



**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 Centre

Joint Action Plan



Mariya Gabriel
European Commissioner
for Innovation, Research,
Culture, Education and Youth



Anne Karjalainen
Chair of the Commission
for Social Policy, Education,
Employment, Research and Culture

“Regions and cities play an essential role in achieving our green and digital transitions . The Joint Action Plan and the relaunched Knowledge Exchange Platform work plan that the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission are adopting are milestones in our renewed European Research Area and focus on concrete solutions to improve citizens’ lives.”

“Firmly anchoring at local and regional level actions in the field of education, research & innovation and culture are key to Europe’s cohesion, sustainable recovery and smooth transition to a carbon-neutral economy. The Joint Action Plan fully reflects the political will to take forward joined actions on the ground, fostering strong synergies between policies and instruments, so that no person and no place is left behind.”

Introduction

Innovation, research, culture and education will be key to our competitiveness and our ability to lead in the transition to a climate-neutral economy and a new digital age. This joint action plan will cover **four priority areas of collaboration** between the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the Directorate-General responsible for the EU Commission's policies on education, culture, multilingualism, youth and sport, the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation and the Joint Research Centre. With 26 concrete actions, we aim to increase the administrative and implementation capacity of the Regions to not leave anyone behind, reducing the innovation divide and to build a well interconnected innovation ecosystem in Europe. The common denominator among all these actions is that they touch on citizens in their daily life. We need to make sure that many more young Europeans are aware and able to benefit from the support and opportunities we designed for them through our strengthened programmes, empowering young people to embody a Europe of talent.

This document is based on the existing protocol on inter-institutional agreement between the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions (2012/C 102/02).

Priority A. No one left behind, evidence-based policymaking in the Regions

The objective is to ensure that regions have access to state-of-the-art knowledge and resources for policymaking. These resources are available at national level but not necessarily at regional level. We will increase administrative and institutional capacity, which is particularly relevant for regions that would otherwise be left behind. **The Knowledge Exchange Platform Work Plan (KEP 2.0)** run by DG R&I with the Committee of the Regions since 2015, will be the perfect platform to achieve this, with its renewed focus on the European Research Area priorities and more strategic approach, to enable and foster coordination with the R&I initiatives of the Joint Action Plan and those promoted by the other partner DGs. It will give support to the dissemination and engagement of CoR stakeholders on the R&I-related actions of the Joint action plan. With KEP 2.0, the CoR will get informed about the latest R&I policy developments and will bring-in the regional perspective and experience for a strategic exchange.

Science meets Regions – beyond the pilot phase is a flagship initiative that the JRC has implemented in close consultation with the CoR to support science-based policymaking at regional and local level, as well as cooperation and exchange of best practices among regions. The Science meets Regions project, which has been rolled out successfully in the EU, has also attracted attention in the context of support for the Western Balkans. Therefore, we propose to extend Science meets Regions to the Western Balkans, bringing together local and international experts together with policymakers on specific topics, in particular, training and awareness-raising initiatives on the importance of solid evidence uptake in policymaking processes.

Up to now, the resilience dashboards have been developed by the JRC at national level and currently there is no ongoing activity related to developing a similar approach to resilience at regional level.

Regarding resilience, JRC will liaise with the CoR in order to better understand the precise needs and offer support, especially with a view to accomplishing the **Green Deal locally** (based on available JRC expertise and resources). This cooperation will also include, as a new project, a **Mapping of educational inequalities**, in the light of the pandemic and the challenges of access to e-learning.

The JRC Smart Specialisation Platform is committed to providing renewed and strengthened support for local and regional administrations in the design and implementation of innovation strategies for place-based economic transformation and to providing better intelligence, advice and knowledge to policymakers around the EU. The CoR can provide the ideal forum to discuss the gaps in administrative and institutional capacity at the regional and local level that may hamper fully reaping the advantages of the strategic approach to innovation policy, and ways to overcome them. Collaboration on cross-border cooperation between regions could also be strengthened. The JRC can provide a wealth of **data** at national and subnational level. It is willing to assist the CoR in order to facilitate the use of those data and information, including in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and allow access to sub-national level data related to innovation and research policies and Smart Specialisation, the digital transformation or Territorial Impact Assessments.

