



**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 and ability to lead the green and digital transitions. The EU's regions and cities have an important role to play in addressing these major challenges. The 26 actions of the Joint Action Plan aim to increase the administrative and implementation capacity of the regions in order to leave no one behind, to reduce the innovation divide, and to build an interconnected innovation ecosystem in Europe. **The Joint Action Plan places the Committee of the Regions (CoR) at the centre of the strategic debates and gives new impetus to the collaboration between the CoR and the Commission.**

This Annual Monitoring Report consists of a core part presenting the highlights per each priority (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 of the Joint Action Plan can be found in the annex.

Achievements in 2022/Work in progress:

Since 2015, DG R&I is supporting regions in debating strategic issues, e.g., through joint CoR-EC seminars under the Knowledge Exchange Platform. The focus on this year's two events was on building synergies at policy and programme level for a successful green and digital transition and on youth involvement in R&I policies.

The CoR is an observer in the ERA Forum and as such contributes to put in place the actions of the ERA Policy Agenda. The CoR continues to be a precious partner in the implementation of the five European missions.

As experienced 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 our 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 EEA, such as the initiatives 'Pathways to School Success' and 'Education for environmental sustainability', as well as in the 2022 European Education Summit.

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 innovation camps. The remaining ones will take place in the first half of 2023.

Moreover, two key pillars of *Science meets Regions* were initiated in 2022: trainings on evidence-informed policymaking for (local and regional) policymakers and pairing schemes with scientists.

In what is perhaps the most important development from JRC side, the Partnerships for Regional Innovation (PRI) initiative gained full momentum in 2022. 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 process, although the NEB is not part of the Joint Action Plan. The JRC responded with a follow-up fiche to the CoR opinion on the NEB, adopted during the April 2022 plenary.

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

The debate with the regions on strategic issues continued in 2022. Under the umbrella of the Knowledge Exchange Platform, the longstanding cooperation between DG R&I and the CoR, two seminars have been organised in 2022. The first seminar “Building synergies for successful green and digital transitions – the way forward” took place on 22 June, held in the CoR premises. The event was focussed 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 seminar. It was ahead of the guidance note on ‘Synergies between ERDF programmes and Horizon Europe’ which was adopted on 6 July 2022.

The second KEP seminar took place during the European Week of Regions and Cities (11 October 2022) and focussed on **the involvement of youth in European R&I policies and the role that regions and cities are playing in this context.** Panellists from the Commission, the CoR and from youth organisations put emphasis on 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 second KEP seminar was followed by a KEP peer-to-peer event, organised by the SEDEC Chair and mayor of Gabrovo, Tanya Hristova. This event took place back-to-back with an **Innovation Camp on resilient cities, where, amongst other topics, youth entrepreneurship for a digital future was discussed.** In the context of the collaboration between the **Knowledge Exchange Platform and Science meets Regions**, the organisation of further **KEP peer-to-peer events** combined with **Innovation Camps** are foreseen. This was the first of its kind.

During the Research & Innovation Days 2022, the CoR Vice-President, and rapporteur for the opinion on the New European Innovation Agenda, 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 counted for 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 give suggestions for futures ones, the **Knowledge Exchange Platform web site** 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 are suggested for future KEP events. Through the interactive website, regional and local stakeholders have the possibility to interact with the Commission services on R&I matters relevant to their regions.

One of the flagship initiatives in the effort to **promote and spread 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 policymakers 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 in order to improve the quality of public policymaking.

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 tender was issued to this effect and the content will be elaborated in close consultation with the JRC and the CoR. The course will be delivered twice 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 outreach to local and regional authorities.

The Startup 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. The CoR President is expected to take part in the high-level opening session.

Another flagship initiative is the **European Researcher's Night**¹, funded by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), which successfully put the diversity of science and its impact on citizen's 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 allow direct interaction with pupils on current and future challenges.

