



**European Committee
of the Regions**



Joint Action Plan for enhanced cooperation in research and innovation

Joint Action Plan for enhanced cooperation in research and innovation

between the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)
and the European Commission (EC),
Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD)
and the Joint Research Centre (JRC)



// Every European policy on research and innovation must mean concrete benefits for our citizens, no matter where they are living. Through the new Joint Action Plan and together with our partners in the Committee of Regions, we will make that happen."



Ekaterina Zaharieva
*European Commissioner for
Startups, Research and Innovation*



// Regions and cities connect the dots of local innovation with the European objectives of competitiveness, sustainability and resilience. They create the conditions to attract, develop and retain talents. An EU policy for research and innovation can only be efficient if strongly rooted in local research and economic ecosystems."

Kata Tüttö
*President of
the European Committee of the Regions*



// It is truly encouraging that the renewed Joint Action Plan between the European Committee of the Regions and the European Commission promises not only to deepen our inter-institutional cooperation, but to also place highly relevant research and innovation priorities—such as competitiveness, health, skills development and social cohesion—firmly on the wider EU agenda."

Heike Raab
*Chair of the CoR Commission
for Social Policy, Education, Employment,
Research and Culture*



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1.

INTRODUCTION



Research and innovation (R&I) are central drivers of the European Union's competitiveness, sustainability and strategic autonomy. Delivering on the Union's priorities – including the green and digital transitions, economic resilience and social cohesion – requires strong coordination across all levels of governance, and the effective mobilisation of regional and local innovation ecosystems.

The mission letter to the Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation reinstates the need to **reinforce Europe's scientific excellence and innovation capacity, deepening the European Research Area (ERA), and strengthening the link between research, innovation and competitiveness**. The mission letter implies decisive action to close the innovation divide, unlock the full potential of Europe's regions, and ensure that research and innovation deliver tangible benefits for citizens and businesses across all territories. The successful implementation of this mandate requires strong multi-level governance and close cooperation with regional and local authorities. Regions and cities play a pivotal role in building research and innovation capacity, implementing smart specialisation strategies, fostering innovation ecosystems and facilitating the growth of start-ups and scale-ups.

In its resolution on the priorities for 2025–2030, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) calls for **stronger cohesion, resilience and proximity** in order to build a fairer, more responsive and people-centred European Union.

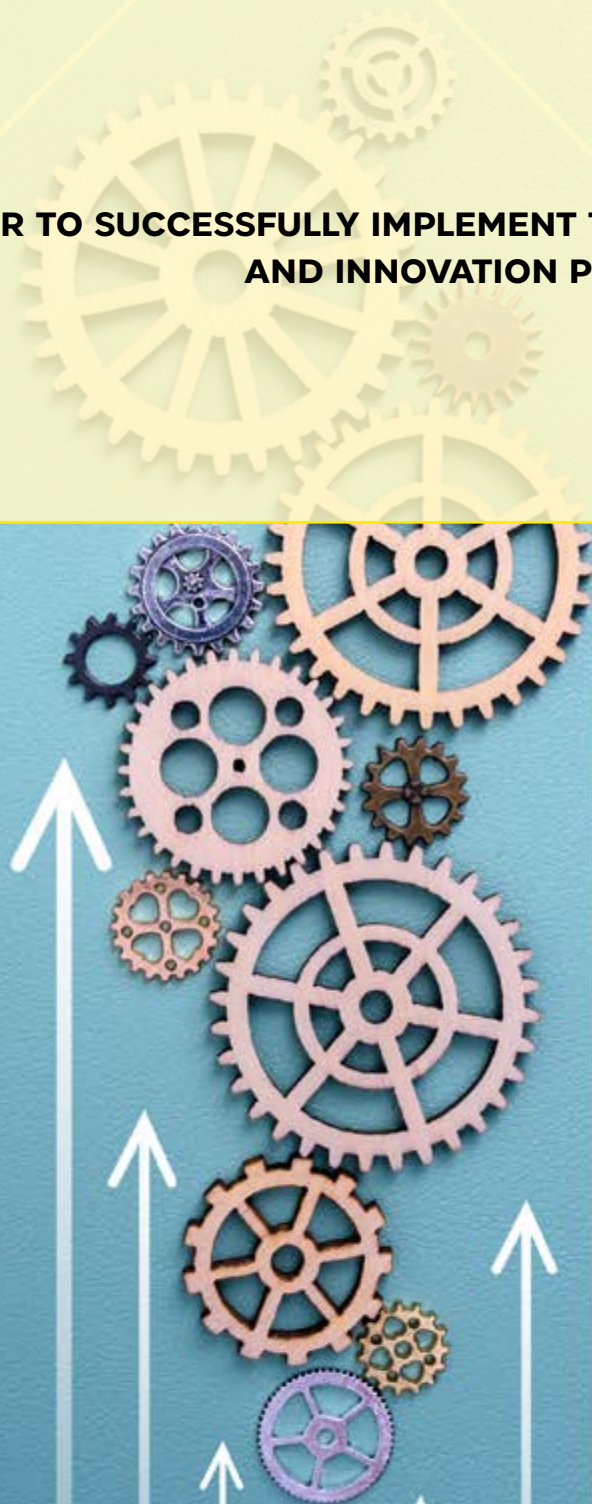
It is therefore essential that there be effective cooperation between the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the CoR, particularly the latter's Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC).

