



**European Committee
of the Regions**



"Bringing Europe closer to people, building sustainable, resilient, innovative regional and local communities, and striving for our values, education and culture: these are our main priorities."

Apostolos Tzitzikostas
President of the European
Committee of the Regions

"The best investment for our future is in our people. We must engage with all Europeans, not just those who live in the capitals or are knowledgeable about the European Union."

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the
European Commission

Joint Action Plan

between the European Committee of the Regions
and the European Commission
Directorate General for Education and Culture,
Directorate General for Research and Innovation,
and the Joint Research Center

Yearly monitoring of the Joint Action Plan, 2022

Executive summary

Innovation, research, culture and education are key to the EU's competitiveness, cohesion, and ability to lead the green and digital transitions. The EU's regions and cities have an important role to play in delivering these major policy areas. The 26 actions of the Joint Action Plan (JAP) aim to increase the administrative and implementation capacity of the regions and cities in order to leave no one behind, to reduce the innovation divide, to build an interconnected innovation ecosystem in Europe, and to facilitate the completion of the European Education Area (EEA) and bridge education gaps. **The Joint Action Plan enables the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) to be an active and recognised partner in the strategic debates and gives new impetus to the collaboration between the CoR and the European Commission.**

This Annual Monitoring Report consists of a core part presenting the highlights in each priority area (i.e. a selection of the major joint actions implemented in this second year of the Plan, with their outcomes and impacts). In addition, a more detailed table with the reporting on all the actions under the Joint Action Plan can be found in the appendix.

Achievements in 2022/Work in progress:

Since 2015, DG R&I has been supporting regions and cities in debating strategic issues, e.g., through joint CoR-Commission seminars under the Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP). The focus of 2022's three events was on building synergies at policy and programme level for a successful green and digital transition, as well as on youth involvement in R&I policies.

The CoR is an observer in the ERA Forum and, as such, it contributes to establishing the actions of the ERA Policy Agenda. The CoR continues to be a valuable partner in the implementation of the European Missions.

As it made clear during the first KEP event in 2022, the CoR has a particular interest in supporting the Commission in its effort to establish synergies between Horizon Europe and the Structural Funds. The guidance note on synergies, adopted on 6 July 2022, was therefore welcomed by the CoR, which will be a central partner in the dissemination of this document within the regions.

DG EAC increased its engagement actions under the European Education Area (EEA) by including CoR members in the consultation on higher education policy initiatives stemming from the EEA, such as the initiatives "Pathways to School Success" and "Education for environmental sustainability", as well as in the first Education and Innovation Summit (23 June 2022) and the fifth European Education Summit (1 December 2022).

The Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) is seen as a highly important initiative by local and regional governments in the EU and has triggered the adoption of a draft opinion by the CoR. Through European Digital Education Hubs, the actions under the DEAP will be extended to local and regional authorities.

Furthermore, the CoR actively participated in various sport and culture initiatives, including the Week of Innovative Regions and Cities 2022, the European Week of Sport, the Cultural Heritage Expert Group, the European Capitals of Culture, and the Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) "EIT Culture & Creativity".

The Preparatory Action "Advancing evidence for policy at local and regional level", adopted by the European Parliament in 2021, and developed under the banner of the *Science meets Regions* programme, came to fruition in 2022. The regions and cities selected in 2021, following two calls for expression of interest, organised their events and a series of innovation camps during 2022. The remaining activities and inter-regional collaborations will take place in the first half of 2023.

Moreover, two key pillars of *Science meets Regions* were rolled out in 2022: training sessions on evidence-informed policy-making for local and regional policy-makers, and pairing schemes with scientists. A major closing event is scheduled for September 2023.

In what is perhaps the most important development from the JRC side, the Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) initiative gained full momentum in 2022, so far involving 4 Member States, 63 regions, 7 cities and 6 regional networks. It was officially launched in May, in the presence of several CoR members and both Commissioners Gabriel and Ferreira.

Due to the strong interest from the CoR, the three DGs continued their efforts to involve the CoR and its members in the New European Bauhaus (NEB) process, even though the NEB is still not part of the Joint Action Plan. The JRC responded by setting out planned future inter-institutional and local activities, as a follow-up to the CoR opinion on the NEB, adopted during the April 2022 plenary.

Priority A. No one left behind, evidence-based policy-making in regions and cities

The debate with regions and cities on strategic issues continued in 2022. Under the aegis of the **Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP)**, the longstanding **cooperation** forum between DG R&I and the CoR, two **seminars** were organised in 2022.

The first one, entitled "Building synergies for successful green and digital transitions – the way forward", was held on 22 June, on the CoR premises. The event focused on how to implement policy and programme synergies to deliver on the EU Missions and foster breakthrough innovation. Around 100 participants, mainly local and regional policymakers, attended the event, which was followed by the adoption of a Commission guidance note on "Synergies between ERDF programmes and Horizon Europe", on 6 July 2022.

