Actions and Strategies

Drawing from the knowledge exchange practices and insights gained through various work packages of the RInnoValleys project, significant results have been achieved to support the development of a Transnational Joint Action Plan for the participating countries. The actions outlined here are proposed based on ten pivotal strategies identified to enhance the access of the project's innovation ecosystems to the European Innovation Council (EIC). This section is intended for Public Consultation, allowing stakeholders to contribute their perspectives and insights on the proposed strategies and actions.

Key Challenges	Strategy
Networking	Involving companies and research institutions in collaborative projects to foster innovation and promote knowledge sharing.
	Forming strategic links based on value chains to support international expansion and maximise contributions to specific value chains.
Awareness raising	Establishing clusters and showcasing them at matchmaking events to enhance competitiveness for EIC funding.
	Engaging in collaborative efforts with the EIC, including organising events and introducing investment programs, to drive innovation within the business community.
Capacity building	Promoting regional/national support to encourage and assist EIC applicants, as well as facilitating their participation in EU funding programs.
	Addressing language barriers to enhance international connections and promote collaboration among ecosystem stakeholders.
	Overcoming budget constraints by exploring and utilising alternative funding sources.
Information sharing and process simplification	Streamlining application processes and providing clearer guidelines to reduce excessive bureaucracy.

	Prioritising initiatives around thematic areas to focus efforts and resources on specific areas of innovation and collaboration.
	Cultivating cooperation among ecosystem stakeholders to build a supportive and collaborative environment for EIC applicants.

1 Collaboration and Networking

1.1 Involving companies and research institutions in collaborative projects

Proposed Activities:

a) **Promote better connections between Academia and Enterprise through the development of new initiatives and implementation of best practices.**

- Involving companies and research institutions in collaborative projects to foster innovation and promote knowledge sharing.

- Leverage existing platforms, such as [Venture Alliances](#) to facilitate matchmaking between Academia and Entrepreneurs and build on them by establishing collaboration with existing platforms and databases (Euraxess, OneDeal).

- Create a common lab2market platform where training and resources on research commercialisation for researchers and TTOS can be developed.

b) **Encourage the formation of consortia to strengthen regional applications and increase their competitiveness.**

- Facilitate matchmaking events and networking opportunities to encourage collaboration and consortium formation among stakeholders. Policymakers need to incentivize collaboration and consortium formation by providing support for matchmaking events, fostering partnerships, and offering financial incentives.

- Collaboration with experienced partners for successful funding applications and leveraging local investment networks for additional support.

- Establish support mechanisms for forming and maintaining consortia, including providing resources for partner identification and relationship management.

- Establishing clear communication channels within consortia, fostering a culture of commitment and collaboration, and investing in networking opportunities.

- Dedicate support actors such as accelerators, incubators, and venture builders as contact points for consortium formation support.

c) **Local deep tech innovation radar to seek for new networking and innovation project opportunities.**

- Make a specific regional actor responsible to become a local deep tech innovation radar.

- The innovation radar will seek potential projects and cases, create a ranking of opportunities, and feed the cases into local calls or EU level calls.

- The ranking will categorise potential cases in three categories: world class, highly competent, and emerging.

1.2 Forming strategic links based on value chains

Proposed Activities:

a) **Promoting collaboration in smart specialisation sectors to strengthen innovation ecosystems and their interconnectedness.**

- S3 strategies tend to focus on areas where the region has added value and an existing ecosystem, making it more plausible to find strong EIC candidates within these sectors.

- Foster partnerships between academia, industry, and government to create a supportive environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, with a focus on existing Smart Specialization (S3) sectors in each region.

- Network and connect regions with other S3 regional and national stakeholders to explore synergies and collaborations within the sectors (possible sectors discussed included maritime, digital and health).

- Local investment networks and venture capital play a crucial role in supporting innovators to secure matching funds or additional support, providing pre-EIC capacity building, development, and funding, increasing chances of success.

