

Renewed Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP 2.0)

Work Plan 2024

The **Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP)** is an existing cooperation mechanism between the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission's DG for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), which was launched in 2015 with the main objective of presenting new solutions, innovative products and best practices in response to the numerous societal challenges facing local and regional authorities (LRAs) in Europe today.

Over the past few years, dozens of local and Brussels-based events were organized, and hundreds of regional decision makers, academic experts and stakeholders participated. Given the success of the KEP with its well-established methodology, the collaboration has been prolonged for the future programming period.

On 30/09/2020, the Commission adopted the Communication *A new ERA for research and innovation*. Under action 2.2 Improving Access to Excellence, the Communication states that "Strategic and coordinated support will also be offered to regions and cities building on successful initiatives such as the Knowledge Exchange Platform (together with the Committee of the Regions) and the Science meets Regions initiative. These will be upgraded to a strategic level ensuring an effective dialogue for setting priorities and promoting synergies between R&I instruments and education and training with adequate mobilization of cohesion policy funds."

The new KEP is fully aligned with and centered on the new ERA: The relaunched version aims at deepening its strategic approach (to become more policy-oriented and linked to what ERA means for regions and local actors) and broadening its scope (with more tools and collaboration actions). KEP 2.0 will promote exchanges of information on a practical and factual basis. A link to the resilience and recovery package will be ensured, in addition to the Commission's strategic agenda (Green Deal, digital strategy etc.).

This KEP 2.0 Work Plan is part of a wider Joint Action Plan set up under Commissioner Gabriel, defining the key collaboration actions between the three DGs (RTD, EAC, JRC) and the CoR. Because of its nature, KEP 2.0 will be a perfect platform to enable coordination with the initiatives of the Joint Action Plan promoted by the other partner DGs.

1. The renewed Knowledge Exchange Platform's (KEP 2.0) key objectives

KEP 2.0 aims at **deepening the cooperation**, becoming more strategic and at the same time **enlarging its scope**, covering R&I policy-related issues in full cooperation with relevant Commission services, and in particular with DG EAC and the JRC, with the purpose of tackling the current challenges and helping the European Union in its recovery process.

Through its well-known tools of regular policy events, held at central and local level, it will pursue the following objectives:

- Promote deeper and wider operational cooperation with the CoR, in close coordination with the EAC and JRC, but also with other DGs (REGIO, REFORM, EMPL etc.) through a strategic exchange and close collaboration in the framework of the renewed **European Research Area**, as well as its synergies with the European Educational Area;
- Assist CoR members and their key regional stakeholders to define their role and engage in the new European Research Area by becoming active drivers of change and innovation leaders in their multiple roles as political decision-makers and by paying particular attention to **the current Commission priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Recovery Package, the Green Deal and the Digital transition**;
- **Valorise new knowledge** created through Horizon 2020 and its successor Horizon Europe by increasing the take-up of R&I results and their use **for evidence-based policy-making** at local and regional level, fully exploiting **foresight analysis**;
- Promote the territorial dimension of the European Research Area (ERA), especially as regards transnational research infrastructures, the implementation of the R&I component of regional **Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3)** and the linking of **regional ecosystems in sustainable partnerships, notably through quadruple helix approaches** (e.g. responsible research and innovation);
- Provide a set of practical mechanisms and event opportunities for **outreach to regional innovation ecosystems and citizens** whenever a relevant major R&I event is organised, particularly in Member States: The active participation of CoR members and local authorities will be encouraged and promoted (e.g. associate regions to the **European Capital for Science and Innovation** policy initiative). The Commission will be present as much as possible in the local events, including by mobilising the relevant testimonials (project beneficiaries, key stakeholders etc.);
- Coordinate its activities with other complementary actions, such as **Science meets Regions**, or the **JRC Science for Policy Platform on Place-based innovation for Sustainability**. The KEP will support local actors and channel findings on local innovation barriers or early trade-off alerts to the EU and national policymaking.

2. **Priority intervention areas for KEP actions**

The collaboration will be developed around the **four strategic objectives** of the new European Research Area, identifying for each one the specific aspects/topics that are more relevant to regions and local actors, by responding to their needs and therefore engaging them more actively in the construction of the ERA.