Furthermore, the MSCA initiative Science is Wonderful! brings the world of science to primary and secondary schools all over Europe. Since 2020, the event has been organised online, thus increasing its reach to schools in different EU countries and regions. Scientists from all disciplines are ready to exchange online with teachers and pupils, to inspire them and show them the world of research. Schools from all Member States registered for the event, which allows them to exchange with researchers in all the EU's official, as well as minority and regional languages. The initiative must also be considered as a lighthouse placing MSCA female researchers as strong role models for women and girls in STEM in the spotlight. In 2021, 57% of the researchers involved in the event were women and mostly female researchers took part in the different webinars and sessions during the event, giving their testimonials about their career paths and motivations to become scientists, aiming to

inspire young students to pursue a career in science. The next edition of Science is Wonderful! will consist of both, a physical and a virtual component: a science fair that will invite 100 researchers from different European cities and regions to the Belgian capital to share their research with 5 000 youngsters in March 2023, and an online competition that gives teachers from across the EU a unique chance to team up with a MSCA scientist and co-create a learning resource together. The competition is open now and registrations will close on 1 December.

On 7 and 8 June 2022, the Commission and the European Research Executive Agency (REA) organised an MSCA Cluster Event on Ocean & Waters. The event brought together EU policymakers and excellent projects and researchers funded under the MSCA, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), and other parts of Horizon Europe, to explore how R&I is helping achieve the goals of the EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters. Discussions focused on topics such as the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems, eliminating pollution and the blue economy.

The event was followed by a citizens' science activity on 8 June. Researchers and EU policymakers met with 14-15-year-old students from Oostende for a hands-on experience to tackle plastic pollution through the ERA Plastic Pirates – Go Europe! initiative. Together, they sampled microplastics in Nieuwpoort (Flemish coast). The Plastic Pirates Initiative is currently being rolled out at European level with Horizon Europe support, contributing to the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters and the European Year of Youth.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

In the framework of a continued inter-institutional cooperation between the EC and CoR, several events were held successfully, raising a lot of interest, under the Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP) initiative. They took place linked to the European R&I Days and the European Week of Regions and Cities, in a digital format.

Bottom-up and networking initiatives such as the Seal of Excellence and widening measures have 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 has been 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* – 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 took 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 in the first half of the year. The first will be hosted in Brussels at the end of March and will focus on turning science into policy action to implement the European Green Deal at territorial 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 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. While the JRC has limited scope for taking on additional research work outside the remit of its Work Programme, JRC scientists are maximally 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 JRC. The official high-level launch took place on November 29 at CoR premises, with participation of several CoR members. JRC also continues to make expertise available to the CoR's commissions and rapporteurs in the run-up to opinions.

The JRC again made a significant contribution to the **CoR's annual barometer** in several fields: 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 organised at 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 trainings targeted specifically to local and regional policymakers, among others the participants in the *Science meets Regions* programme. The CC-DEMOS team also actively contributed to the conference "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. In a challenging period for EU's local and regional authorities, dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also by the relatively short period to submit their own strategic plans and continue the Green and Digital transformation, the wide expertise of JRC was actively sought by sub-national authorities.

The recent evolution of the field of Smart Specialisation and the design phase of the New European Bauhaus, including labelling, have solicited a keen interest on behalf of many regions and cities across Europe.

The new edition of Science meets Regions and first call to regions has attracted many individual participants and territorial networks to join this project.

The attempt to map educational inequalities during a pandemic context has proven to be challenging to realise, as data and local authorities' engagement was quite irregular and difficult to mobilise. Nevertheless, systematic efforts in this direction will be carried in the near future.

Finally, 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.

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, which is an important forum for strategic dialogue. Up until end of October 2022, 10 meetings of the ERA Forum have taken place. Representatives of the CoR participate to 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 State, is currently under discussion. Several of the actions are about to establish sub-groups 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. The CoR is likely to have a particular interest in the participation in the sub-group of Action 16 – Increase EU-wide access to excellence, co-chaired by DG RTD and DG REGIO.