Building on the achievements of the previous Joint Action Plan on research and innovation (2020–2025), and in line with the revised [protocol on cooperation between the European Commission and the CoR](#) signed in 2024, this renewed action plan establishes **a structured framework for enhanced cooperation** between DG RTD, the JRC and the CoR. It aims to reinforce the regional dimension of EU R&I policy, support the Commission in delivering its key initiatives, strengthen multilevel governance and promote the mutual exchange of expertise, data and evidence. By fostering closer collaboration, the action plan seeks to enhance policy coherence, support territorial convergence in innovation performance and maximise the impact of research and innovation investments across the Union including the cohesion policy's research and innovation investments that enhance R&I capacity across the EU and strengthen regional innovation ecosystems, as well as in enlargement and neighbourhood countries.

The plan is aligned with the priorities set out in the Commission's strategic agenda, and its timeframe is limited to the current Commission's remaining term of office (2026–2029).

2.

WORKING TOGETHER TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENT THE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION POLICY AGENDA



To deliver effectively on the EU's research and innovation priorities, strong and well-functioning regional research and innovation ecosystems are indispensable. Only robust local and regional ecosystems can ensure the seamless translation of scientific excellence into market-ready solutions, foster collaboration between research, industry and public authorities, and create the conditions necessary to attract, develop and retain talent. Empowered regional ecosystems are essential for driving the green and digital transitions on the ground, ensuring that EU policy objectives are implemented coherently, inclusively and with cohesive territorial impact.

To support these objectives, the following **key priority areas** have been identified and are to be implemented through structural cooperation between DG RTD, the JRC and the CoR:

- 1. Building strong local and regional innovation ecosystems: implementing the European Research Area and supporting knowledge transfer and valorisation from concept research into innovation output, ensuring attraction and retention of talent.**
- 2. Facilitating the green and digital transition, supporting place-based innovation for sustainable and inclusive territorial transformation.**
- 3. Raising awareness and dissemination of funding opportunities and the results of framework programmes for R&I, creating synergies among funds and exchanging best practices (including simplification) in the fields of research and innovation.**
- 4. Supporting evidence-based policymaking in the regions, including territorial foresight and resilience.**

Rooted in these shared objectives, the partners commit to pursuing the actions in the Annex, presented as a non-exhaustive list. This framework offers flexibility and may be adjusted at any time to accommodate emerging needs and developments.