Table of Actions

Action
<p>1. Knowledge Exchange Platform Work Plan (KEP 2.0)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DG R&I will run the KEP 2.0 in collaboration with the CoR. Each set of events/actions will contribute to EXPLAIN, ENGAGE and EMPOWER regional/local policymakers and actors through: bringing the main ERA concepts and messages closer to citizens and multiplying its reach; giving the opportunity to regional and local actors to promote their R&I activities and competences in a specific ERA area; supporting an informed decision-making process at regional/local level on the opportunities offered at European level.• CoR members will host the events and act as ambassadors.• Coordination with the JRC programme "Science meet Regions" will be ensured.
<p>2. Science meets Regions – beyond the pilot phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The JRC (and notably the territorial development units) will continue to provide scientific support to regional initiatives. The interregional collaboration dimension will be enhanced.• Synergies between "Science meets Regions" and the RTD-CoR initiative "Knowledge Exchange Platform" (KEP) in the context of ERA will be strengthened.
<p>3. Extending Science meets Regions to the Western Balkans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• After a successful pilot, the JRC will extend the Science meets Parliaments / Science meets Regions approach throughout the Western Balkans.
<p>4. Studies in Resilience, Mapping educational inequalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Mapping of educational inequalities in the light of the pandemic and the challenges of access to e-learning, carried out jointly with the JRC.• Exploring the extension of the national resilience dashboards developed by the JRC to the regional level.
<p>5. Support for Smart Specialisation & Territorial Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online workshop on S3 implementation (early 2021)• Organise an event in Seville to showcase the JRC-CoR collaboration in Smart Specialisation and discuss the way forward with the main stakeholders, in the EU and at the global scale (for example UN-Habitat and the UN Inter-agency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs or the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).• Examine the governance implications of the inclusion of local authorities in the design and implementation of sustainable development agendas and the Green Deal, as well as the prominent role that innovation-led agendas based on the Smart Specialisation governance approach could play.

- Examine the gaps in administrative and institutional capacity at the regional and local level, and ways to overcome them.
- The CoR can become a forum for discussing the possibilities for building administrative and institutional capacity at the regional and local level, as well as synergies between smart specialisation strategies with other regional innovation plans or strategies .

6. Provision of sub-national data relevant to regions and cities

The JRC can provide data at national and sub-national level:

- The Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies, soon to undergo a major update, provides sub-national level data via the Urban Data Platform Plus, including in relation to the COVID-19 pandemics;
- The new Annual Regional Database of the European Commission (ARDECO) might be of relevance in the context of Territorial Impact Assessments;
- The Smart Specialisation Platform hosts several applications that allow access to sub-national level data related to innovation and research policies and Smart Specialisation, as well as digital transformation (Eye@RIS3 tool mapping and comparing the Smart Specialisation policy priorities; R&I Regional Viewer provides a structured, regionalised visualisation of regional funding flows; Digital Innovation Hubs tool provides a geo-localised map of Digital Innovation Hubs and their characteristics);
- Cooperation to the LORDI initiative; regional input-output systems (and potential applications to value chains, economic interdependency etc.) and the territorial impact assessment of policies.
- Interactive pilot tool (dashboard) bringing together R&I data from ERDF (Interreg), with data from the Horizon2020: policy areas; funded projects and participations. The target audience will be policy-makers (e.g. for programming purposes) and potential applicants (e.g. who may want to expand their options in their quest for partners).

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

The objective is to include the regional dimension in the implementation of all policy initiatives in the area of Innovation, research, education, culture and sport, to build bridges between the initiatives and the CoR.

