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ERRIN input to the Call for evidence on the future EIT regulation

ERRIN supports the EIT's mission to enhance the European innovation ecosystem – and its collaborative approach to innovation. At the same time, **the EIT knowledge triangle does not fully reflect the needs of a well-functioning innovation ecosystem as it does not consider the facilitation role that the public authorities play in innovation ecosystems**. This is probably one of the reasons why the KICs have not been sufficiently integrated into their host territories, their innovation strategies as well as boosting the local assets – or their regional specialisations – including the engagement of key stakeholders of the quadruple helix. This has resulted, for example, in the initial promoters of KICs leaving the consortium and eroding the links with the local ecosystem stakeholders, including difficulties in mobilising the key stakeholders to take part.

As Europe seeks to enhance its competitiveness and resilience, connecting innovation ecosystems across Europe and strengthening the strategic value chains is more important than ever. At the same time, the KIC model seems to have several barriers that might be better solved with **strengthening existing structures and initiatives rather than building new ones**.

For example, some of the KICs have experienced **overly long set-up and initial development phases**, with a considerable time passing from the official launch before first concrete outcomes are seen. Furthermore, in certain thematic areas where there are already ongoing innovation programmes and initiatives, the KICs create an overlap of activities rather than ensure collaboration and synergies. It was also highlighted that EIT should not aim to do same things that other programmes do. For example, the KICs should not aim to fund startups, with much more limited funding than EIC.

Therefore, **establishing a new KIC should be considered only when there is a significant gap that needs to be filled (similar approach has been taken related to establishing European Partnerships)**. Otherwise, the new KIC might not end up boosting the overall European innovation ecosystem in the selected area or sector but rather fragmenting the system or even creating conflicts among the existing and emerging innovation hubs / ecosystems.

Also challenges related to openness of integrating key innovation stakeholders (including small ones) seem to hinder its potential. For example, Universities of Applied Sciences are struggling to access KIC activities, funding opportunities and decision-making structures. As a result, the considerable strengths of UAS in areas such as knowledge transfer, entrepreneurial education, innovation support and engagement with SMEs are not always fully utilised within the EIT ecosystem.

Therefore, ERRIN suggests that the future support instruments would focus more on pulling the expertise of existing innovation ecosystems, connecting them better as well as enhancing collaboration with ecosystems that are not yet well connected. As such, we rather **support strengthening the European Innovation Ecosystems Action (under pillar III of the current Horizon Europe) especially the Regional Innovation Valleys type of approach** that combines

strategic alignment of territorial innovation ecosystems with innovation activities across borders that also allow companies to internationalise and access ecosystems in other countries.

Many of the barriers identified are similar to the ones with the **European Partnerships** as outlined in [ERRIN's contribution on the future Joint Undertakings](#) from July 2026. European-level instruments should be more open, better connected to territorial innovation ecosystems and more closely integrated with the wider European policy and funding landscape. The same principle should apply to the future of the EIT and KICs. Rather than creating additional, relatively self-contained structures, future KICs should be designed as instruments that connect and strengthen existing innovation ecosystems, building on regional strengths, Smart Specialisation Strategies and established European, national and regional initiatives. This would also help ensure that KIC activities contribute to a coherent European innovation landscape and avoid duplication or fragmentation.

If the KIC model is retained, it should evolve towards a more partnership-based approach with open, multi-stakeholder structures with meaningful involvement of local authorities, academia, SMEs, startups and other relevant actors throughout strategic priority-setting and implementation. This would be consistent with ERRIN's position that European-level partnerships should function as platforms for connecting research, innovation, deployment and territorial ecosystems, rather than as isolated structures. In this model, KICs could provide value by connecting existing solutions and capabilities across Europe, facilitating knowledge and technology transfer and supporting their scaling and market uptake, while drawing on the strengths of established regional and European innovation initiatives rather than duplicating them.

On a positive note, the EIT Higher Education Initiative has helped open the EIT ecosystem to a broader range of stakeholders and created valuable opportunities for institutions beyond the established KIC networks. These efforts are welcome and have the potential to mobilise a wider range of actors and expertise. The skills academies seem to have been developing useful training related to key technologies such as batteries and hydrogen.

Key recommendations

- The knowledge triangle that the EIT model is based on should be reconsidered. It is essential to consider the role of public authorities, and specifically local and regional authorities, as facilitators of place-based innovation ecosystems. Functioning innovation ecosystems need to engage key stakeholders of the quadruple helix.
- Boosting the European innovation ecosystem should start by strengthening existing structures, instruments and initiatives rather than creating new ones. The KICs do not seem to always well complement and bridge the possible gaps in Europe's innovation ecosystem as a whole but rather to fragment it further. More focus should be placed on strengthening the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) type of an approach in the future Horizon Europe programme.
- Overall, the format of the EIT and their KICs should be evaluated. If the KIC model continues, it could be considered rather as a type of European Partnership rather than an entity seeking to become financially independent. Establishing new KICs should be considered only when there is a significant gap that needs to be filled. At the same time,

more emphasis should be placed on partnerships that operate in the field of innovation, scaling up and ensuring that the tested solutions, products and services reach the markets.

[ERRIN](#) (European Regions Research and Innovation Network) is a Brussels-based platform that gathers over 130 regional organisations from 28 European countries. ERRIN aims to strengthen the regional and local dimension in EU research and innovation policy and programmes. ERRIN supports members in enhancing their regional and local research and innovation capacities and further developing their research and innovation ecosystems.

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