The second KEP seminar took place during the European Week of Regions and Cities (11 October 2022) and focused on the **involvement of youth in European R&I policies** and the **role that regions**

and cities play in this context. Panellists from the Commission, the CoR and youth organisations emphasised the fact that, in order to address its substantial societal challenges, Europe needs excellent young scientists, both female and male, who are open to new ideas and have an entrepreneurial mindset.

This seminar was followed by a **KEP peer-to-peer event**, organised by the **SEDEC chair** and Mayor of Gabrovo (BG), Tanya Hristova. It took place back-to-back with an **Innovation Camp on resilient cities**, where youth entrepreneurship for a digital future was also discussed. In the context of the collaboration between the **KEP and Science meets Regions**, the organisation of further such combined events is foreseen.

During the **Research & Innovation Days 2022**, the CoR rapporteur for the opinion on the *New European Innovation Agenda* (NEIA), Markku Markkula, participated as a panellist in the session on Pan-European innovation ecosystems, together with representatives from the European Parliament, governments, and the business sector. The R&I Days were attended by more than 12 000 participants.

To give regions and cities the possibility to interact directly on R&I matters relevant to them, provide feedback on KEP events and make suggestions for future ones, the **KEP website** has been rendered **more interactive**. This is done via a contact section linked to a functional mailbox and an **EU survey**. This survey revealed that topics on the green and digital transition, as well as on R&I funding, are of particular interest to the respondents, and future KEP events will be envisaged in this direction. Through the interactive website, regional and local stakeholders have the possibility to exchange with the Commission services on R&I matters relevant to their territories.

One of the flagship initiatives in the effort to **promote a culture of evidence-informed policymaking** in recent years has been the **Science meets Regions** programme. Deriving from the annual *Science meets Parliaments* event, which brought together high-level policy-makers and scientists in the European Parliament, *Science meets Regions* has evolved into a fully-fledged tool for regions and cities to boost their knowledge potential and innovation capacity, in order to improve the quality of public policy-making.

Revolving around participatory events on specific policy topics, a training offer for policymakers and an incipient **community of practice**, the instrument is currently financed through a Preparatory Action, which the EP adopted in December 2020. Following two calls for expression of interest in 2021, over 20 regions and cities were selected for financial, methodological and scientific support from the JRC. Several CoR members were involved in the regional events.

An innovative component is the organisation of **pairing schemes** between local and regional policymakers and scientists. It will be carried out in a decentralised mode, in which the JRC will provide financial and methodological support to **9 pairing schemes** implemented locally in 6 different Member States. The launch of the pairing scheme took place on 21 November 2022, and the effective implementation of the pairing schemes will take place in the course of the first half of 2023.

Finally, a **training offer** on working with evidence is being developed specifically for (local and regional) policymakers. A call for tenders was issued to this effect and the content will be developed

in close consultation with the JRC and the CoR. The course will be delivered in two sessions to local and regional policymakers, and – even more importantly – the training materials will ultimately be available in 18 EU languages, so as to ensure even better inclusion of and outreach to local and regional authorities.

The **Start-up Village Forum**, launched in 2021, continued its activities in 2022. The JRC participated in the June 2022 Rural Pact conference and also hosted a session on the topic during the R&I days in September. The 2023 Forum will take place in Brussels on 28 February 2023 and will strongly involve the CoR at the highest political level.

Another flagship initiative is the **European Researchers' Night**, funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), which successfully put the diversity of science and its impact on citizens' daily lives on display across Europe on 30 September 2022. In 2019, more than 420 cities and regions alongside universities and research institutions across Member States and neighbouring countries had been involved in public outreach activities. In 2023, as a yearly event, the European Researchers' Night will take place again on the last Friday of September, gathering a very broad public across Europe and beyond. The event will bring research and researchers closer to the public through hands-on experiments, science shows and competitions, games, quizzes, exhibitions and more. The night's celebration will involve local and regional authorities, alongside universities and research institutions and continue the "Researchers at Schools" initiative, which brings researchers back to schools to enable direct interaction with pupils on current and future challenges.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The debate with the regions on strategic issues continued in 2022. Cooperation in the field of implementing Horizon Europe Missions and debating the future of the European Research Area in the ERA Forum proved quite positive for both the Commission and national and regional representatives. The inclusion of practical elements and dedicated funding in the 2023 Horizon Europe Work Programme regarding the above elements is very much appreciated by the CoR and regional associations' representatives.

As part of long-standing cooperation between the Commission and the CoR on strengthening local R&I capacity and ecosystems, several high-level events were held successfully, raising a lot of interest, in the framework of the renewed Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP 2.0) project. The first seminar took place at the Platform's initiative, on the CoR premises, about building funding synergies for successful green and digital transitions. The second one was organised in the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities and focused on the role of regions and cities in engaging the youth in research and innovation.

The new edition of "Science meets Regions" and successive calls to regions have attracted many individual participants and territorial networks to join this project. The Innovation Camps and policymakers' training scheme proved very popular and attracted media attention nation- and Europe-wide.

Bottom-up and networking initiatives such as the Seal of Excellence and widening measures also accelerated in the second half of the year and hold considerable promise for local impact.

