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Regional Innovation Valleys (European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme Call and Call for Expression of Interest) Gap Analysis Report

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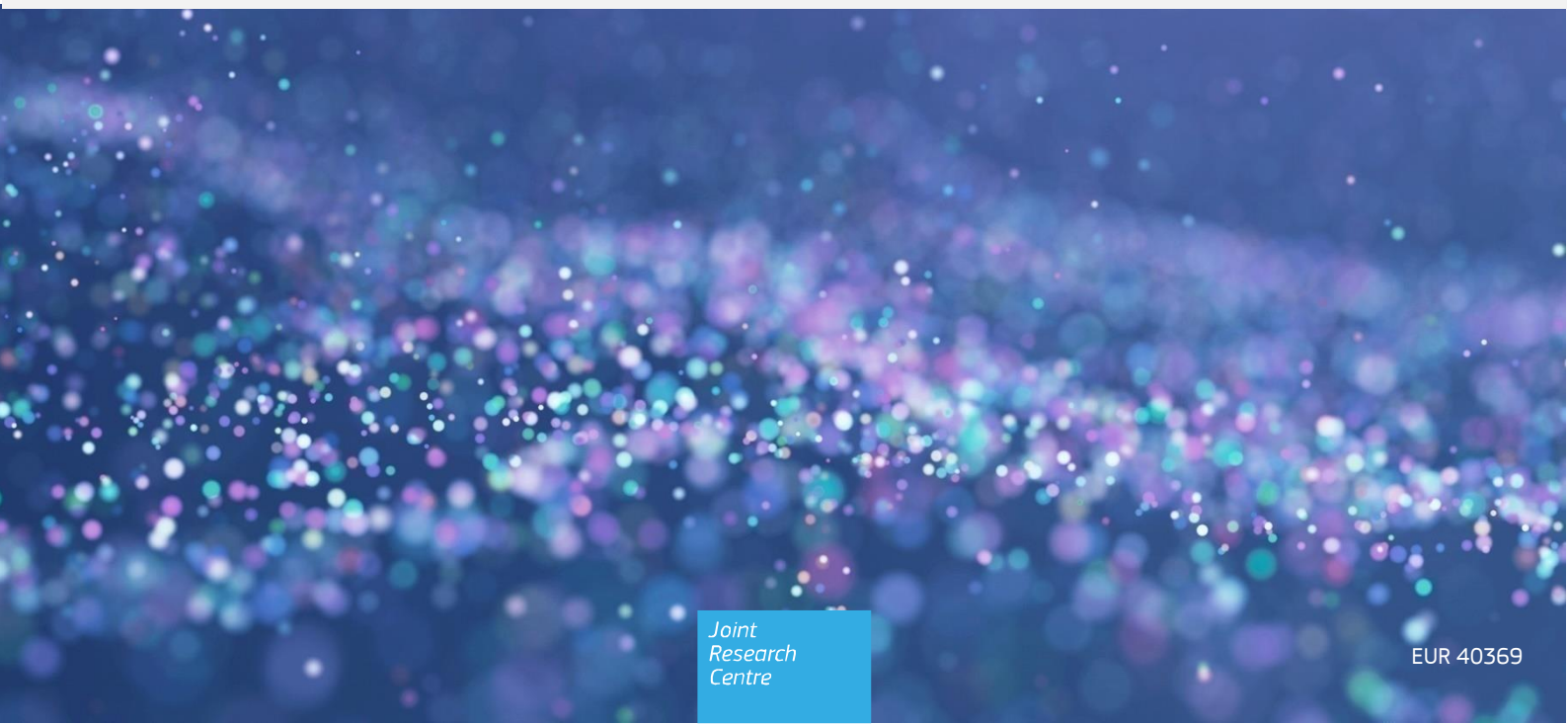

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Contents

Abstract

The Regional Innovation Valleys (RIV) initiative is a flagship action under the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA), designed to strengthen innovation ecosystems across the European Union by fostering interregional collaboration and accelerating the deployment of innovation. The initiative supports partnerships between regions with varying levels of innovation performance to address key EU challenges such as energy resilience, food security, digital transformation, healthcare, and circularity.

A total of 146 regions have been designated as RIVs through three mechanisms: a Call for Expression of Interest (CEI), the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) and the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3). The political commitment for the initiative totals €170 million, with initial funding of €116 million distributed through EIE and I3 calls.

This Gap Analysis aims to (i) identify the motivations and obstacles influencing regional participation in RIV calls, particularly CEI and EIE; and (ii) provide evidence-based recommendations to enhance future calls and stimulate more effective interregional collaboration.

To address these objectives, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data from 30 regions (via interviews and focus groups) with survey responses from 89 regions across the EU and Horizon Europe Associated Countries. The analysis revealed four critical areas influencing regional participation. These refer to co-funding requirements, collaboration patterns, the RIV label and thematic focus areas. Based on these findings, the report proposes several policy recommendations, including simplifying co-funding mechanisms, enhancing matchmaking and capacity-building efforts, providing clearer guidance on the RIV label's value, and improving alignment and continuity of thematic areas. By addressing these gaps, the RIV initiative can more effectively fulfil its dual mission of boosting innovation and reducing regional disparities across Europe.

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Executive Summary

The *Regional Innovation Valleys (RIV)* initiative is the flagship action under **Pillar 3** of the *New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA)*. It seeks to strengthen innovation ecosystems across Europe by accelerating the development and deployment of innovation, especially in deep tech. Central to its mission is fostering collaboration between more and less innovative regions to address Europe's most pressing challenges — namely, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, increasing global food security, mastering the digital transformation (including cybersecurity), improving healthcare, and achieving circularity.

