across governance levels and linking research, innovation and implementation, CapaCITIES 2.0 contributes to translating the Mission's objectives into concrete national and regional action while ensuring stronger alignment across European, national and local initiatives.

The importance of research in delivering the Cities Mission

Research plays a central role in enabling the Cities Mission by supporting evidence-based decision-making, systemic innovation and the effective scaling of solutions. As highlighted in the NetZeroCities input paper "Unleashing a Research Agenda for the EU Mission Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities in FP10", research underpins the development of integrated, place-based approaches that connect technological, social, financial and governance dimensions of the transition. Through close collaboration between municipalities, research institutions and other stakeholders, the Mission

creates a unique environment for research through implementation, where knowledge is generated directly from real-life experimentation and feeds back into policy and investment decisions. Strengthening this research dimension in future EU programmes supporting the EU Missions will be essential to support cities in developing integrated climate strategies, improving governance models, mobilising finance and accelerating the replication of successful solutions across Europe.

Finally, the current implementation of the Cities Mission highlights the need to better exploit synergies across EU policy initiatives. In particular, the New European Bauhaus (NEB) represents a strong complementary framework, linking sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion in urban transformation. Strengthening alignment between the two initiatives would allow the EU to better connect technological innovation with social, cultural and spatial dimensions of the transition. Addressing both dimensions is essential to fully capitalise on existing EU instruments and maximise their collective impact.

Soil Mission

Soil Mission demonstrates that investing in soil health strengthens territorial competitiveness by enhancing productivity, resilience, innovation capacity and long-term economic viability in agriculture, food systems, and land management.

Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in translating Mission objectives into concrete actions. Through instruments such as Living Labs, participatory governance processes, citizen engagement and Territorial Management Agreements (TMAs), the Mission has enabled territories to move beyond awareness-raising and towards systemic change.

By promoting sustainable soil management and encouraging collaboration among local stakeholders, the **Mission helps European territories, including rural areas**, to enhance their productivity and economic resilience, **strengthening their overall competitiveness**.

In Extremadura (Spain), a rural region, Mission Soil has strengthened regional competitiveness by mobilising a coordinated innovation ecosystem around soil health. Through the establishment of an Action Group for the Soil Mission, 27 public and private actors jointly engaged in European collaboration, resulting in five co-funded projects (including [PREPSOIL](#), [NATIOONS](#), [ECHO](#) and [HuMUS](#)). These projects enhanced regional skills and innovation capacity, led to the creation of the Dehesa Soil Living Lab in 2025, and supported the uptake of Living Lab methodologies beyond soil health, including circular bio-based business models and agroecological transformation. This work has improved the region's ability to attract funding, upscale solutions, and position itself as a reference territory for sustainable land management.

Soil Mission strengthens multilevel governance and access to funding, reducing long-term risks and costs. By aligning local action with EU research and innovation funding, regional strategies and national frameworks, the Mission improves policy coherence, attracts investment and reduces future costs linked to soil degradation, climate impacts and ecosystem loss.

In Tuscany Region (Italy), Mission Soil has reinforced local competitiveness by embedding soil health into governance and investment decisions. Participatory processes under [HuMUS](#) led to the co-creation of Territorial Management Agreements, which positioned municipalities to access national funding for soil de-sealing and renaturalisation. Municipalities involved in the Mission improved their capacity to mobilise strategic investment in securing resources from the National Fund to combat land

take. By improving land-use efficiency, reducing environmental risks and enabling investment in sustainable urban redevelopment, these initiatives contribute to stronger territorial productivity and long-term economic resilience.

In the **Region of Murcia** (Spain), Mission Soil is strengthening regional competitiveness through the development of **Living Labs**, which brings together farmers, researchers, companies and public authorities to co-create practical solutions for soil health. The region plays a key role in mobilising actors, aligning priorities and facilitating access to European funding and policy support. This approach enables the Living Lab to test and scale innovative practices such as regenerative soil management, circular fertilisers and efficient irrigation systems. By fostering cross-sector collaboration and linking innovation with investment and policy, the Mission proved to support the regional ecosystem in strengthening soil productivity and the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of its agricultural sector.

Ocean and Waters Mission

The Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters” contributes to Europe’s competitiveness by accelerating innovation towards a sustainable blue economy, strengthening regional innovation ecosystems and supporting the development of solutions that protect and restore marine and freshwater resources and ecosystems while enabling sustainable economic development.