- Practitioners should prioritise building strong regional innovation ecosystems, fostering cooperation among stakeholders and with other regions, and investing in key infrastructure and human resources.

- Synergies may be found with EU funding programmes such as the I3 instrument, which can fund synergistic activities to strengthen regional S3 ecosystems.

b) Facilitate matchmaking events, networking sessions, and brokerage events to connect regions with potential partners, investors, and experts.

- Promoting collaboration in common smart specialisation sectors to strengthen innovation ecosystems and their interconnectedness.

- Leverage regional/national support structures, promote local investment networks, and capitalise on regional advantages such as well-connected markets or specialised industry focuses.

- Organise social entrepreneurial events to promote investment readiness and entrepreneurial academic collaboration.

- Research on researcher turned entrepreneurs, barriers, and motivation for research commercialisation in researchers, to understand different types of profiles and barrier identification to improve matchmaking process.

c) Forming strategic links based on value chains to support international expansion and maximise contributions to specific value chains.

- Develop partnerships that align with globalisation efforts and provide essential support for value chain expansion.

- Create networks of organisations for strategic partnering, each contributing essential core capabilities to compete successfully in value chain networks.

- Engage with a community of manufacturing and supply chain experts to navigate internationalisation efforts.

d) Foster interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaborations.

- Involve stakeholders such as private entities in decision making when defining priorities, new project ideas, project contents and collaborative action.

2 Awareness building

Across all four countries, stakeholders emphasised challenges in accessing EIC funding due to limited awareness and visibility of programs.

2.1 Establishing and showcasing clusters

a) **Establishing clusters and showcasing them at matchmaking events to enhance competitiveness for EIC funding.**

- Identify relevant stakeholders, such as research institutions, industry players, and local authorities, who share common interests in areas like climate, energy, and mobility.

- Present a given cluster's achievements, goals, and collaboration opportunities during matchmaking events.

- Showcase relevant profiles during matchmaking events to attract potential partners and investors.

- Leverage digital platforms, social media, and dedicated websites to promote a cluster. Highlight success stories, ongoing projects, and innovative solutions developed within the cluster.

- Collaborate with cluster members to identify EIC funding opportunities aligned with the cluster's objectives. Prepare strong project proposals that demonstrate the cluster's added value, impact, and feasibility.

b) **Promote stronger involvement of local and regional media in promoting innovation culture and opportunities.**

- Elaborate case studies, profiles and success stories of ecosystem stakeholders, local researchers, innovators, and entrepreneurs in deep tech to increase coverage of deep tech innovation in local and regional media

- Recognition for innovation as well as new initiatives

c) **State of the ecosystem report and an ecosystem map with regular updates.**

- Define an actor (for each country/region), if not yet defined, to carry out state of the ecosystem analysis consisting of an ecosystem map, including stakeholders, regional and national funding instruments, key policies, recent developments, and success stories.

- The report will help local and international stakeholders to navigate the ecosystem and its potential opportunities.

- The report should be updated every two years.

d) **Forecasting and market intelligence.**

- Determine appropriate levels (country, region, university, clusters) to fund and carry out regular forecasting and market intelligence reports

2.2 Engaging in collaborative efforts with the EIC

Organise information sessions, workshops, and training programs to raise awareness about the EIC and its support mechanisms, with particular focus on EIC key criteria and complementary pathways to EIC (EEN, EIT Fast track, Plug in).

- Policy efforts should prioritise enhancing awareness of EIC funding opportunities through targeted campaigns, webinars, and educational initiatives.

- Launch multi-channel campaigns designed to raise awareness about EIC funding programs, instruments, and support services that are relevant to the specific needs of target regions.

- An online learning platform will also be developed, offering courses, tutorials, and resources on EIC funding opportunities. This platform will include interactive modules, quizzes, and a certification process upon course completion.

- Strategies to improve accessibility include increasing dissemination of information and providing detailed guidance for applicants, which is a shared concern among stakeholders.