One of the actions in the draft list 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 mapping and analysis of successful ecosystems, with the aim to better understand the challenges and identify success factors. A call for testing of different ERA Hubs concepts has been launched in Q1 2022 and kick-off is foreseen for Q1 2023. The pilot should support 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 would be put in place.

As of 2023 the ERA Forum will monitor the implementation of the actions and provide strategic advice. The creation of EEA Portal & ERA Portal, the attractive online entry points to policies and activities under the wider EEA umbrella, has been progressing 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. The Commission will present its suggestions on a concept for the platform to the ERA Forum at its meeting on 14 December 2022. This strand of work is crucial to achieve EAC's objective of including local and regional authorities in future initiatives.

Since September 2021, EU Missions have finished their intense preparatory stage and have entered a phase of full implementation. They prepared three Horizon Europe Missions' Work Programmes to ensure fast roll-out of the actions. They engaged with policy actors, citizens and stakeholders, 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 Economic and Social Committee endorsed the EU Missions and their objectives.

All five mission secretariats are in contact with the CoR. To name just a few examples of recent collaborations: 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 - Francesca Rizzo (Politecnico di Milano), participated in this event. Both contributions were focused on the key role of local and regional leaders in the future-proof recovery; 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 organised its First Mission Forum on 7 June 22 – in the CoR premises – where the first signatories of the Mission Charter were announced; iii) CoR member, Mr Gaetano Armao, Vice-president and regional minister of the Region of Sicily, was speaking at the session “Mission Charter and regional engagement”, during the EC high level event taking place on 14 June 2022 in Marseille; iv) 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 opening the Call for Pilots. On 23/11/22 Representative of the Cities Mission will participate 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 of “Towards a leading Europe in breakthrough innovation – unleashing the potential of regions”, two days of high-level plenary sessions and topical workshops were organised. CoR members participated as speakers and contributed to introduce the regional angle into the event.

Local and regional (CoR) perspective

The JAP has catalysed a series of key cooperation activities between DG R&I and the members of the CoR. Two notable examples are the ERA Forum for Transition and the implementation of European Missions, whereas the EC made significant headways to include local and regional authorities not only in the consultation process, but also in some of co-design and governance structures. Important synergies were built with other EC DGs and funding instruments, which could potentially have a significant impact on smart and innovative territorial investments.

As local and regional authorities play an important role in the implementation of **the European Education Area and the European Research Area**, the CoR expressed support of the Commission’s efforts to achieve the **European Education Area by 2025** through the adoption of an opinion in their March 2021 Plenary. The Commission published its Report on progress towards the achievement of the European Education Area in November 2022.

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**. End July 2022, Commissioner Gabriel and Emil Boc, the CoR’s Rapporteur on 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.

In support of the implementation of the **European Climate Pact** through innovative education capabilities -supported by the Erasmus+ programme-, the Joint Action Plan parties joined forces in the creation of the **Education for Climate Coalition**. This initiative aims to support the participation of education institutions within all European regions, to facilitate concrete climate-related actions by education institutions in the regions, as well as to allow for inter-regional cooperation. On 7-9 November 2022, the second edition of the Education for Climate Days took place, to 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. The first edition successfully took place on 25 November 2021 and aimed at the mobilisation of all the education community through existing initiatives to connect at regional, national and EU level.

In addition, the CoR's involvement in two Open Public Consultations (OPCs) for the initiatives “**Pathways to School Success**” and “**Education for environmental sustainability**” has been vital, and their results informed and improved the respective proposals for Council Recommendations. The proposal for the Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability was adopted by the Commission on 14 January 2022 and served as a base for the adoption of the Council Recommendation proposal under the **title ‘Learning for the green transition and sustainable development’** on 16 June 2022. On 30 June 2022, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on **Pathways to School Success**, which is currently being discussed at the Council, and is expected to be adopted in November 2022. The CoR has prepared an opinion on the Commission proposal.

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. The adoption of the relevant opinion in the CoR Plenary on 6 May 2021, 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, has been also very welcome, and a number of its elements have been included in the new Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027.