Support to **territorial development and smart specialisation** features high on the list of priority actions in the Joint Action Plan. Considerable progress was made in 2022. Following initial discussions on the S4 methodology and a letter from the CoR to Commissioners Ferreira and Gabriel, the

Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) – adding the sustainability dimension to S3 – were officially launched in May 2022. A playbook was developed in which methodological foundations were laid for territories to implement their smart specialisation strategies on this novel basis. Several key events have taken place since then, with a view to moving on to the phase of concrete implementation.

The intensive cooperation on PRI with the CoR will continue in 2023, with a series of events planned for the first half of the year. The first will be hosted in Brussels on 28 March 2023 and will focus on turning science into policy action to implement the European Green Deal at local and regional level.

The second event will be hosted in Dalarna region (Sweden) by the CoR and the Dalarna Regional Authority with the support of the JRC on 31 May 2023 and will focus on interregional cooperation in view of building European value chains and "interconnected valleys", including "deep-tech valleys". As a major milestone for 2023, a new version of the **Playbook** is expected by October.

JRC scientists are available to **deliver relevant data and factual material to the CoR and to local and regional authorities** directly. A recent example is the Pilot project on regional SDG indicators, which is being led and implemented by the JRC. The official high-level launch took place on 29 November in the CoR premises, with the participation of several CoR members. The JRC also continues to make expertise available to the CoR's commissions and rapporteurs in the preparation of CoR opinions.

The JRC made a significant contribution to the **CoR's annual Regional and Local Barometer** in several fields: the Green Deal, migration and demography, as well as participatory and deliberative democracy.

The CoR has also been cooperating with the JRC regarding a number of **horizontal studies** (especially as regards the implementation of the Green Deal, foresight, demography and resilience). Collaboration in the area of participatory and deliberative democracy continued in 2022. The final event of the "BiodiverCITIES" project was held in the CoR premises, in close collaboration with the CoR administration. Moreover, the JRC competence centre on participatory and deliberative democracy (CC-DEMOS) organised several citizen engagement training sessions targeted specifically to local and regional policymakers, including the participants in the *Science meets Regions* programme. The CC-DEMOS team also actively contributed to the conference on "European democracy, citizens' participation and the role of regions and cities", organised by the CoR and the Bertelsmann Foundation.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

Substantial progress was achieved in the majority of areas originally identified as important in the JAP, especially as regards the evolution of the regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), becoming greener and sustainable. As a result, the PRI pilot was launched and gained momentum in the second half of the year, with the participation of more than 60 local stakeholders.

The recent developments in the New European Bauhaus (NEB), including labelling and expert support to regions, has raised the keen interest of many regions and cities across Europe. A "voucher scheme" proposed by the CoR NEB rapporteur could be adopted and receive direct support from the Commission in the months to come.

The JRC services have regularly shared research analyses and studies with the CoR commissions, while

members have been invited as speakers to different key policy events. An inter-institutional visit by CoR members to Ispra (Varese, Italy), in early May 2022, involved several CoR rapporteurs on R&I issues and commission chairs – making it a clear success and model to follow for such visits and exchanges in the future as well.

Priority B. Close consultation on the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA), the European Education Area (EEA) and the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP), Horizon Europe Missions and other initiatives

Substantial progress has been made in supporting the involvement of the CoR in strategic fora, such as the **ERA Forum**. As of the end of 2022, more than 10 meetings of the ERA Forum have taken place. Representatives of the CoR participate in the ERA Forum meetings as observers and are actively involved in the discussions.

At the ERA Forum, the new ERA Policy Agenda, which is a list of actions to be jointly agreed by the EU and the Member States, is currently under discussion. For several of the actions, sub-groups are about to be established, to which Forum members and observers will nominate representatives in autumn 2022, so that the work of the sub-group can start by the end of 2022.

One of the actions in the Commission's draft list of priority actions in the ERA Forum is the ERA Hubs where DG R&I is cooperating with the CoR, the Member States and relevant stakeholders to further improve the concept and align it with other initiatives such as the **Regional Innovation Valleys**. This work also builds on findings from a large study on the knowledge ecosystems, where one of the work packages focused on the mapping and analysis of successful ecosystems, with the aim of better understanding the challenges and identifying success factors. A call for testing of different **ERA Hubs** concepts was launched in Q1 2022 and the kick-off of the two projects selected for funding (COOPERATE and ERA FABRIC) took place in Q1 2023. The two pilot projects will help to further define the concept of ERA Hubs. To ensure that all relevant lessons from the pilot period can be captured, an assessment of the pilot period is to be carried out.

As of 2023, the ERA Forum will monitor the implementation of the actions and provide strategic advice. The creation of the EEA Portal and the ERA Portal and the improved online entry points to policies and activities under the wider EEA umbrella progressed in 2022. The EEA portal was officially launched by Commissioner Gabriel on 10 January 2022 and the ERA policy platform is expected to be launched in early 2023. They are set to include the regional dimension in the implementation of the EEA, the ERA and the Pact for R&I respectively. This strand of work is crucial to achieving DG EAC's objective of including local and regional authorities in future initiatives.