- Engaging in collaborative efforts with the EIC, including organising events and introducing investment programs, to drive innovation within the business community.

- Detecting possible candidate companies in the early stages will allow us to accompany them and prepare them better when the time of application arrives.

a) **Broadcast EIC funding opportunities, success stories, best practices, and upcoming events.**

- Provide tailored content considering the needs of emerging innovation ecosystems and regions.

- Disseminate inspiring success stories to increase awareness of EIC and deep tech innovation.

- Enable collection of success stories in a dedicated online open access repository. A best practice repository will be offered online through RInnoValleys website to be used by EU regions.

b) **Ecosystem partner label for ecosystem supporters in the regions.**

- Establish a label system for key innovation stakeholders who will be responsible for activities promoting the action plan objectives, such as awareness building or being a network intermediary at the local level.

- The entities should pass a training program to ensure they are familiarised with key instruments, stakeholders etc.

- The labelled organisations are part of the regional innovation ecosystem working group locally.

- The entities with an ecosystem partner label will be added in an online catalogue, improving awareness of these actors to promote ecosystem development.

3 Capacity building

Capacity-building initiatives play a pivotal role in enhancing the skills and resources available within local communities. The proposed activities to enhance innovation capacity of regions with limited capacity can include providing training programs, workshops, mentorship opportunities, and access to resources such as incubators and accelerators.

3.1 Promoting support to encourage and assist EIC applicants

a) **Establish regional helpdesks to provide personalised assistance to regions in navigating the EIC ecosystem.**

- Offering regional/national support to encourage and assist EIC applicants, as well as facilitating their participation in EU funding programs. This support is highlighted as crucial in encouraging, selecting, and helping EIC applicants across all countries.

- Capacity building of innovation ecosystem stakeholders in EIC and other HE high TRL opportunities.

- Organise workshops face to face with national EIC NCPs and strengthen their connection, including through EEN.

b) **Develop online resources and toolkits to guide regions through the EIC application process and provide necessary support.**

- Materials can be available online on an open access basis. We will look for synergies with existing EIC NCP projects or design a hosting organisation.

c) **Build capacity to give pre-application assessment and guidance to key stakeholders.**

- Stakeholders should invest in capacity building to improve expertise in preparing EIC applications, focusing on business implications alongside technological/scientific aspects, and consortium formation.

- Best practices, such as (Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnológico Industrial-CDTI's EIC pre-assessment tool, can be replicated in other countries to facilitate the assessment of suitability of startups for the EIC.

d) Strengthen entrepreneurial capacity and commercialisation support to researchers.

- Replicate best practices in entrepreneurship training at all academic levels

- Develop capacities in Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) to provide hands on support to researchers for research commercialisation

- Develop different tiers of entrepreneurship skills training and services for different types of researcher stages, profiles (early, late career, researcher to entrepreneur, researcher to collaborator with private sector, IP aspects…)

- Create Web 3.0 platform using blockchain to secure research results and their IP for researchers, facilitating and de-risking the lab to market process

3.2 Addressing language barriers to enhance international connections

a) International learning and collaboration.

- Addressing language barriers to enhance international connections and promote collaboration among ecosystem stakeholders.

- Key stakeholders should have a strategic mandate to increase exchange and collaborate on joint projects.

- Coordination among local actors and Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), involving strong regional actors.

b) Stimulate Collaboration and Networking.

- RInnoValleys will organize regional innovation forums to facilitate networking, knowledge sharing, and collaboration between academia and industry. These forums will include panel discussions, pitch sessions, and networking events.

- Furthermore, inter-regional innovation networks will be established to connect innovators across regions. These networks will foster collaboration through online platforms, regular meetings, and joint projects.

c) International talent attraction

- Acting as a lobby to try to influence regulation for talent attraction, including faster and less bureaucratic process for work permits for international deep tech talent. An option would be to create special programmes to pilot new approaches of talent attraction in specific deep tech domains or diaspora targeted instruments.