Cooperation in the field of **digital education** especially took place in the framework of the European Week of Regions and Cities 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 of this event, DG EAC and 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, is scheduled for adoption by the Commission in the first quarter of 2023.

Moreover, the **Connectivity4Schools** initiative which encourages Member States to uptake EU support for broadband, internet access and digital tools, raised interest in the CoR which recognises and supports its potential to provide high-speed connectivity in rural areas.

Preparatory work for the creation of a **Digital Education Hub** linking digital education initiatives and strategies with stakeholders is underway with cooperation amongst DG EAC, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and the EU STEM Coalition. Its outreach and engagement activities include the **Digital Education Hackathon**, which will return for its fourth edition in 2023, with an expanded and up-scaled version and a new implementation mode. The rebranded Digital Education Hackathon will draw on the lessons learned from the three first editions, aiming to also engage a greater variety of hosting organisations (e.g schools) and provide more targeted support for the winning teams. The fourth edition of the Digital Education Hackathon is expected to engage at least 2500 participants (50% women) over 55 local events and to ensure at least 75 registered hosting organisations. The previous edition took place in November 2021.

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 in other flagship initiatives, such as the European Week of Sport, #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, and enabling spaces for healthy lifestyles, for instance in the context of the New European Bauhaus. The **SHARE initiative** was presented to the SEDEC Commission on 23 June 2021 and 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” also 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**. The European Week of Sport will raise awareness of the importance of sport and physical activity, encouraging Europeans to embrace a healthy and active lifestyle in regions and cities across Europe. 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. The #BeActive campaign is officially launched on 23 June (International Olympic Day) and promotes the #BeActive message with a huge online reach among citizens all year long. The highlight of the campaign is the Week itself, which runs from 23 to 30 September.

Launched by Commissioner Gabriel during the 2021 European Week of Sport, the **HealthyLifeStyle4All** emerged as a follow-up to the Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle. The Commission's two-year campaign aims to link sport and active lifestyles with health, food and other related policies. HealthyLifestyle4All showcases the Commission's commitment to promoting healthy lifestyles for all, across generations and social groups, noting that everyone can benefit from activities that improve health and well-being. Until 2023, the HealthyLifestyle4All initiative will

continue to promote a broad outreach, uptake and ownership of healthy lifestyles across society involving the sport movements at national, European and international level; state authorities, cities & regions and civil society organisations of Member States, Erasmus+ programme countries, the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans countries. The 2022 EU Sport Forum, which took place in Lille in June 2022, has featured an Ideas Lab on HealthyLifeStyle4All that contributed to promote healthy lifestyles across generations.

The promotion of gender equality in sport has a dual benefit: sport can contribute to the overall promotion of gender equality, but it is also beneficial for the sport sector itself. Women can contribute to greater diversity in sport, combatting prevalent gender stereotypes. Sports organisations also benefit from better participation of women from an economic point of view, be it as athletes, coaches or leading members of organisations. In 2022, the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport published recommendations and an action plan to achieve gender equality in sport.

The **#BeInclusive EU sport awards** recognise sport organisations dedicated to people with fewer opportunities from ethnic minorities, refugees, people with disabilities, youth at risk, and other groups that face challenging social circumstances. In May 2022, a gala event took place, awarding three projects that were presented as examples of best practice in the field of inclusion and non-discrimination. Similarly, the #BeActive Awards Gala will take place in Brussels on 28 November 2022 and will unveil the winners for four different categories: #BeActive Education Award, #BeActive Workplace Award, #BeActive Local Hero Award and #BeActive Across Generation Award.

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. DG EAC is currently planning a second edition of the High-Level Webinar bringing together Commissioner Gabriel, mayors and regional representatives.