Since September 2021, the **EU Missions** have finished their intense preparatory stage and have entered a phase of full implementation. The work programmes of three Horizon Europe Missions were prepared to ensure a fast roll-out of the actions. Policy actors, citizens and stakeholders were engaged, ensuring that their efforts can tap into existing initiatives and networks at EU, national and regional level. In their respective opinions, the CoR and the European Economic and Social Committee endorsed the EU Missions and their objectives.

All five mission secretariats are in constant contact with the CoR. To name just a few examples of

recent collaboration: i) on 7 October 2022, the mission manager of the **Cities Mission** shared a video message for the CoR ENVE commission conference, which took place in Milan and was focused on the Local Green Deal: A blueprint for a future-proof recovery. A representative of the Mission Platform currently managed by the *NetZeroCities consortium* participated in this event. Both contributions were focused on the key role of local and regional leaders in the future-proof recovery, and on how the Cities Mission will engage with citizens, with a special focus on social innovation and the role of the CoR in the Cities Mission; ii) the Mission on **Adaptation to Climate Change** held its first Mission Forum on 7 June 2022 – in the CoR premises – where the first signatories of the Mission Charter were announced; iii) CoR member, Gaetano Armao, Vice-president and regional minister of the Region of Sicily, spoke at the session "Mission Charter and regional engagement", during the Commission's high level event that took place on 14 June 2022 in Marseille; iv) the CoR's COTER commission is closely associated with the implementation of the Cities Mission and both secretariats are in close contact. In September, the CoR shared with its members information regarding the opening of the Call for Pilots. On 23 November 2022, a representative of the Cities Mission participated in the COTER meeting.

Common activities to elevate the debate with regions to a more strategic level include **the yearly WIRE conference** (Week of Innovative Regions in Europe) – an EU presidency conference supported by Horizon, where the CoR is part of the steering committee. The CoR actively participated in setting the agenda and proposing speakers for the 12th edition of the WIRE conference, which took place in Paris from 11 to 13 May 2022 and was organised under the French presidency by the University Paris-Saclay in cooperation with DG R&I. Under the heading "Towards a leading Europe in breakthrough innovation – unleashing the potential of regions", two days of high-level plenary sessions and topical workshops were held. Several CoR members participated as speakers and contributed to introducing the regional angle into the event.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The JAP catalysed a series of key cooperation activities between DG R&I and the members of the CoR. Two notable examples are the ERA Forum and the implementation of the European Missions, where the Commission made significant headway and included local and regional authorities in the consultation process. Important synergies were built with other Commission DGs and funding instruments, which could potentially have a significant impact on smart and innovative territorial investments. The Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) and the "Regional Innovation Valleys" – both to be rolled out to EU regions and cities in the near future – could be key to the implementation of the territorial aspects of the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA).

As local and regional authorities play an important role in the implementation of **the European Education Area (EEA) and the European Research Area (ERA)**, the CoR expressed support for the Commission's efforts to achieve the **European Education Area by 2025**, through the adoption of an opinion at their March 2021 plenary. The Commission published its report on progress towards the achievement of the European Education Area in November 2022. These positive developments should be paired with the still initial steps of implementing the NEIA locally during 2023 and the years to come.

DG EAC and DG R&I appreciates the increased engagement of the CoR in the field of higher education and the European Universities initiative and welcomes the CoR's opinion on the Higher Education Package. On 18 January 2022, the Commission adopted the *Higher Education Package*, i.e., the

European Strategy for Universities and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation. The Council adopted **Council Conclusions on the European strategy and the related Council Recommendation on 5 April 2022**.

The CoR, in particular the rapporteur of the European strategy for Universities, participated in the first edition of the **Education and Innovation Summit** (23 June 2022) and further promoted the key political messages of the opinion at the European Education Summit (1 December 2022) in a high-level panel dedicated to "Shaping the Future: Better investing in education and training", featuring Commissioner Mariya Gabriel's launch of the **Learning Lab**. At the end of July 2022, Commissioner Gabriel and Emil Boc, the CoR's rapporteur for the opinion on the European Strategy for Universities, issued a joint op-ed on the European strategy for universities and the European Universities initiative. The results of the **third European Universities call** were announced on 27 July 2022 and the fourth European Universities call was launched on 30 September 2022.

On 7-9 November 2022, the second edition of the **Education for Climate Days** took place, in which CoR member Markku Markkula participated. The theme of the event was "Co-creating learning for climate resilience", and each day focused on one key aspect of tackling climate change through education and training systems.

In addition, the CoR played a crucial role in two **Open Public Consultations (OPCs)** on the initiatives "**Pathways to School Success**" and "**Education for environmental sustainability**", and their results informed and improved the respective proposals for Council Recommendations.

Significant progress can be reported in cooperation in the context of the **Digital Education Action Plan** (2021-2027) and in working together to address the fragmentation of digital education policies across Member States and regions. In its opinion on this subject, adopted at the plenary on 6 May 2021, the CoR reiterated the important role of cities and regions. Moreover, the CoR's opinion on Strengthening STEAM education in the EU, which covers areas of action in STEAM subjects in education and training, was also very well received, and a number of its elements have been included in the new Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.