3.3 Overcoming budget constraints by alternative funding

a) **Enhance Innovation Infrastructure.**

- Improving innovation capacity also requires enhancing access to incubators and accelerators to support startups and SMEs. Foster financial support or grants to increase the number of startups participating in these programs.

b) **Create a [funding opportunity tracker](#) with the calls that are relevant for capacity building of the key stakeholders.**

- Find synergies with broader objectives and leverage resources to strengthen key stakeholders' capacities and local innovation system interconnectedness, support, and funding capacity.

- Overcoming budget constraints by exploring and utilising alternative funding sources.

c) **Regional funding for capacity building**

- To further support innovation, regional funding programs will be created, connecting local innovators with national and EU funding sources. This will include initiatives such as seed funding, grants, and financial advisory services.

- To build a skilled workforce, stakeholders should implement STEM education programs in schools and universities. These programs will include workshops, coding boot camps, internships, and scholarships aimed at cultivating a new generation of innovators.

- Additionally, entrepreneurship training programs could be offered to equip individuals with the necessary skills to start and grow businesses. These programs will cover essential areas such as business planning, financial management, marketing, and legal aspects.

4 Information sharing and process simplification

4.1 Streamlining application processes and providing clearer guidelines

a) **Ensure transparency in the evaluation process and provide feedback to regions on their applications.**

- Carry out meta-analysis of national applications to give consolidated feedback on key improvement areas for EIC applicant companies.

- Follow up Widening Countries EIC study with new participatory process from end users and National Contact Points (NCPs) to ensure implementation of

targeted support measures, process streamlining and monitoring of progress and impact of measures in improving access to EIC in widening regions.

- Improve transparency of expert evaluator selection.

b) Streamlining application processes and providing clearer guidelines to reduce excessive bureaucracy.

- EIC should streamline application process with co-participation of end users and NCPs to ensure a relevant process, respectful of candidates' time.

- The application process should ensure to provide enough guidance to allow less entrepreneurially skilled companies to develop appropriate responses.

- Ideally key sections can be accompanied by a link to webinar videos where an expert explains what is expected.

- Introduce clear guidelines and templates to assist regions in preparing their applications. Namely, step by step guidance on what is expected and understood in the application forms is crucial to ensure more consistent understanding.

4.2 Prioritising initiatives around thematic areas

a) Diffuse EIC and related HE opportunities with Smart Specialisation clusters in each country.

- Prioritising initiatives around thematic areas to focus efforts and resources on specific areas of innovation and collaboration.

- Leverage existing S3 networks to diffuse EIC and related HE opportunities.

b) Streamlined and fast process for awarding co-funding in strategically important projects.

- Strategically important projects, considering the needs of a specific country or region, should be able to get confirmation of co-funding already at the application stage,

- Coordinated approach for seeking international support for local activities,

4.3 Cultivating cooperation among ecosystem stakeholders

a) Establish a mechanism for sharing knowledge and experiences among regions to facilitate mutual learning and collaboration.

- End users can submit feedback from their evaluation results and application process. This should allow to have consolidated feedback by evaluator, making it easier to pick up if there seems to be consistent bias.

- EIC NCPs, innovation ecosystem stakeholders and end users can access training material, programme information, masterclasses, and best practices on EIC.

b) Replicate good practice for diffusion (regular workshops, tailored diffusion…).

- Cultivating cooperation among ecosystem stakeholders to build a supportive and collaborative environment for EIC applicants.

- Create centralised information sources that can be used and adapted for training for different audiences.

- Create training course outlines, learning outcomes and accompanying tools (such as quizzes) to evaluate participants' knowledge.

c) Developing a Unified Regional Innovation Policy Framework.

- To address common challenges and promote best practices, Stakeholders should develop a standardized framework for regional innovation policies. This unified policy framework will include key components such as funding mechanisms, regulatory support, R&D incentives, and collaboration initiatives.