The **Commission's Expert Group on Cultural Heritage** is continuously followed by the CoR as an observer, with CoR representatives in attendance at 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 green transition of cities. Fostering the mutual exchange of expertise, the expert group has proven to be an important forum for exchange. EAC is looking forward to foster 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 explore ways on how to develop the action, thanks to the 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**, which is funded by the Creative Europe programme has entered its second phase and will run until 2023. This project aims to empower 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 secretariat continue 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 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 policy making in Europe. Furthermore, the Commission will issue a Report on the cultural dimension of sustainable development in EU actions in December 2022, which includes specific chapters developing 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 1st 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 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 are working on the details of the Enhanced Cooperation Agreement. On 21 June 2022, the draft Agreement was submitted to the SEDEC Coordinators for approval. This Enhanced Cooperation Agreement will translate cooperation opportunities into concrete activities that will allow strengthening 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 has been finalised and signed.

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

In the field of Youth, EAC appreciates the CoR opinion on Youth Employment Support under the **European Youth Guarantee**², adopted by the Plenary on 3 February 2021, recognising the important role of cities in regions in supporting youth both in their educational, vocational and professional training as well as socially.

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 include 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 EC / 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

² See <https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opid=CDR-3454-2020>.

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 is providing since Spring 2022 a map for meet-ups in EU cities. The European Year of Youth 2022 has also been the occasion to highlight activities aimed at young people in cities and regions across the EU, via the EU Youth Portal.

In 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 particular sustainable site, providing learning activities. 49 Meet-ups have already taken place in 2022. In addition, 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" has been published in May 2022. This second 'DiscoverEU Route' aims to encourage young people to embark on a cultural journey during their travel with DiscoverEU. The route highlights places of cultural interest, including in smaller cities. A 'Digital Route' is also under preparation. It will be published at the end of 2022, and will focus on cities that are doing particularly well with the digital transition. On 13 May 2022, DG EAC presented DiscoverEU 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 of 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. These can be either the communities where they reside, in the case of local initiatives - such as Solidarity Projects, or communities that host cross-border Volunteering Projects. By participating in the European Solidarity Corps, the young volunteers also gain essential personal, social and civic competences that will help them better cope in a rapidly changing world and will help them act as active citizens once they are back in their own communities after the completion of their engagement in the Corps. While the municipalities can clearly benefit from any and all 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. In 2020, 2828 local solidarity projects and 2691 volunteering projects were submitted. The National Agencies are implementing the actions of the European Solidarity Corps in individual participating countries, while also monitoring the representation of individual regions and carrying out specific outreach activities aimed at promoting a balanced geographical distribution of the programme's funding and activities. Specific measures are foreseen for facilitating 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 vocation to mainstream the gender equality perspective throughout its actions over the entire programming period, in line with the principles of the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25. The **Erasmus+ Programme Inclusion and Diversity Strategy** supports an

easier access to funding for a wider range of organisations, and to better reach out to more participants with fewer opportunities, in order to foster equality. The participation in the Erasmus programme by gender is well-balanced. In terms of supported activities, 9,243 projects funded under the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme, were reported to have addressed gender equality among other objectives. When it comes to the young people registered for the European Solidarity Corps, i.e. those wishing to engage in its activities, the aggregate data since 2018 shows a prevalence of young people declaring themselves to be female (60,5%).

EAC welcomes the existing exchanges on current calls within EU programmes such as the **ErasmusDays**, and invites the CoR members to maintain the contact with their respective Erasmus+ National Agency.

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.

In the run-up to 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 intervened at the second, fourth, fifth and sixth meeting with youth stakeholders and national coordinators taking place respectively on 17 December 2021, 29 March 2022, 2 June 2022 and 18 October 2022.

DG EAC colleagues participated in the European Week of Regions and Cities/EU Regions Week to present the European Year of Youth and two of its flagship initiatives: HealthyLifeStyle4All Youth Labs and DiscoverEU routes. This interactive session also included breakout rooms for the two initiatives, where the participants got to discuss about the sport legacy of the Year, and to brainstorm for a new sport route for DiscoverEU. According to a CoR representative, during the European Week of Regions and Cities, thanks to EYY, youth issues were much more present in the questions of the audience, in the events, and in the discussions throughout the conference.