Significant cooperation in the field of **digital education** took place in the framework of the *European Week of Regions and Cities* (EWRC) 2022. DG EAC and the SEDEC commission organised a workshop on "Digital education and skills – the role of local and regional authorities", which took place on 12 October 2022 during the European Week of Regions and Cities. In preparation for this event, DG EAC and the SEDEC commission had launched a survey to capture local and regional authorities' experience with digital education and skills and help channel their perspectives into the "structured dialogue" with Member States on digital education and skills. The outcomes of the survey and the exchanges during the workshop will contribute to the **Structured Dialogue on Digital Education and Skills** and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the enabling factors for digital education, which is scheduled for adoption by the Commission in April 2023.

Moreover, the **Connectivity4Schools** initiative, which encourages Member States to take up EU support for broadband, internet access and digital tools, raised interest among CoR members via the Broadband Platform, which recognises and supports its potential to provide high-speed connectivity also in rural areas. . The CoR had expressed its interest in the action through the draft opinion (CDR 4769/2020) on the Digital Education Action Plan, adopted on May 6, 2021, by rapporteur Gillian Coughlan (IE/Renew E.). The draft opinion is tackling connectivity on different occasions in view of

divides and investments and expresses support to promote the Connectivity4Schools campaign, outlined in DEAP. The opinion also calls for more coherence and support in the investments at regional level.

Preparatory work for the creation of a **Digital Education Hub** linking digital education initiatives and strategies with stakeholders is underway, involving cooperation between DG EAC, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the EU STEM Coalition. With the Hub, the Commission aims to enhance cooperation and collaboration on digital education at all levels, including local, regional and national, and provide a common space for exchange of good practices, knowledge, and the search for synergies and opportunities for cooperation. As the Digital Education Hub is an open online collaborative community for digital education stakeholders in Europe and beyond, it welcomes all individuals who are interested in cooperating. The Commission would welcome the support of the CoR in raising awareness about this community. Its outreach and engagement activities include the **Digital Education Hackathon**, which will return for its fourth edition in November 2023, with an expanded and upscaled version and a new implementation mode – including regions and cities. The rebranded Digital Education Hackathon will draw on the lessons learned from the three first editions (having involved the CoR), aiming to also engage a greater variety of hosting organisations (e.g., schools) and provide more targeted support for the winning teams. The fourth **Digital Education Hackathon** is expected to engage at least 2 500 participants (50% women) over 55 local events and to ensure at least 75 registered hosting organisations. The initiative will return for an up-scaled and improved edition, where the Commission has put forward as a goal to strengthen its inclusiveness and the geographical coverage across the EU. For these purposes, the support of the CoR in disseminating information across their members would be of great added value in finding hosts in different regions across the Union. Such efforts will be in great complementarity to the upcoming National Ambassadors Network envisaged to be launched under the service contract on the Hackathon.

In the field of sport, efforts between DG EAC and the CoR are ongoing to exchange evidence through studies and collected data to improve sport policies. Both institutions collaborate closely through the **SportHub Alliance for Regional Development in Europe (SHARE)** initiative, as well as through other flagship initiatives, such as the European Week of Sport, the #BeInclusive EU Sport Award and notably the HealthyLifeStyle4All.

The **SHARE initiative** (SportHub: Alliance for Regional Development in Europe) will continue to promote the role of sport and physical activity as an instrument for economic, social and cultural development towards more healthy and active communities, while enabling spaces for healthy lifestyles, for instance in the context of the New European Bauhaus. The **SHARE initiative** featured prominently during the European Week of Cities and Regions in October 2022 with a workshop entitled "Green transition in and with sport".

At the 2022 **European Week of Regions and Cities**, a participatory lab entitled "European Year of Youth: A Healthy Discovery for young people through sports, culture and travel" took place, where young participants exchanged ideas on healthy habits and well-being through sport, culture and travel, as part of the European Year of Youth. In 2023, actions in the field of sport will focus on the role of sport in contemporary society for people's health, social inclusion, well-being and its contribution to economic growth.

Continuity will be ensured in the support of the **European Week of Sport**. Since 2015, the European

Week of Sport and its #BeActive message has helped tackle the inactivity crisis, reaching out to citizens at the grassroots level, regardless of age, social background, or fitness level.

Launched by Commissioner Gabriel during the 2021 European Week of Sport, the **HealthyLifeStyle4All** two-year campaign aims to link sport and active lifestyles with health, food and other related policies, involving many local and regional players. The 2022 EU Sport Forum, which took place in Lille in June 2022, featured an Ideas Lab on HealthyLifeStyle4All that helped to promote healthy lifestyles across generations.

In the field of culture, the collaboration between the CoR and the implementation teams of the **European Capitals of Culture** initiative is set to continue with regular participation in the selection of the Capitals through the related expert group and ongoing monitoring activities.