The CoR will be involved in, and at the same time benefit from, the mapping of knowledge ecosystems across the EU, with a view to developing the **ERA Hubs initiative**. The ERA Hubs will be structures bringing together ecosystem actors and networking those structures that share standards of work and quality. In addition, the CoR will be an important partner in the dissemination of the European Innovation Council (**EIC**) **European Innovation ecosystems** local and regional-related activities, developing synergies with their actors, policies and programmes, and could possibly play a role in the **EIC forum**. A role for the Committee of the Regions **in the ERA governance**, based on the principle of inclusiveness and multilevel-governance approach, could be envisaged.

In the wider context of promoting synergies with Cohesion policy funds, the promotion of the **Seal of Excellence** initiative at the regional level could be carried out through the relevant CoR Members and by taking part in the SoE "Community of Practice".

The Committee of the Regions will be involved in consultations related to the implementation of the **European Education Area**, in which local and regional authorities will have an important role in delivery. For 2020-2021, this would include the initiatives on "Pathways to School Success", "Education for environmental sustainability", "The transformation agenda of higher education and universities", the "European Student Card initiative" and "mobility for volunteering and solidarity purposes". They can also help in promoting dedicated platforms for exchanges, such as eTwinning, the School Education Gateway, the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE), the European Youth Portal (including the European Solidarity Corps portal) and OpenU. To encourage teachers, trainers, young people, schools, universities and local organisations to take part in online courses, access online material, learn from other professionals in a wide range of fields, share their own practices and access information on opportunities through EU programmes.

The European Commission will create a new **European Education Area Portal** that provides systematic information on the various enabling framework activities, disseminates outputs, and facilitates the implementation of what has been agreed. The idea is to place greater emphasis on EEA visibility, dissemination of results and specific thematic support for Member States. The portal will also give visibility to the main initiatives at regional and local level.

European Universities are closely linked to their **regions and cities**. We need to stimulate in particular the creation of European knowledge by co-creating teams of academics and students, together with regional actors, researchers, businesses, and civil society to jointly address societal challenges in a multi-disciplinary approach. This must be done in synergy with regional and local communities and will pave the way for interesting job opportunities for students in their home countries. In addition, European Universities will be centres of gravity for upskilling and reskilling adult learners, including active professionals, with high-level and forward-looking competences in a twin transition: digital and climate. Importantly, this will support job creation/preservation at local and regional level, helping businesses that have an insufficiently skilled workforce.

The CoR can become closely involved in the "**Education for Climate**" **Coalition**. The coalition will be launched by the end of 2020 to support the implementation of the European Climate Pact. The Coalition will involve regions and local communities, to work on: curriculum development, teacher training, pedagogical tools and sustainable school infrastructure, supported by the Erasmus+ programme to mobilise expertise, provide resources for networking and support creative approaches with teachers, pupils and students. In synergy with the European Climate Pact, the policy guidance under development, which promotes education for environmental sustainability, and the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+, will provide a link between bottom-up initiatives and EU-level action, supporting pledges and concrete actions for sustainable behaviour across the EU.

Equally important is the cooperation in the context of the updated **Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP)**, and its **Connectivity4Schools** initiative supporting high-speed connectivity for schools and VET providers located in rural areas. The cooperation will also cover the new **European Digital Education Hubs**, linking national and regional digital education initiatives and strategies and connecting national authorities, experts, education and training

providers, civil society, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders at regional, national and EU level. The new DEAP will support the EU Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Coalition to develop new higher education curricula for engineering and Information and communications technology (ICT) based on the science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) approach, as well as to boost the participation and careers of women in STEM.

The RTD and EAC, together with the CoR, will work to establish links between the EEA and ERA, in particular as regards (i) empowering the higher education sector through a comprehensive transformation agenda to be developed together with stakeholders, Member States, and regions, and (ii) strengthening synergies between **Erasmus and Horizon Europe** in support of these transformations for the future of universities in Europe.

