

Regional Innovation Ecosystems

Terms of Reference

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I. Objectives

The Topical Group on Regional Innovation Ecosystems strives to empower European University Alliances with a regional focus to act as key enablers of transformation, positioning them as central actors in strengthening Europe's competitiveness. Grounded in a variety of multi-stakeholder collaborations across Europe, the group focuses on fostering challenge-driven, inclusive innovation ecosystems aligned with regional Smart Specialization Strategies and EU priorities such as cohesion and a triple transition – green, digital and social.

Comprising 53 Alliances, this group operates along two strategic pillars:

1. **Knowledge Sharing within a Reflective Community of Practice:** The group sees itself as a collaborative platform where alliances exchange insights, best practices, and challenges through a structured process of mutual learning. Through case studies, webinars, and regional showcases, members will reflect critically on their roles, share co-creative engagement models, and document both successes and failures in regional innovation. With a focus on various practices of implementation, this reflective community supports capacity building across different types of regional contexts across Europe, ensuring the lessons are transferable and inclusive.
2. **Policy Recommendations and Advocacy for Visibility and Impact:** A second key goal of this Topical Group is to increase the visibility and strategic influence of EUAs with a regional focus as policy-relevant actors. The group will develop concrete outputs such as policy briefs, toolkits, and comparative analyses to demonstrate the added value of university alliances in advancing regional innovation. Recommendations will be designed to influence both regional and European policies by showcasing how collaborations between universities and stakeholders embracing the Quadruple Helix can reduce inequalities, retain talent, and address complex societal challenges. Special attention will be given to aligning research and education with regional needs while contributing to broader European goals and strategies.

The Topical Group aims to:

- Foster systems thinking to strengthen EUA impact on regional innovation.
- Promote policy alignment to position EUAs as central stakeholders in Smart Specialization and regional development.
- Empower alliance members to facilitate inclusive knowledge exchange across academia, civil society, and industry.
- Share knowledge on how to advance regional and international synergies through cross-border and interregional collaboration.
- Support talent development and retention aligned with entrepreneurial and technological needs.
- Establish collaborative innovation and policy-making models in European regions.
- Share comparative best practices to inspire effective regional strategies.

Timeline:

- **Short-term:** Mapping of alliances' regional activities, election of leadership, first round of thematic webinars.
- **Mid-term:** Development of toolkits, reflection paper, regional engagement case studies.
- **Long-term:** Policy briefs, final report, and dissemination of outputs through WP4.

Target Audience: Other EU Alliances, policymakers, regional authorities, European institutions, and stakeholders involved in Smart Specialization and innovation policy.

II. Background

European University Alliances are well-positioned to drive regionally rooted transformation, responding to the EU's emphasis on skills, resilience, and sustainability. The group responds to growing expectations that HEIs not only produce knowledge but actively shape and embed innovation in their regions. There were no prior informal groups. This is a new initiative to address policy and implementation gaps.

III. Work plan and working modalities

Work Plan

Work Plan Highlights:

- **Year 1:** Launch the group and define its goals, conduct a baseline mapping and first thematic webinars, case study collection.
- **Year 2:** Cross-regional collaboration, on-site workshop, reflection paper.
- **Year 3:** Tool and policy brief development, final dissemination.

Meeting Plan and Working Modalities

- Bi-monthly online meetings.
- Rotating leadership for thematic webinars.
- Documentation of failures and successes.
- Regular contributions to WP4.

Attributions of GCT and group members

Group Chairing Team:

- Set agendas, coordinate outputs, report to WP2.

Group members

- Active participation, content contributions, stakeholder engagement.

Considerations on Equality & Diversity in organisational modalities

- Rotate leadership roles.
- Inclusion of underrepresented regions, gender-balanced participation in leadership and facilitation.

Communication and dissemination plan of both the topical group activities and outputs

- Outputs will be shared via WP4 and collaboration with ERRIN.
- The group will use shared platforms and events for wide visibility.

IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination

Advocacy outputs to be aligned with WP3 and presented for endorsement.
Regular updates and deliverables coordinated with WP4.

Contributions to general policy positioning of FOREU4ALL on regional policies and Smart Specialization.

V. Members

Expected profile of topical group members:

- Representatives from European University Alliances.
- Invited stakeholders from civil society, industry, regional and national policymakers.
- Invited Experts in Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ funding schemes.

Number of participants per alliance:

- Each alliance nominates two members.

Members commit to ongoing contribution and reporting.