The **Commission's Expert Group on Cultural Heritage** is systematically followed by the CoR as an observer, with CoR representatives attending the meeting held on 13 and 14 October 2022. They contributed to the discussion, in particular related to climate-neutral cities and initiatives related to the green transition of cities. Fostering the mutual exchange of expertise, the expert group has proven to be an important forum for exchange. DG EAC is looking forward to fostering the cooperation in regard to the European Heritage Label Award, which celebrates remarkable projects, initiatives and personalities in the field of cultural heritage and aspires to give stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on recent developments, novelties and strategies. In 2023, the Commission is committed to exploring ways of developing the action through close cooperation with the Member States and the European panel of independent experts, of which one member is appointed by the CoR.

The **Cultural Heritage in Action project**, funded by the Creative Europe Programme ended in January 2023. This project aimed at empowering cities and regions to strengthen their cultural heritage policies and initiatives and to develop innovative solutions to preserve cultural heritage assets. Regular contacts with CoR members and the secretariat took place regarding peer-learning activities on cultural heritage and CoR members were invited to the peer-learning visits organised by *Eurocities* and their partners in February and November 2022. The outputs of the project include a catalogue of over 60 good practices, reports and webinars, available in their website.

The regional and local perspectives are of relevance also for the implementation of the new **EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026**. The Work Plan is, inter alia, based on the Commission's Report on the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022 of June 2022, which also highlights actions related to the regional dimension and entailing reflections on future cultural policymaking in Europe. Furthermore, the Commission issued a report on the cultural dimension of sustainable development in EU actions on 9 December 2022, which includes specific chapters expanding on the role and potential of culture, including in a local/regional setting, to help achieve the UN Agenda 2030.

In the field of culture, the **European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT)** will keep playing a crucial role by identifying relevant events for the promotion of the call jointly with the CoR, through the **Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC), EIT Culture & Creativity**. Following the designation of the KIC in June 2022 and based on the evaluation by independent experts of their start-up plan, initial activities are expected in 2023 but the full year of operations will start on 1 January 2024. Once the start-up grant agreement has been approved, DG EAC will liaise with the EIT Culture & Creativity to see how to involve the CoR in events.

The future relations between the **European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT)** and the **CoR** will be framed in an **Enhanced Cooperation Agreement**, currently at a draft stage. At the 22 February 2022 SEDEC meeting, the EIT Director presented an update on the EIT and collaboration opportunities with the CoR. Both parties have been working on the details of an Enhanced Cooperation Agreement. This Enhanced Cooperation Agreement will translate cooperation opportunities into concrete activities that will strengthen the link between the EIT and its KICs and the CoR at regional and local level, in particular in those regions that are eligible for the Regional Innovation Scheme due to an innovation performance below average. Discussions on the concrete implementation action plan that will complement the Enhanced Cooperation Agreement will start once the agreement is finalised and signed during the first half of 2023.

Priority C. Raising awareness and dissemination of funding opportunities. Exchange of best practices in the fields of research and innovation, education, culture, youth and sport

The cooperation between the JAP partners has proven to be important in a joint effort to promote the **EU Youth Portal** as a focal point of information for youngsters, which includes relevant information about the European Solidarity Corps and funding opportunities through Erasmus+, including the DiscoverEU initiative. Cities and regions are regularly addressed via news items highlighting Commission / CoR initiatives and via articles tackling topics with cities in the spotlight. Some examples include the "Youth4Regions" competition, the "Europe in My Region" stories competition, the presence of the European Solidarity Corps beneficiaries at the European Week of Cities and Regions, traineeships opportunities at the CoR, European Youth Capitals and Cultural Gems in European Cities. The European Youth Portal also highlights cities and regions via European Solidarity Corps opportunities, the DiscoverEU competition and its Green Route, the EU Youth Dialogue and its local / regional consultations, and events taking place in EU cities. In the framework of DiscoverEU, the Portal has been providing since spring 2022 a map for meet-ups in EU cities. The European Year of Youth 2022 has also been an opportunity to highlight activities aimed at young people in cities and regions across the EU, via the EU Youth Portal.

With regard to the **DiscoverEU initiative**, linkages to cities and regions are ensured by the DiscoverEU Learning Cycle, which national agencies are implementing. The Learning Cycle consists of a pre-departure meeting and/ or a pre-departure information package as well as at least one DiscoverEU meet-up at a historical, cultural or particularly sustainable site, providing learning activities. Some 49 meet-ups took place in 2022. In addition, the national agencies organise at least one coordination meeting with regional and local multipliers to support participants hosted in their country, coordinating with stakeholders such as youth associations and municipalities. Apart from steering DiscoverEU participants into the regions through the above- mentioned main activities, the Commission's team coordinating DiscoverEU has also continued to develop the "DiscoverEU Routes" on the European Youth Portal. In addition to the first "Green Route" that was published in July 2021, a second one called the "Culture Route" was published in May 2022. On 13 May 2022, DG EAC presented it at the **10th Green Deal Going Local working group meeting** organised by the CoR and encouraged the members of the CoR to promote the initiative within their regions.