ERA4You is a policy initiative aimed at (i) developing intersectoral mobility for a better flow-through of talent to society; and (ii) tackling brain-drain by supporting low-performing countries in R&I to promote excellence in their R&I systems. Both dimensions are subject to reforms of national R&I systems, requiring favourable framework conditions such as excellent research infrastructure, attractive working conditions and adequate remuneration packages. The ERA4You aims to support and incentivise such transformations, to achieve a more balanced circulation of talent, across both regions and sectors. It proposes an approach that strengthens synergies between EU and national and regional programmes. It will also foster structured collaboration between academia and businesses, and across disciplines and borders, within the internal market.

The **Horizon Europe Missions** aim to deliver solutions to some of the greatest challenges facing our world. Cities and regions are the natural environment for the deployment of these solutions. The Committee of the Regions will play a strategic role by connecting both worlds: the RTD Mission-oriented thinking and the implementation side, where challenges are tackled. Its role could be to facilitate stakeholders and education programmes/campaigns to raise awareness among the public in all five mission areas (Climate Neutral and Smart Cities; Adaptation to Climate Change including Societal Transformation; Cancer; Healthy Oceans Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters; Soil Health and Food).

The collaboration of the Committee of the Regions with the **European Capitals of Culture** initiative should carry on, through participation in the selection of the Capitals through the related expert group and the monitoring activities.

Moreover, in the short and medium term, there will be a number of different events in which the CoR can contribute or participate. These include events under the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022 and other events. Within the CoR, the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) could further emphasise the role of culture in cities and regions at the European Week of Regions and Cities. Indeed, every year, a number of sessions are devoted to the topics of culture/cultural heritage.

The CoR is and will remain an observer in the Commission's **Expert group on cultural heritage**, which acts as a platform for consultation and exchanging best practice for sustainable and participatory cultural heritage policies in Europe. The Commission representatives remain available to take part in SEDEC meetings.

The CoR also designates one member of the European panel of independent experts that was established to carry out the selection and monitoring at Union level of European Heritage Label sites.

Sport makes a direct contribution to economic activity and social cohesion in any given region by encouraging innovation, fostering sustainable development and urban regeneration and enhancing the overall attractiveness of regions. The CoR Opinion "Mainstreaming sport into the EU agenda post-2020", demonstrates its interest in **sports policy**. Also, the annual European Week of Cities and Regions traditionally includes sports-related sessions. The Sport Chapter in the Erasmus+ supports European partnerships on grassroots sport (and as such, is anchored at local level). Different flagship initiatives and the launch of the Erasmus call for close collaboration with local actors will reinforce cooperation with the CoR.

Table of Actions

Actions
<p>7. Involvement in ERA design & implementation - Synergies with local actors: ERA Hubs, EIC innovation ecosystems, EIC Forum, Seal of Excellence and policy dialogue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CoR will be involved in, and at the same time benefit from, the mapping of knowledge ecosystems across the EU run by DG R&I with a view to designing the ERA Hubs. • The CoR will be an important partner in the dissemination of the EIC European Innovation ecosystems' local and regional-related activities and in boosting synergies with their actors, policies and programmes, and could play a role in the EIC forum, should a working group be set up on the regional aspects of innovation ecosystems. • Involvement of the CoR in the Seal of Excellence initiative could be through its promotion by CoR Members at regional level, and by taking part in the SoE "Community of Practice" established by the Commission, for exchanges of know-how and good practices. • DG R&I will focus in particular on establishing a policy dialogue with regions as part of the R&I/ERA related policy dialogue with Member States, based on a screening of the R&I needs of and practical challenges faced by regional authorities and local players. Involvement of CoR in the ERA governance could be envisaged.
<p>8. Involve the Committee of the Regions in consultations related to the implementation of the European Education Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and regional authorities have an important role in the implementation of the EEA, including in the initiatives on "Pathways to School Success", "Education for Environmental Sustainability", the "Higher Education Transformation Agenda" the "European Student Card initiative" and "Mobility for Volunteering and Solidarity Purposes". • The CoR could help promote dedicated platforms for exchanges, such as eTwinning, the School Education Gateway, EPALÉ, the European Youth Portal (including the European Solidarity Corps portal) and OpenU, to encourage teachers, trainers, young people, schools, universities and local organisations to take part in online courses, access online material, exchange good practice, and access information on opportunities through EU programmes.