DG RTD and the JRC commit to supporting the effective implementation of this action plan by combining policy leadership with robust scientific evidence and territorial intelligence to strengthen evidence-based policymaking and to support regions in developing, implementing and monitoring place-based innovation strategies. Together, DG RTD and the JRC will promote structured dialogue and knowledge exchanges with the CoR to maximise the impact of EU research and innovation policies across all Union regions.

The CoR, particularly its SEDEC Commission, will contribute to the implementation of the below-listed actions by **mobilising its members and relevant political networks** to participate in the envisaged events and initiatives, propose regional and local perspectives for EU R&I priorities, and promote the uptake of innovation-driven approaches aligned with EU objectives. The CoR will further support implementation by facilitating political dialogue and multilevel governance, disseminating information on EU funding opportunities and initiatives, showcasing regional innovation success stories, sustaining capacity-building and technical assistance efforts on the ground, and providing examples from regions and cities to inform evidence-based policymaking and improve the territorial impact of EU research and innovation initiatives.

3.

JOINT ACTION PLAN MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP



This plan is intended to be a flexible way of cooperation and therefore allows for actions to be added or removed according to arising priorities and needs. Any update of the list of actions set out in the Annex can be done through a simple exchange of registered communication between the CoR's SEDEC Commission and DG RTD, which coordinates the Joint Action Plan on the Commission's side.

This cooperation is to be monitored by the concerned services of DG RTD, the JRC and the CoR. To ensure effective follow up of the Joint Action Plan, the partners may also organise periodic stocktaking exchanges on the implementation of these actions and on new emerging priorities. These entities will keep their stakeholders informed through their standard communication channels.

ANNEX – NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF ACTIONS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO PRIORITY AREAS¹

1. **Maintaining the Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP 2.0)**, which is a long-standing instrument for collaboration that provides for the organisation of two joint DG RTD-CoR seminars per year on research and innovation topics and possible peer-to-peer events hosted by CoR members.

The topics for these seminars will be agreed jointly between DG RTD and the CoR's SEDEC Commission, based on the interests of their members.

This action will contribute to all four priority areas.

2. **Ensuring the involvement of CoR representatives in designing and implementing the European Research Area.** CoR representatives will participate in the ERA Forum and relevant sub-groups as observers. CoR members are already actively engaged in the ERA Forum sub-group 'R&I and Cohesion Managing Authorities Network' (RIMA), and in the ERA's Action on "Accelerating R&I Investments for Europe's Industrial Transformation and Competitive Sustainability". The objective will be to ensure strong interinstitutional cooperation in shaping and implementing the future ERA policy agenda.

This action will contribute to priority area 1.

3. **Collaborating with Horizon Europe's five missions and related EU R&I flagship initiatives, bringing a regional/local perspective.** This collaboration will strengthen the territorial dimension of EU missions and help build networks of regional and local innovation ecosystems in mission-related activities. It will be structured independently for each mission and may involve regular meetings, joint events or invitations for CoR members to attend mission events.

For R&I flagship initiatives, the plan refers to examples such as the regional innovation valleys (RIVs), the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative (CCRI), the renewable energy and hydrogen valleys coordinated by DG RTD, and the 'Nuclear meets Regions' initiative coordinated by the JRC.

This action will contribute to priority areas 1, 2 and 3.

4. **Expanding the 'cooperation working arrangement (CWA)' under the 2Zero EU partnership.** This co-programmed European partnership accelerates the transition to a European carbon-neutral road transport system by 2050. The CWA is a non-binding document intended to boost cooperation between the EU partnerships and regional authorities, seeking to align regional activities under cohesion policy funds to implement the partnership's priorities and objectives.

This action will contribute to priority areas 1, 2 and 3.

5. **Implementing the cooperative, connected and automated mobility (CCAM) urban deployment roadmap**, and related initiatives building on it. The CCAM roadmap is a joint initiative of [POLIS](#) (the network of European cities and regions cooperating for innovative transport solutions) and the [CCAM partnership](#) developed within the framework of the [CCAMBassador project](#). This roadmap aims to define what it takes to move from research and pilots to large-scale CCAM deployment in cities and regions. DG RTD and the CoR will explore how local and regional representatives can be further involved in these activities, as well as in relevant projects launched under the regional innovation valley's umbrella.