The CoR reunited representatives from Youth Forums from all the Member States at the **LevelUp! Accelerating Change Festival** on 28-29 October. The event was organised by the European Youth Forum and took place in the European Parliament, with the participation of more than 1200 young people.

The CoR is also working on the legacy of the European Year of Youth, particularly thanks to the opinion paper “The future of EU youth policy”, addressing different fields of youth policy and concrete tools that would ensure the implementation of youth policy at the local, regional, national, and European levels.

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

In the context of enhancing synergies between Horizon European and Cohesion programme 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 their members. This should lead to an

increase in implementation of the Seal of Excellence in the regions and ultimately to more regions investing in Research and Innovation. The CoR is also invited to disseminate **the guidance on synergies** adopted on 6 July 2022. Joint seminars are foreseen to disseminate the guidance as widely as possible with the aim to inform regional and local authorities and stakeholders in regions and local communities. The CoR is also 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 in references to the opportunities and challenges of synergies at regional level.

The work programme calls 2022 for the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) were published between May and June. An info day was organised on 07/9/22 to share more details about five calls that are open until around mid-November 2022 (total budget ~30 Mil EUR). Target groups include national, regional or local authorities, and other players in the ecosystem. The tweet for the info day included the CoR. The Executive Agency EISMEA contacted the CoR communication team for further dissemination of the EIE WP calls.

The Partnership for Regional Innovation (PRI) pilot constitute an important element of the flagship 3 of New European Innovation Agenda. Under EIE WP 23-24 call for implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys, complementarity and synergies with the 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 aims specifically at accelerating and strengthening Innovation Ecosystems across Europe and at better connecting them in support of EU priorities.

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

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

As in 2021, the CoR hosted an online workshop during the Week of Regions and Cities, with close involvement of JRC. The workshop was titled '*The role of regions and cities in the New European Bauhaus*'. The JRC also participated in the SEDEC seminar "Cultural Diversity in the Mediterranean" (Palermo, 13 September 2022).

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

Conclusions:

The Joint Action Plan has structured cooperation and contributed to the significant increase of the bilateral cooperation between the Commission and the CoR. In addition, the JAP has also increased inter-service cooperation between Commission DGs in a number of key areas.

The Joint Action Plan is a fundamental element to maximise 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, in a complicated period characterised by the aftermaths of the COVID 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 and will continue to do so from the fruitful collaboration, involving supranational and local and regional actors.

Ultimately, the priority areas identified in the Joint Action Plan present an important compass for decision-makers and policy officers in both the EC and the CoR. The inbuilt flexibility of this list of actions allows 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). The need to quickly roll out actions across Europe through major EU programmes such as Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, the European Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Just Transition Fund, presented a big challenge for this joint activity.

A solid multilevel and inter-institutional partnership is a guarantee that such partnership could be carried out successfully in the near and medium-term future.

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

Cooperation with the CoR in implementing the five European Missions has intensified during 2022. The importance to have the CoR on board is acknowledged by the mission secretariats underlining that involving places in a bottom-up way in research and innovation provides a decisive contribution for making the green and digital transition a reality.

Considerable progress was made for the actions under 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 EC and the CoR stand to gain from mutual support.

DG EAC and the CoR are looking forward to fostering the stakeholders' engagement at European, local and regional level and to develop 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 frame the future relations between the EIT and the CoR.

An important milestone to continue with the great cooperation will be the organisation of the 5th European Education Summit on 1 December 2022, where several CoR members will participate in various high-level panels.

Milestones

Indicative milestones/events (2023)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024
KEP Thematic seminars: June/October 2023						X				X			
KEP Peer-to-peer event											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 foreseen end January 2023;	X												
Results of the 4 th Erasmus + call on the European Universities Initiative expected in summer 2023							X						
EIT Culture & Creativity Early-bird activities of the KIC start in 2023; “EIT Creative and Culture” 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 Week of Sport									X				