Cities and regions are likewise important stakeholders in the **European Solidarity Corps**, providing young people with an opportunity to tackle unsolved societal challenges faced by communities across Europe and beyond. Young people engaged in the Corps bring tangible benefits to places and communities in need. While the municipalities can clearly benefit from any and all of the activities of the European Solidarity Corps that take place on their territory, regional and local authorities and other stakeholders may also directly take part in the Programme as participating organisations that request funding for a project specifically designed to meet their needs in the solidarity sector. Specific measures are provided for to facilitate access to Solidarity Corps activities for young people with fewer opportunities, including those who face geographical obstacles, including long travel distances and weak transportation links.

All EU youth programmes share the objective to mainstream the gender equality perspective throughout their actions over the entire programming period, in line with the principles of the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25. The **Erasmus+ Programme's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy** supports an easier access to funding for a wider range of organisations and aims to better reach out to more participants with fewer opportunities, in order to foster equality, including at local and regional level.

DG EAC welcomes the existing exchanges on current calls within EU programmes such as the **Erasmus Days** and invites the CoR members to maintain the contact with their respective Erasmus+ national agency. The Commission welcomes the existing exchanges of experiences and networking opportunities on current calls within EU programmes such as the Erasmus Days and invites the CoR members to maintain the contact with their respective Erasmus+ national agency to enhance participation and dissemination at national level

Furthermore, the **EU Youth Coordinator** serves as a visible point of reference for young people and youth organisations from cities and regions across Europe and aims to ensure that their views and perspectives are taken into account and integrated in all relevant policies. Regarding the numerous activities put in place during the **European Year of Youth 2022**, the EU Youth Coordinator moderated and spoke at the first meeting with youth stakeholders and national coordinators on 16 November 2021, with a representative from the CoR in attendance. Representatives from the CoR participated actively and spoke at the second, fourth, fifth and sixth meetings with youth stakeholders and national coordinators that took place respectively on 17 December 2021, 29 March 2022, 2 June 2022 and 18 October 2022.

In the context of the European Year of Youth and inspired by the methodology of the Conference on the Future of Europe in engaging citizens, the CoR launched a bottom-up participatory co-creation process for a **Charter on Youth and Democracy**, with representatives of youth organisations across the EU and the European Youth Forum (EYF). The Charter was signed by the CoR President and the President of the EYF at the last CoR plenary session and was handed over to Commissioner Gabriel by the SEDEC chair, Ms Hristova, in December.

The CoR reunited representatives from youth forums from all of the Member States at the **LevelUp! Accelerating Change Festival** on 28-29 October at which CoR members also participated in an exchange with the youth representatives. The event was organised by the European Youth Forum and took place in the European Parliament, with the participation of more than 1 200 young people. The CoR also adopted an **opinion on "The future of EU youth policy"**, which addressed different fields of youth policy and called for a comprehensive approach to youth policy, the mainstreaming

of the youth perspective across policy fields, and the facilitation of active participation of youth in building the future of Europe, while also proposing practical tools that would support the implementation of youth policy at the local, regional, national, and European levels.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The close cooperation between the CoR and DG EAC during the 2022 European Year of Youth proved productive both regarding the CoR's involvement in European policymaking and outreach and also in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, where the "youth" topic enriched a large number of the debates.

Priority D. Co-funding of programmes: top-up with European Structural and Investment Funds (Cohesion Policy Funds)

In the context of enhancing synergies between Horizon Europe and the cohesion funds, the CoR is invited to participate in the meetings of the **Seal of Excellence Community of Practice** and to disseminate information on the Seal of Excellence to its members. This should lead to an **increase in the implementation of the Seal of Excellence in the regions** and ultimately to more regions investing in research and innovation. The CoR has also been invited to disseminate **the guidance on synergies** adopted on 6 July 2022. Joint seminars are planned to disseminate the guidance as widely as possible with the aim of informing regional and local authorities and stakeholders in regions and local communities. The CoR has also been invited to disseminate the information on the recently published Evaluation study on the external coherence and synergies of Horizon 2020 within the European research and innovation support system, which abounds with references to the opportunities and challenges of synergies at regional level.

The 2022 work programme calls for the **European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)** were published between May and June. An info day was held on 7 September 2022 to share more details about five calls that are open until around mid-November 2022 (total budget c. EUR 30 million). Target groups include national, regional or local authorities, and other players in the ecosystem. The related communication activities for the info day included the CoR. The Executive Agency EISMEA contacted the CoR communication team about further dissemination of the EIE WP calls.

The **Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) pilot** constitutes an important element of Flagship 3 of the New European Innovation Agenda. Under the EIE WP 23-24 call for implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys, complementarity and synergies with regional participation in pilot PRIs will be sought.

DG R&I is currently exploring the role of regions in innovation ecosystems in the context of the **New European Innovation Agenda**. One action is aimed specifically at accelerating and strengthening innovation ecosystems across Europe and at better connecting them in support of EU priorities.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

At the beginning of the programming period, the PRI and NEIA debates provided clarity regarding the synergetic use and prioritisation of EU funds regionally not only by the CoR members, but also by a number of territorial associations such as ERRIN, EURADA, EARTO, etc.