This action will contribute to priority area 1.

¹ The proposed actions are foreseen to be funded under the existing Multiannual Financial Framework (2021–2027). However, their scope or objectives may need to be updated after the adoption of the next MFF, depending on the final legal framework. Any changes would be implemented following the procedure outlined under part 3 of the Joint Action Plan.

- 6. Strengthening cooperation on health research:** A more enhanced health research ecosystem can be achieved through regular dialogue with the CoR and its members, focusing on health and wellbeing at regional and local levels. In the field of public health, the regional and local perspective is key as health research often intersects with local management systems. Health research activities, including support to clinical trials, provide significant benefits to communities by fostering economic opportunities requiring skilled professionals, and facilitate earlier patient access to cutting-edge treatments. The cooperation could encompass different health research areas, such as clinical research on non-communicable diseases (e.g., cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes) or sharing of knowledge, including those produced by JRC.

This action will contribute to priority area 1.

- 7. Promoting opportunities for the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and exchanges of views with local and regional authorities.** In many Member States, regions are in charge of cultural policy and certain industry support issues, such as developing smart specialisation and cluster strategies. Over 120 smart specialisation strategies across 124 regions in 22 Member States include culture- and creativity-related priorities.

This action will contribute to priority areas 1 and 3.

- 8. Promoting the Knowledge Valorisation Platform run by DG RTD among CoR members and endorsing the Charter for Access to Research and Technology Infrastructures,** on which the CoR will be invited to provide feedback. A key element will be how regions and cities can gain better access to and benefit from such infrastructures. In addition, work will be carried out to promote the [JRC sites with openly accessible research infrastructure](#), and foster collaboration in these regions where such sites are hosted.

This action will contribute to priority areas 1 and 3.

- 9. Collaborating on territorial vulnerability and resilience evidence.** The CoR has consistently supported the Risk Data Hub's vulnerability framework by promoting it at high-level events, referencing it in official reports, and increasing its visibility through social media and online platforms. This ongoing partnership helps to promote essential communication products (such as story maps) and raises awareness of the Risk Data Hub and its tools and datasets that are designed to improve disaster preparedness at the sub-national level. This action will build on the ongoing cooperation with the CoR in developing and disseminating territorial evidence and analytics, supporting regional and local decision-making on disaster resilience and preparedness.

This action will contribute to priority area 4.

- 10. Providing support to territories through place-based innovation.** The JRC has long-standing research on [innovation for place-based transformation](#), which supports the goals of the digital and green transitions while ensuring EU competitiveness. The current dedicated EU preparatory action focuses on empowering territories by supporting policy practitioners in building capacities, designing, and implementing transformative approaches. This action is part of a broader research line that include support for developing local and regional innovation ecosystems, building synergies among a variety of actors and funds, fostering engagement in bottom-up action research initiatives, and enabling the co-creation of actionable knowledge tools.

This action will contribute to all priority areas, with a focus on priority area 1.

11. **Promoting the New European Bauhaus, strengthening local leadership for a just transition and resilience in the built environment**, by organising targeted events between the JRC and the CoR, including under the [‘innovation for place-based transformation’ preparatory action](#), which includes an experimentation journey dedicated to the New European Bauhaus. The CoR has been actively involved in this by participating in related events and seminars. The preparatory action includes a dedicated experimentation journey on the New European Bauhaus. Synergies should also be explored with the [‘Boost for Small Municipalities’](#) pilot project, which currently supports small local communities in implementing NEB initiatives.

This action will contribute to priority area 2.