9. European Education Area (EEA) Portal and European Research Area (ERA) Portal

- The new EEA Portal and the ERA Portal will provide information on enabling framework activities, disseminate outputs and facilitate implementation. The portals will be a permanent and constantly updated information tool.
- The EEA and the ERA portals will also give visibility to the main initiatives at regional and local level.

10. Cooperation on European Universities initiative and regions

- Will stimulate the creation of European knowledge and co-creating teams of academics and students, together with regional actors, researchers, businesses, and civil society, to jointly address societal challenges in a multi-disciplinary approach.
- This must be done in synergy with regional and local communities and will pave the way for interesting job opportunities for students in their home countries.
- European Universities will be centres of gravity for upskilling and reskilling adult learners, including active professionals, with high-level and forward-looking competences in a twin transition: digital and climate.

11. Education for Climate -Coalition

- The coalition will support implementation of the European Climate Pact. The Coalition will involve regions, local communities, to work on: curriculum development, teacher training, pedagogical tools and sustainable school infrastructure.
- Supported by the Erasmus programme to mobilise expertise, provide resources for networking and support creative approaches with teachers, pupils and students. In synergy with the European Climate Pact, it will be a link between local bottom-up initiatives and EU-level action, supporting pledges and concrete actions to change sustainability behaviour across the EU.

12. Cooperation in the context of the updated Digital Education Action Plan:

- Connectivity4Schools initiative, to support high-speed connectivity for schools and VET providers located in rural areas.
- Cooperation through the new European Digital Education Hubs to link national and regional digital education initiatives and strategies and connect national authorities, experts, education and training providers, civil society, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders at regional, national and EU level.
- The new DEAP will support the EU STEM Coalition to develop new higher education curricula for engineering and ICT based on the STEAM approach to increase the participation and careers of women in STEM, and to provide mentoring schemes and guidance for female students by promoting role models in STEM fields.

13. Strengthen links between the European Education Area and the European Research Area

- Strengthen synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe,
- Engage with the full roll-out of the European Universities initiative under the Erasmus programme, in close synergy with Horizon Europe and other EU instruments.
- Ensure full synergies between the universities' four missions - education, research, innovation and service to society. – The new ERA and EEA together will help enable shared objectives between the EU, Member States and regional initiatives to empower higher education institutions in their transformation efforts on the missions for education, research, innovation and service to society. The CoR will be involved in the consultation process for the transformation agenda, and the subsequent awareness-raising at regional level.
- The monitoring of the European Universities initiative, piloted by Erasmus+, with complementary support from Horizon to fine-tune and optimise synergies between the future programmes in support of Higher Education sector.

14. ERA4You initiative and contribution to inter-sectoral mobility

- Through **ERA4You**, the DG R&I aims to support and incentivise transformations to achieve a more balanced circulation of talent, across both regions and sectors. It will include targeted mobility measures and awareness-creation at national and regional level about existing and new initiatives to support researchers in lower performing Member States to develop R&I excellence.
- As part of the approach, a study will aim at mapping the brain-drain problem in the ERA, analysing its causes and identifying the most appropriate solutions to enable evidence-based and sustainable policies for improving cross-border circulation of talent. The CoR can participate in the analysis regarding the search for solutions. The CoR will be involved in awareness-raising and be informed early on about all further development of the ERA4You initiative.