The high success rate of the participation of CoR member-regions and cities in the Horizon Missions

(especially in the Cities and Climate Mitigation Mission), the Science meets Regions and PRI pilot, as well as in the Seal of Excellence and the NEB-related calls, proved that such upstream cooperation between the CoR and the Commission has been very productive.

Initiatives not mentioned in the Joint Action Plan as adopted on 25 November 2020

The **New European Bauhaus (NEB)**, for which the JRC leads the design phase, has attracted considerable interest from European regions and cities. Ever since the launch in 2021, the JRC has strived to maximise regional and local involvement in the project.

In 2022, the CoR hosted an online workshop during the Week of Regions and Cities, with close involvement of the JRC. The workshop was entitled *The role of regions and cities in the New European Bauhaus*.

The JRC will continue to **involve the regional and local level in the further development of the NEB and is counting on the CoR to raise awareness via its members throughout Europe's regions and cities.**

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The future evolution of the New European Bauhaus (NEB), including the related EIT KIC on culture and the creative industries, is being closely followed by a very large number of regions and cities. The CoR proposal for a "voucher scheme" to support and further catalyse this process is being considered by the European Commission.

Conclusions:

Overall, the Joint Action Plan (JAP) has better structured and further strengthened cooperation in a number of key areas between the European Commission and the CoR.

The Joint Action Plan is a key tool for maximising the positive impact of EU action in Europe's regions and local communities. It is a hallmark of strengthened outreach, not just to the CoR as a political body, but also directly to the local and regional authorities and the citizens that the CoR represents.

Furthermore, against the backdrop of several past and unfolding challenges, resulting in a complicated period characterised by the aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic and tight deadlines to start the new programming period, the implementation of EU policy measures and numerous funding activities on the ground has already benefited from and will continue to benefit from this fruitful collaboration, involving supranational and local and regional actors.

Ultimately, the priority areas identified in the JAP constitute an important compass for decision-makers and policy officers in both the Commission and the CoR. The inbuilt flexibility of this list of actions enables new and interesting projects and initiatives to be included, such as the New European Bauhaus and the 2022 European Year of Youth (not included in the initial Joint Action Plan). It also allows for participation in topical debates (such as the one entitled "Beyond the Conference on the Future of Europe", held during the SEDEC commission meeting of 21 June 2022).

Substantial progress has also been made by DG R&I in involving the CoR in strategic working groups and fora on the future of the European Research Area – participation made possible thanks to the Joint Action Plan.

Cooperation with the CoR on the implementation of the five European Missions intensified during 2022. The importance of having the CoR on board is acknowledged by both the mission secretariats and the respective CoR commissions, underlining that involving regions and cities in a bottom-up way in research and innovation provides a decisive contribution to making the green and digital transitions a reality.

Considerable progress was made on the actions under the JRC's remit. The flagship initiatives (PRI, *Science meets Regions*) are in full swing and will be further implemented in close consultation with the CoR. Special attention will be given to the areas where more progress is needed, such as the sourcing of data at local and regional level, where both the Commission and the CoR stand to gain from mutual support.

DG EAC and the CoR are looking forward to fostering stakeholder engagement at European, local and regional level and developing further joint outreach activities. There has been close cooperation between DG EAC and the CoR in the framework of the 2022 European Year of Youth, as well as on the drafting the Enhanced Cooperation Agreement which will govern the future relations between the EIT and the CoR.

An important milestone in this great cooperation was the 5th European Education Summit in December 2022, where a SEDEC Member (Mr Emil Boc) contributed to the high-level panel on '*Shaping the Future: Better Investing in Education and Training featuring the launch of the Learning Lab*'. The CoR recalled the importance of involving local and regional authorities in the Learning Lab and stressed that supporting investment in education and innovation in all corners of Europe, is key to reducing education and equity gaps. The CoR looks forward to further education summits in the years ahead.

Milestones

Indicative milestones/events (2023)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024
KEP Thematic seminars						X				X			
KEP Peer-to-peer events					X						X		
Science meets Regions: delivery of training courses to policymakers						X							
Science meets Regions: Pairing scheme finalisation											X		
PRI: revised version of the Playbook										X			
Launch of the ERA policy platform early 2023				X									
European Education Area and European Universities – Education package Meeting with rectors of European Universities planned for end January 2023;	X												
Results of the 4th Erasmus+ call under the European Universities Initiative expected in summer 2023							X						
EIT Culture & Creativity Early-bird activities of the KIC start in 2023; "EIT Culture and Creativity" launch event on 21 February 2023		X											
Mutual exchange of expertise Next meeting of Cultural Heritage Expert Group			X										
European Researchers' Night									X				

Next edition of Science is Wonderful!			X										
Council Recommendations on the enabling factors for digital education and improving the provision of digital skills in education and training			X										
Digital Education Hackathon											X		
European Week of Regions and Cities										X			
European Sport Forum													
European Week of Sport									X				