-
- ➔ **Prioritising investments and reforms:** New targets have been set to raise national investment in R&I, support reforms and encourage higher participation in joint programmes, missions and partnerships, mobilising all type of funds, including Structural Funds and the new Recovery and Resilience Facility to contribute to the twin transition, as well as resilience and recovery. Local and regional actors are unavoidably affected by that, and can positively contribute to it: for instance, there is a **clear regional dimension of missions**, a role to play in mobilising different funds for the twin transition. Missions will certainly be one of the topics where the KEP will have a strong mobilisation role to play.
 - ➔ **Improving access to excellence:** As sharing of information on policies and R&I results and practices is at the core of KEP 2.0, it is by nature a tool to promote inclusiveness and enable easier access to excellence. Multi-level exchange with all involved stakeholders is key, and the Commission is ready to support the process through **regular dialogue** with Member States, involving all levels (including regional and local) and all relevant Commission departments. The KEP will raise awareness on all comprehensive horizontal measures **to close the "innovation gap" with regions/countries of a lower R&I performance**, including the new initiatives under the Widening programme of Horizon Europe, such as the Excellence hubs. In this context, it will promote excellent place-based, disruptive innovation and regional development, including through promoting a **structured cooperation among a quadruple helix of actors in the regional ecosystems** and stimulating cross-fertilisation, intra-regional and inter-regional connectivity and dissemination of good practices. Synergies with Structural Funds will be fundamental in this effort to ensure access to excellence across Europe. The KEP will continue to create opportunities for workable synergies with the **ESIF funds**; continue **support for the Smart Specialisation Strategies and all forms of synergies** (including the Seal of Excellence).
 - ➔ **Translating R&I results into economy:** The **EIC** and **InvestEU** are the ERA flagships in Horizon Europe, complemented through the ERA with the development of industrial roadmaps, a stronger focus on knowledge valorisation, ERA Hubs and a specific action on intellectual property. Specifically important for subnational actors is the support to **ERA Hubs** with a strong territorial dimension, to provide an incentive for advanced ecosystems to seek recognition as centres of reference and knowledge-transfer, and to help attract investments from European, national, regional and local level. Mapping of these centres will also rely on KEP actions. The KEP will cover the importance of the cultural and creative sectors for the local and regional economy, and for strengthening local, regional, national and European identities.
 - ➔ **Deepening the ERA:** KEP 2.0 will support R&I regional policy needs to make further progress on the promotion of adequate framework conditions and free circulation of knowledge such as through the ERA4U policy initiative. KEP 2.0 will contribute to deepening the ERA in Europe in close collaboration with regions and their stakeholders. This is about completing the single market for knowledge through making further progress on open science, infrastructures, careers of researchers, universities and gender equality. The KEP will be instrumental to promote full access and support to research infrastructures, encourage the talent-producing capacity of countries and regions as supported through upskilling and reskilling programmes, as well as attract talents through transnational networks such as EURAXESS, while fostering balanced brain circulation and access to a sustainable talent pipeline.

In a changing world, it is necessary to tap into a **Transformative R&I policy framework, through key features** such as citizen engagement and outreach. In this sense, KEP 2.0 will also contribute to the **Conference on the Future of Europe**. The KEP will favour closer cooperation within the **network of European Capitals of Culture**, capitalising on related business opportunities and strategic investments and promoting the EU's values to combat nationalism and extremism. CoR members could get targeted information about EU co-financing opportunities and policy support.

3. Key actions and instruments

For each of the above areas, a number of initiatives will be performed throughout the years:

3.1 Core actions: a set of well-structured and complementary policy events with a multiplier function

Building on successful experience, KEP 2.0 would continue the tradition of organising a number of high-level policy events, grouped around two major themes each year and taking place normally in spring and Autumn (EWRC/WIRE). They will be organised according to the different topics duly selected by the CoR and the Commission services, that are most relevant to the local and regional dimension.

Each set of these well-established events will help explain, engage and empower the regional/local policy makers and actors through: a) bringing the ERA's main concepts and messages closer to citizens and multiplying its outreach, b) giving the opportunity to regional and local actors to promote their R&I activities and competences in a specific ERA area and c) supporting an informed decision-making process at regional/local level on the opportunities offered at European level.