15. Strong Collaboration with Horizon Europe's five Missions

- The CoR will have a prominent role in supporting the co-creation process for the implementation of the missions, in coordination with DG R&I. It will contribute to the creation of networks of regions and participate in dissemination and communication activities aimed at promoting stakeholder and citizen engagement. In particular, CoR could:
 - cover the activities of the Global Knowledge Centre ("Climate Neutral and Smart Cities" mission),
 - establish key partnerships in and between regions and communities ("Adaptation to Climate Change including Societal Transformation" mission), supporting the objective of identifying and helping 200 European communities and regions to co-create a vision and innovation pathways
 - have a role in supporting the implementation of effective cancer-prevention and screening strategies, and in dissemination and

<p>communication activities to transform the cancer culture (the "Cancer" mission)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage and support the co-creation process for the implementation of the Oceans mission, specially the place-based demonstrators, and awareness-raising among citizens (the "Healthy Oceans, Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters" mission) • support, in close cooperation with DG AGRI mission secretariat, i) events, communication and outreach, ii) Stakeholder and citizen engagement, iii) Networking activities, e.g. bringing together regional actors from living labs and lighthouses planned under the mission, iv) support for public science in the regions (the "Soil health and Food" mission)
<p>16. European Capitals of Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collaboration of the CoR with the European Capitals of Culture initiative should carry on. The CoR continues to participate in the selection of the Capitals through the related expert group, and is also involved in the monitoring process. • Cooperation on the networking and synergy-developing activities with the Innovation Capitals and Green Capitals
<p>17. Increased synergies and participation in events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation will continue on high-level conferences and events, including events under the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022 (i.e. on alternative funding for cultural heritage; on social cohesion; on music) and other events, such as the closing conference of Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities in 2021. • The CoR Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) could further emphasise the role of culture in cities & regions at the European Week of Regions and Cities. • The CoR will also be involved in the design of and will participate in the Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE), the annual Presidency event supported by Horizon.
<p>18. Mutual exchange of expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CoR is observer in the Commission expert group on cultural heritage, set up under the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (2018) to act as a platform for consultation and exchanging best practice for sustainable and participatory cultural heritage policies in Europe. The Commission representatives remain available to take part in SEDEC meetings. • The CoR designates one member for the European panel of independent experts, established to carry out the selection and monitoring at Union level of European Heritage Label sites.
<p>19. Cooperation on sport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SportHub Alliance for Regional development in Europe – the SHARE initiative – financed through Erasmus+ aimed at ensuring that sufficient account is taken of sport when formulating policies and programmes across different fields, including sport for health and active territories.

- Other flagships financed by the Erasmus+ programme are the **European Week of Sport** to raise awareness about the importance and benefits of sport and physical activity; and the **#BeInclusive EU Sport Awards**, which recognise sport organisations working with ethnic minorities, refugees, people with disabilities, groups of young people at risk, or any other group that faces challenging social circumstances.

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

This priority aims to support regions to use good practice and role models/examples to encourage greater participation by regions and cities in EU initiatives and to reduce the innovation divide.

Before innovations are taken up globally, they will first emerge locally and be subsequently supported at EU level. And it is the regional and local authorities that are closest to the citizens. For this reason, an EU action coordinated with regional and local authorities and in line with the priorities and the strategies of these territories is the only way forward. This is what the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** model of place-based innovation is about, with an action deeply embedded within local and regional innovation ecosystems. This operational model calls for close collaboration with local actors and, therefore, for closer cooperation with the CoR.

In order to formalise (through a non-contractual agreement) the strong commitment of both parties to substantially increase their collaboration, the EIT could consider signing a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with the CoR. This MoU would be tailor-made for the needs of the two institutions and would include concrete initiatives and actions to be implemented over the next few years.

The Commission and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) have proposed to launch a new Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) in the area of **Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)** in 2022. CCI are sectors with a high growth potential, many grass-roots initiatives and strong appeal among the general public. They are strongly embedded in their local and regional ecosystems. However, CCI still form a very fragmented sector and the innovators and business creators lack the necessary entrepreneurial and innovation skills. Moreover, they have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and need substantial support to recover and transition to a more resilient and digital model. As these sectors are often deeply anchored at local level, the CoR could be at the interface between local actors and the future KIC.

