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| Logo of the European Commission, 12 yellow stars on a blue background arranged in a circle and framed by two light grey graphic elements representing the Berlaymont building, which is the headquarter of the European Commission. | EUROPEAN COMMISSION  DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR COMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS, CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGY  Policy Strategy and Outreach  **Research Strategy and Programme Coordination** |

Brussels

CNECT.D.1/WVDV

Note for the attention of HE Cluster 4 Digital and DEP PC delegates

Subject: CNECT Synergy Brief – Regional Innovation Valleys for digital technologies

CNECT Synergy Briefs highlight a specific opportunity for programme synergies in the digital area.

**Context**

This note describes possible **synergies in the digital domain** (HE, DEP) with calls for proposals under the call of HORIZON-EIE-2023-CONNECT-03-01: Implementing co-funded action plans for connected **regional innovation valleys**, under the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) Work Programme 2023-2024 and the two strand 1 and strand 2a calls[[1]](#footnote-1), published in 2023 under the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument.

Both these calls aim to contribute to **foster connected regional deep-tech innovation valleys across the EU**, a flagship action of the New European Innovation Agenda, by identifying up to 100 regions across the EU as Regional Innovation Valleys. Basically, Regional Innovation Valleys group regions spanning different member states that jointly want to develop strength in a selected thematic/technological area, including **deep tech, linked to key EU priorities**. The New European Innovation Agenda lists the 5 thematic areas (‘burning challenges’), of which ‘**Mastering the Digital Transformation (including cybersecurity)**’ is one.

**About the EIE and I3 calls**

While the principle of **interregional cooperation** is common to both calls, the Horizon topic aims to combine less and well-performing innovation regions (as per the Regional or National Innovation Scoreboard), while the I3 Instrument has a clear cohesion objective (as per Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060). There are also some differences in eligible partners, ranging from authorities (for EIE) to quadruple helix actors (in I3), which includes authorities as well.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The calls are currently open and close on 17 October. The budget is **EUR 60 million (HE) and EUR 62 million (I3)**. A later call has an indicative budget of EUR 48 million (not announced yet). The current EIE call aims at 6 projects with a funding of EUR 8-12 million each (3-5 years). I3 projects are 18-36 months, EUR 2-10 million funding.

Both use Grants with an FSTP component. For EIE, the interregional projects (at least 3 per grant) have to absorb at least 50% of the action plan’s total budget. The maximum amount of FSTP to be granted to an **individual third party is EUR 600.000** (50% funding rate). For the I3 Instrument, the funding rate for financial support to third parties is **up to 100%** of the eligible costs, 70% for the other cost categories.[[3]](#footnote-3)

For illustration, an EIE action under this call consists of a CSA and an IA with action plans along the following lines: Market uptake of research, Support companies in scaling up their ideas, deploying and demonstrating deep technologies in real world environments and with end users, Access to cross border infrastructure and expertise, Exchange of staff, training and skills development, Developing standards and regulations through sandboxes and test beds (CSA component); and 3-4 specific collaborations on the specific theme (IA component).

The I3 actions have a strong investment angle: they aim at scaling-up of mature innovation to bring new solutions on the market supporting the twin transition, and bringing financial support for joint interregional innovation projects to trigger direct investment in companies.

**The opportunity**

1. Thematic synergies: The digital transformation (including cybersecurity) being one of the 5 topics, with a focus on deep-tech innovation, many digital technologies are in scope: Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Worlds, Quantum, Photonics, neuromorphic computing, digital twins, cybersecurity, digital commons, and so on.
2. Downstream synergies: the Regional Innovation Valleys can bring funding to support emerging European eco-system and emerging value chains in some of those technologies that have reached sufficient level of maturity and regional footprint through Horizon Europe.
3. Parallel synergies (non-financial): in principle these projects could supplement Digital Innovation Hubs with an interregional cooperation dimension, bringing in other types of activities. They could also be envisaged as small scale collaboration platforms in view of creating critical mass for future larger initiatives (e.g. EDIC).
4. Parallel synergies (investments): the actions under I3 aim to mobilize investments in companies that could contribute directly to the Digital Decade Objectives. Under EIE, some of the actions, could directly contribute to reaching targets in terms of take-up or skills, for the specific thematic areas addressed.
5. Cohesion synergies: the kind of synergies between regional, place-based eco-systems across Europe are not explicitly addressed through our main calls in HE or DEP. These actions can help specifically to boost participation of underrepresented countries in future calls.

**Useful links and contacts**

* [Specific information on this action](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda/new-european-innovation-agenda-roadmap/flagship-3-accelerating-and-strengthening-innovation-european-innovation-ecosystems-across-eu-and_en), including links to the call (closes 17 October 2023) and guidance documents[[4]](#footnote-4). You also find there a call for expression of interest to become a Regional Innovation Valley[[5]](#footnote-5) (closes 18 September 2023). This is not mandatory but can help to find like-minded regions.
* Contact for EIE call Panagiotis SEVDALIS, Policy Officer, RTD.A.5, Innovation Policy & Access to Finance
* Contact for I3 call Denisa PERRIN, Head of Unit, EISMEA.I.01, EU and place-based Innovation Ecosystems

Walter Van de Velde  
Foresight and Synergies

c.c.: Andreas GEISS, Head of Unit

1. Financial and advisory support for interregional innovation investments projects along existing (strand 1) or new (strand 2a) EU value-chains. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I3 requires a link with Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) as Cohesion Policy enabling condition for ERDF expenditure in R&I. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Disclaimer: please check the conditions for the specific calls on the Participant Portal. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda/new-european-innovation-agenda-roadmap/flagship-3-accelerating-and-strengthening-innovation-european-innovation-ecosystems-across-eu-and_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/Regional_Innovation_Valleys> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)