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between the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission (EC),
Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC)

Brussels, 24 April 2026

Ekaterina Zaharieva

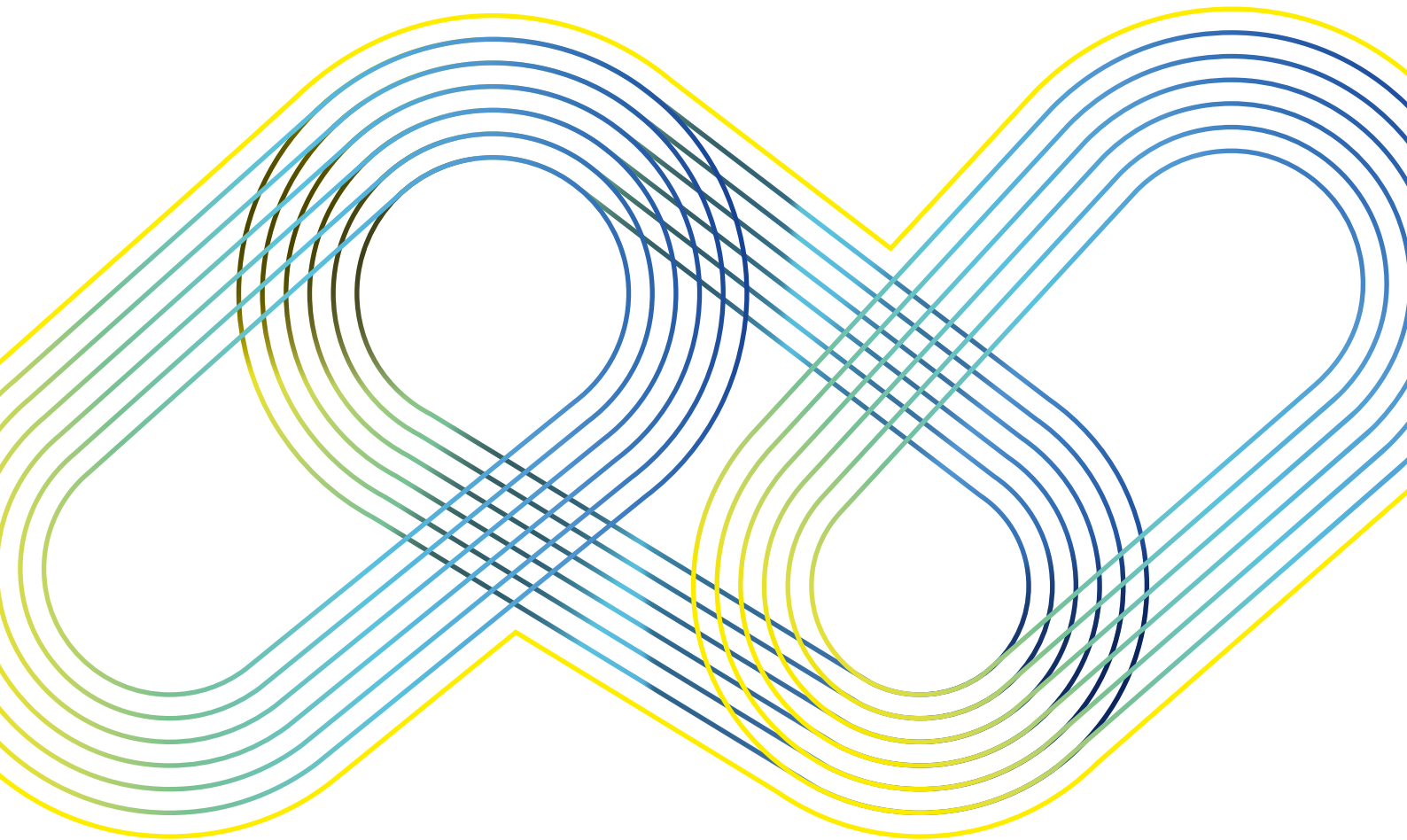
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**European Committee
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Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives such as regional presidents or city-mayors from all 27 Member States, representing over 446 million Europeans.

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