The EIT and its KICs operate through a network of over **60 co-location centres across the EU**, and notably in Member States that lag behind in terms of innovation. Co-location centres are physical innovation hubs that make it possible to combine EU and local levels of intervention to bring excellence directly to the regions. The EIT has launched an initiative targeting countries/regions not yet involved in the core EIT Community activities, where innovation capacity is moderate or modest. The aim of the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS) is to help disseminate the knowledge and know-how of the EIT Community and widen the participation in KICs across Europe. Under Horizon Europe, the Commission has proposed to earmark at least 10% of the funding allocated to KICs for RIS activities.

Closer cooperation, notably via the co-location centres, would ensure that local and regional authorities (notably from RIS-eligible countries) as well as innovation actors, are made aware of the opportunities to engage with the EIT Community, and, in turn, the EIT Community will learn of emerging potential synergies with national initiatives and engage with local actors. This could include awareness-raising events on the EIT and its KICs, matchmaking events and workshops to share best practices for nurturing **local innovation ecosystems**.

Policy exchanges could be strengthened in relation to respective policy initiatives and relevant EU-funded projects. An example of the former could be the Committee of the Regions opinions on heritage and culture and creativity. Another could be to promote together European values, identities and citizenship via education and culture at the regional and local levels.

The Commission will inform the CoR about selected **Creative Europe projects** with regions as partners or coordinators and encourage newly selected Creative Europe projects, including platforms, at the kick-off meetings, to get in touch with their representatives, as well as encourage Creative Europe Desks to involve the CoR in events.

The **Knowledge Exchange Platform** will promote new knowledge created through Horizon 2020 and its successor Horizon Europe programmes by increasing the take-up of R&I results and their use for evidence-based policymaking at local and regional level.

The **National Agencies** play an important role in the implementation of the programmes. Closer cooperation between these and the CoR (and/or its members) would be beneficial to obtain information about when calls are launched in different Member States and in order to assess how best to support applicants in their regions.

Table of Actions

Actions
<p>20. CoR and contact with National Agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving contacts with the National Agencies to find out when calls are launched in the MS to assess how best to support applicants in regions. • This could be particularly relevant for cooperation calls with all sectors (schools, VET, higher education, adult education, young people, sports) and flagship actions, such as European Universities and VET centres of excellence. Once DiscoverEU is integrated into the Erasmus programme, the CoR could be actively involved in promoting local and regional destinations. • The CoR could also promote synergies with ESIF funds at regional level. • Through its thematic seminars and peer-to-peer events, the Knowledge Exchange Platform would disseminate R&I Framework Programme information (WP priorities, calls for expressions of interest, etc.)
<p>21. EIT KIC on Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the CoR could be at the interface between local actors and the future KIC, first during the call phase, to ensure the broad dissemination of opportunities, but also during implementation of the KIC activities, to ensure that the innovations stemming from the KIC (notably those linked to virtual tours, sustainable cultural infrastructure, etc.) can benefit a large numbers of cities.

22. Co-Location centres, Local innovation ecosystems (widening countries)

- Closer cooperation, notably via the co-location centres, would ensure that local and regional authorities (notably from the Regional Innovation Scoreboard -eligible countries) as well as innovation actors, are made aware of the opportunities to engage with the EIT Community, and, in turn, the EIT Community will learn of emerging potential synergies with national initiatives as well as engage with local actors. This could include holding awareness-raising events on the EIT and its KICs, matchmaking events, workshops to share best practices for nurturing local innovation ecosystems, etc.

23. Strengthened policy exchanges

- Follow-up on CoR opinions on cultural heritage and culture and creativity.
- "Cultural Heritage in Action!" peer-learning project for cities and regions,
- Cultural and Creative Spaces and Cities peer-learning project for local cultural stakeholders & authorities around the idea of the commons
- FLIP pilot project for CCS (Finance, Learning, Innovation and Patenting is a Pilot project co-funded by the EU whose main objective is to support healthy and sustainable ecosystems for Cultural and Creative Industries)
- The OECD-EAC joint policy project on maximising the impact on culture for local development.