Healthy oceans, seas and freshwater systems are essential for Europe’s economic resilience. They underpin key sectors of the European economy, including fisheries, maritime transport, coastal tourism, renewable marine energy and water management. By supporting innovation, ecosystem restoration and sustainable resource management, the Mission helps ensure the long-term viability and competitiveness of these sectors while reducing environmental risks.

The Mission has delivered clear added value by connecting academic partners with regional authorities across sea basins. This cooperation strengthens marine research and innovation ecosystems while supporting the development of place-based solutions adapted to the specific environmental and economic contexts of Europe’s ocean and sea basins.

The Mission has also supported concrete ocean restoration and water resilience actions while actively involving society, including in outermost and island regions (e.g. Fundo Regional da Ciência e Tecnologia – Azores). These territories often face environmental pressures but also play a strategic role in developing innovative solutions for sustainable marine management, strengthening Europe’s capacity to lead in blue economy innovation.

In 2025, new EU-funded projects are bringing local and regional authorities to the heart of the Ocean and Waters Mission: [CO-WATERS](#), which brings together regions, cities and islands committed to the Mission objectives by providing capacity-building services and fostering collaboration; and [BlueActionBANOS](#) and its sister projects ([BlueActionAA](#), [SoS2LearnDBS](#), [TASC-RestoreMed](#)), which supports the development of transition agendas and the implementation community-led actions in the Baltic and North Sea basin.

CO-WATERS project, in which ERRIN is a partner, actively strengthens the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by putting regions, cities, islands and ports at the forefront of implementation. By forming a dedicated coalition of territorial authorities, the project ensures that local and regional actors move from beneficiaries to shapers and implementers of the Mission agenda. It equips

territories with the services (e.g., trainings, citizen and stakeholder engagement and funding advice), networking opportunities and visibility needed to showcase their commitments and concrete actions. Through the Label supporting the Mission Ocean and Waters and structured engagement, CO-WATERS will amplify local and regional leadership and innovation. And in doing so, it will bring place-based solutions into the European spotlight and reinforce the Mission's impact on the ground.

Furthermore, the numerous cascade funding opportunities available have been well-received and have generated a lot of interest among the ERRIN members. For the Baltic and North Sea Basin, for instance, the [BlueMissionBANOS project](#) has increased awareness on the ground, targeting a wide range of local and regional actors, ranging from managers of Marine Protected Areas, local and regional policy and decision makers, marine planners, researchers, industry professionals (blue economy sectors), NGOs, and local communities. Through four local Mission Arenas, the project mobilised over 1200 local stakeholders, committed to strengthening collaboration for achieving Mission objectives locally.

This approach has increased the sense of urgency for multi-stakeholder action as well as the willingness to act locally. As a result, an important number of local and regional actors have applied to the first round of cascade funding calls of [the BlueActionBanos project](#). At the closing of the first open calls, some 220 ideas for community-led actions and 88 ideas for transition agendas have been submitted for the Baltic and North Sea Basin alone. This clearly demonstrates the big interest of local and regional actors, their willingness to act, and the important potential for scaling the deployment of innovative solutions for the blue transition across Europe. These numbers also illustrate that the absorption capacity at local and regional level is largely exceeding the available EU cascade-funding, underscoring the necessity of support from the EU level, when national and local funding and financing are under pressure or not sufficient.

Such cascade funding mechanisms offer a way of accessing direct funding for the development of transition agendas/community-led actions with minimal administrative burden and accessible conditions. They have proven particularly effective for smaller communities, islands and peripheral territories, making Mission calls more inclusive and responsive to local realities.

Cancer Mission

The EU Cancer Mission plays a crucial role in strengthening Europe's competitiveness by accelerating innovation in cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment while improving the resilience and sustainability of healthcare systems. By aligning research, innovation and healthcare policy across European, national and regional levels, the Mission is helping to create a coherent framework for tackling one of Europe's most pressing health challenges while reinforcing Europe's leadership in biomedical research and healthcare innovation.

The Mission has played an important role in providing a clear and shared European framework and strategic direction for cancer-related efforts. By reducing fragmentation and fostering collaboration across research institutions, healthcare providers, industry and public authorities, it strengthens Europe's health innovation ecosystem and improves the impact of EU-level investments in cancer research and innovation.

The strong emphasis on prevention, early detection and health equity aligns well with regional and clinical priorities. This focus supports both improved health outcomes and the long-term sustainability

of healthcare systems, while directly addressing geographic and social inequalities in access to cancer prevention and care at regional level.