This set of targeted events at different levels will consist of:

- A. **Thematic seminars (two per year – each one focusing on one ERA priority area and on the most relevant actions/initiatives in it)**, major policy event bringing together CoR policy makers, Commission representatives and experts/stakeholders. These seminars will be held in Brussels.
- B. **Peer-to-peer events**, following on from the thematic seminars and organised voluntarily by CoR members in their region, promoting mutual learning. These peer-to-peer events take place at local/regional level, allowing CoR members to have an exchange with DG RTD and other EC experts and local stakeholders on a given policy challenge.
- C. **Showcasing events**, not necessarily hosted by CoR members, but getting the 'validation' and sponsorship of the KEP, and outlook discussions focusing on specific aspects of the European Research Area which are relevant to the audience.
- D. **Science meets Regions specific support to regions**: stronger collaboration between the Knowledge Exchange Platform and Science meets Regions. The Preparatory Action, submitted by a group of MEPs, in close dialogue with the JRC, has been the perfect instrument to provide scientific support to regional governments and initiatives based on evidence-informed policymaking.

- E. **Societal engagement:** In general, more innovative and digital-enhanced discussions/cooperation, taking advantage of the existing innovative and digital tools, such as competitions, hackathons, interactive infographics, gamification strategies etc.: stimulating fresh ways to connect citizens and other quadruple helix actors (LRAs, SMEs, research institutes and civil society). Citizen science and/or quadruple helix R&I actions on the basis of coalitions of knowledge actors on the ground, to address the local and regional challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals (including the clusters under HE), in order to translate them into local or regional actions.

Regular policy dialogues of the European Commissioner/Directors-General with CoR members (at least once a year). In order to take stock of the strategic cooperation, draw up factual papers from previous KEP actions for information at EU and local/regional level and expanding future KEP activities and its complementarity with other actions. The **policy dialogue between DG RTD-EAC-JRC and the CoR** will be strengthened and held regularly during the meetings of the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC).

Friends of the KEP

In order to increase the KEP's local outreach and draw from an even larger pool of expertise, it is envisaged that regional networks (such as The European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN) and other subnational representatives) will be granted a status of Friends of the KEP. As such, they will be invited to major events (possibly as speakers) but will also ensure full mobilization of their constituencies at local level, and be associated with the project wherever feasible.

In addition, the **Horizon Europe Network and relevant task forces** of more than 250 Cities Network partners in Smart and Sustainable Cities demonstration projects will be integrated as Friends of the KEP. These task forces support the exchange of knowledge and best practices platforms to innovate cities.

4. Interaction with institutional processes

Inter-institutional relations are subject to the inter-institutional agreement between the Commission and the CoR (2012/C 102/02), which covers the consultative works of the CoR such as opinions, resolutions and reports related mainly to the CWP files.

In this context, the Commission will continue collaboration with the CoR and ensure exchange of information and presence of the Commission representatives in relevant meetings, including the participation of the Commissioner in the CoR plenary sessions on the occasion of the adoption of the opinions with an R&I component.

The main partner for DG R&I is the SEDEC commission, and it is essential that we keep building on our fruitful collaboration. Ensuring proper follow-up to the opinions adopted by the Committee is also an important part of our cooperation.

In this inter-institutional arena, the KEP is a very important tool that can support the follow-up of initiatives stemming from the consultative works of the CoR and build extensive collaboration between the CoR and Commission services in the field of R&I. This is now more important than ever in order to support the green and digital transformation and Europe's recovery.

5. Communication strategy

Bearing in mind the possibility that such an initiative is to be considered an inter-institutional activity, it is important that it is communicated properly, engaging communication departments when relevant, to reach out to local and regional authorities and to profile the key role of innovation eco-systems at local and regional level.

6. Annual Timetable 2024 (times approximate, tbc) for the planned activities

Indicative timetable	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Thematic seminars (TS) in Brussels (two per year, one during the European Week of Regions and Cities)					x					x		
Peer-to-peer events (P2P) in the regions (max. four per year, subject to availability of CoR members and regions willing to organise them)						x					x	
Showcasing events (SE) as agreed with partners, times and number subject to mutual agreement and budget constraints (allocated flexibly during the year depending on availability).												