24. Memorandum of Understanding with the EIT

- In order to formalise (through a non-contractual agreement) the strong commitment of both parties to substantially increase their collaboration, the EIT could consider signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the CoR. This MoU would be tailor-made for the needs of the two institutions and would include concrete initiatives and actions to be implemented over the next few years.

25. Strengthening collaboration within Creative Europe and the R&I Framework Programmes

- The Commission would inform the CoR early on about selected Creative Europe projects with regions as partners or coordinators and encourage newly selected Creative Europe projects, including platforms, at the kick-off meetings, to get in touch with their representatives as well as encourage Creative Europe Desks to involve the CoR in events.
- The KEP would use new knowledge created through Horizon 2020 (and its successor, Horizon Europe) projects to increase uptake and impact on innovation at local and regional level.

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

The Horizon Europe programme and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) will continue encouraging synergies with European Structural and Investment Funds, particularly in the Cofund-actions and the Seal of Excellence -scheme. This includes collaboration via the

Horizon Europe programme, including Seals of Excellence and the European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme, which aims to create a more connected and efficient innovation ecosystem that supports the scaling-up of companies and which spurs innovation to address important challenges also at regional and local level in a sustainable way. The programme will encourage cooperation, networking, and the exchange of ideas and knowledge, developing open innovation processes in organisations, funding and skills among national, regional and local innovation ecosystems. **The CoR could act as a catalyst and facilitator to promote co-funded ecosystems** in order to increase the impact of EU projects in the regions.

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions are the most important EU Programme for the training, mobility and career development of researchers through the development of excellent international doctoral networks, among other things, and are as such a powerful link between the European Education Area and the European Research Area. The MSCA will keep offering EU regions opportunities to attract and retain talented researchers (including the return of nationals working abroad). Regions may support COFUND projects in subjects included in their Smart Specialisation Strategies and top-up the EU contribution with ESIF funds.

Table of Actions

Actions
<p>26. Horizon Europe synergies with ESIF, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the EIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of the CoR in the Seal of Excellence initiative through its promotion by CoR Members at regional level, and by taking part in the SoE "Community of Practice" established by the Commission that allows for exchanges of know-how and good practices. • The CoR could act as catalyst and facilitator to promote cofund -projects topping up the EU contribution with ESIF funds in a wide range of areas within Horizon Europe, notably in the area of co-funding projects, to connect innovation ecosystems as part of the 'Innovation Ecosystems' initiative of the Pillar III of Horizon Europe. • The MSCA and the R&I Framework Programmes will keep encouraging synergies with the ESIF, particularly in the cofund -action and support the Seal of Excellence scheme. Regions may support cofund-projects in topics included in their Smart Specialisation Strategies and top-up the EU contribution with ESIF funds. • The CoR could help to deploy and disseminate research results generated under Horizon Europe. (e.g. with the help of the new Horizon Results Platform). • Raise awareness among regional ERDF/ESF+ Managing Authorities on Horizon Europe priorities and actions when drafting Smart Specialisation Strategies and the cohesion policy programmes. In particular, provide information on thematic priorities identified in the Horizon Europe Strategic Planning process, as well as the missions and partnerships, as an excellent reference point for synergies. • Promote and disseminate in the regions the new and simplified opportunities for synergies between Horizon Europe and Cohesion Policy funds.

Monitoring and follow up

This joint Action Plan includes a process to ensure that the actions listed above continue to be relevant and that they are implemented in an impactful, efficient and timely way. The implementation of the actions is monitored twice a year by the concerned services of the Commission/CoR administration and will be reviewed in twice-yearly monitoring reports. An annual meeting of the Commissioner and the CoR President is set up, informed by the twice-yearly monitoring reports in the context of the SEDEC Committee meeting, to follow up on the progress achieved.

Brussels, 25 November 2020

Mariya Gabriel

European Commissioner for
Innovation, Research,
Culture, Education and
Youth

Apostolos Tzitzikostas

President of the
European Committee of the
Regions

Anne Karjalainen

Chair of the Commission for
Social Policy, Education,
Employment, Research and
Culture