The Mission's more integrated innovation approach, which includes clinical practice and implementation, strengthens the connection between research, innovation and healthcare systems. This approach is particularly relevant for regions and hospitals engaged in patient-centred practice.

The Netherlands has developed a coordinated bottom-up approach supported by the [ECHOS project](#). The Netherlands Cancer Agenda (NKA) has been co-designed by a body of over 140 stakeholders while being primarily implemented through "acceleration teams": multi-stakeholder groups that spearhead operational initiatives in a given area. The Netherlands Cancer Collective (NKC) hub provides strategic support to these teams while maintaining a strategic vision and institutional continuity. The hub operates independently of any institution, with dedicated funding and a process-oriented team.

Cancer Mission Hub Finland (Syöpämissio Suomi) will align its activities with the National Cancer Strategy's implementation roadmap, set to be published in 2026. The Hub's founding members are the same organisations leading the national cancer strategy: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (STM), the Finnish Cancer Centre (FICAN), the Cancer Society of Finland and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). The aim is to expand the Hub's membership to include diverse sectors of society, following the ECHoS project principles and the penta helix model.

Maximising the impact of the Cancer Mission

Strengthening multi-level governance and territorial engagement: A clearer link between the overall Mission strategy and regional and clinical implementation would facilitate stronger engagement from regional authorities, hospitals and research organisations. Strengthening the territorial dimension of the Mission would help mobilise local innovation ecosystems and ensure that Mission objectives are effectively translated into concrete actions. In this context, collaboration with initiatives such as the ECHoS project is essential to reinforce the role of regional actors in implementing the Cancer Missions and maximising their impact across European healthcare systems.

Ensuring a seamless funding and scaling pathway: Greater emphasis should be placed on connecting research and innovation projects supported under the Mission with mechanisms that enable their integration and scaling within healthcare systems. Strengthening the link between Mission objectives and available funding opportunities would make it easier for regional and clinical actors to participate and contribute to the Mission's goals.

Leveraging health data and innovation ecosystems: The European Health Data Space (EHDS) can play a crucial role in strengthening the Mission's impact by enabling secure and interoperable access to health data across Europe. By facilitating data sharing between researchers, healthcare providers and industry, the EHDS can support research efforts, accelerate innovation in diagnostics and treatments and reinforce Europe's competitiveness in health data-driven medical innovation.

ERRIN and the EU Missions

ERRIN has been actively engaged in the development of the EU Missions from the very beginning. Recognised as a key priority by the ERRIN Management Board, the Missions are central to our work supporting Europe's green, digital and societal transformation. Through our Working Groups, Task

Forces, events and input papers, ERRIN has shaped the Missions in close dialogue with the European Commission.

Championing the Missions at political level: Together with Eurocities, ICLEI Europe, Energy Cities and the Resilient Cities Network, ERRIN recently sent [a joint letter](#) to Executive Vice-President Teresa Ribera, urging her to take political leadership of the EU Missions. The letter outlines how the Missions can help deliver the new Commission's objectives: closing innovation gaps, accelerating decarbonisation and boosting European competitiveness. The message was also shared with other Commissioners to stress the need for joined-up political support across portfolios.

Contributing to Horizon Europe & FP10: ERRIN has consistently advocated for the Missions in Horizon Europe and in the development of Framework Programme 10 (FP10). We submitted detailed [input](#) during the Horizon 2014–2027 consultation and are pushing for [strong Mission inclusion in FP10](#) to maintain momentum and long-term impact.

Strengthening Mission implementation: To ensure the Missions reach their full potential, ERRIN focuses on enabling effective implementation. In collaboration with the TRAMI project and [NetZeroCities](#), ERRIN co-organised Mutual Learning Events that connect regions, academia and industry, helping bridge policy and practice. To fully realise the potential of the EU Missions, key improvements are needed:

- Strengthen coordination across all governance levels to tackle complex challenges more effectively.
- Break silos by aligning Missions, funding instruments, and existing EU initiatives.
- Clarify communication and stakeholder roles to boost engagement and impact.
- Invest in skills, especially transversal and future-oriented competences, to meet Mission goals.

ERRIN (European Regions Research and Innovation Network) is a Brussels-based platform that gathers over 120 regional organisations in 26 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 paper brings together evidence and examples from ERRIN members and from projects in which ERRIN and/or its members are actively involved.

For more information on ERRIN's activities on EU Missions, please consult: <https://errin.eu/RI-Policy/missions>

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