By promoting interregional partnerships, the RIV initiative encourages knowledge exchange, technology diffusion, and the creation of cross-regional value chains. It supports the strategic alignment of regional and EU-level innovation policies, contributing to the goals of *Cohesion Policy* and *Horizon Europe*, and reinforcing Europe's global competitiveness.

In total, 146 regions have been labelled as Regional Innovation Valleys via three distinct avenues:

- 77 regions through the *Call for Expression of Interest (CEI)*, evaluated by independent experts (non-EU funded);
- 26 regions through the *European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)* call under Horizon Europe;
- 43 regions by endorsing a successful applicant under the *Interregional Innovation Investments (I3)* Instrument of the ERDF.

The NEIA earmarked **€170 million** for this initiative. The first projects have received **€116 million** — including **€54 million** under EIE (with matching co-funding from public and private sources) and **€62 million** under I3.

Purpose and Approach

This *Gap Analysis* seeks to:

1. Understand the motivations and obstacles regions face in applying to RIV-related calls, particularly CEI and EIE;
2. Offer evidence-based recommendations to improve the attractiveness of future calls and stimulate deeper regional collaboration.

Given the diversity of regions across Europe, the study applies a **mixed-methods approach**, combining qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups with quantitative data from a pan-European survey. This enables both in-depth understanding and broader generalizability.

Key Findings

The analysis identified four interlinked areas that influence regional participation in the RIV initiative:

1. **Co-funding Requirements**

   The 50% co-funding threshold was flagged as a significant barrier, especially for financially constrained regions. A lack of clarity on how to combine different EU funding sources was also identified as a significant bottleneck.

➤ *Recommendations:* Adapt co-funding rules to financial capacity of regions, provide specific and regular information to NCP managing authorities, and foster better communication between stakeholders.

2. **Collaboration Patterns**

   While many regions have access to networks, challenges persist in forming consortia with regions of very different innovation capacities, particularly within short application timelines.

   ➤ *Recommendations:* Underline the long-term perspective and integration of regional strategies through the RIV, further insist on comparative advantages of heterogeneous regions; Include calls that focus on mission-based efforts and build on S3 priorities; Leverage existing networks and allow for longer preparation periods.

3. **The RIV Label**

   Although the label is widely seen as a tool for enhancing visibility and collaboration, its strategic value remains unclear to many.

   ➤ *Recommendations:* Provide clearer guidance on leveraging the label for funding and strategic alignment; promote it as a flexible instrument aligned with broader S3 strategies.

4. **Scope of Thematic Focus Areas**

   Some thematic areas were viewed as misaligned with regional priorities, either too broad or too narrow. Regions also voiced concern over shifting priorities across calls.

   ➤ *Recommendations:* Strengthen the links between thematic areas and smart specialization strategies.

Conclusion

The findings highlight critical areas for improvement in the design and implementation of future RIV calls. Addressing co-funding barriers, enhancing collaboration mechanisms, clarifying the value of the RIV label, and improving thematic alignment are essential to make the initiative more inclusive and effective. Strengthening these elements will help the RIV initiative deliver on its dual ambition: boosting innovation and reducing disparities across Europe's regions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background on the Regional Innovation Valleys (RIV) Initiative

The Regional Innovation Valleys (RIV) initiative is the key action under Flagship 3 of the New European Innovation Agenda, which aims to promote innovation ecosystems and to tackle the innovation divide across the EU, by accelerating the development and deployment of innovation, including deep tech innovation. The initiative aims to bring together less and more innovative regions with a view to addressing the most burning challenges facing the EU, namely reducing the reliance on fossil fuels, increasing global food security, mastering the digital transformation (including cybersecurity), improving healthcare and achieving circularity.

In this manner, the initiative seeks to support regions in developing and scaling innovative solutions to shared key challenges. By encouraging partnerships between regions with strong innovation capacity and those lagging behind, the RIV initiative promotes knowledge exchange, technology diffusion, and the creation of cross-regional value chains. It is aimed at bridging innovation gaps, supporting inclusive growth, and advancing Europe's global competitiveness.

A total of 146 regions were labelled as Regional Innovation Valleys. They are committed to enhance the coordination and directionality of their R&I investment and policies at regional level, providing an example of policy and funding alignment between Horizon Europe and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), between regions and between the EU and its Member States, around EU strategic priorities.

There were three avenues to which a region could apply to become a RIV, namely:

- through the evaluation of independent experts under a call for expression of interest (CEI), not funded by the EU budget – where 77 regions were successful;
- as a beneficiary of the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) RIVs call under Horizon Europe – where 26 were successful;
- as a region endorsing a beneficiary of a RIV call under the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) Instrument of ERDF – where 43 were successful.

With an overall political commitment of €170 million set out in the NEIA, the first projects have received €116 million, with nearly €54 million from the EIE (mobilising the same amount as co-funding from other public and private sources) and over €62 million from the I3 Instrument.

Specifically, the EIE-supported RIVs are well positioned to strengthen place-based innovation ecosystems through connecting innovation stakeholders and regional authorities around joint innovation agendas and specific interregional innovation projects. More concretely, EIE focuses on regional aspects of innovation targeting national and regional innovation authorities with RIV action of a 3-to-5 years duration. Participation had to be of at least 5 national or regional authorities, coming from at least 5 different Member States or Associated Countries comprising of 2 moderate/emerging innovators and 1 strong/innovation leader.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The goals of the study are twofold. First, to better understand regions' overall motivations to collaborate and, in particular, the motivations and obstacles for participating in the calls for

expression of interest (CEI) and EIE calls launched in the framework of the RIV action. Second, to use these insights to identify gaps left by previous CEI and EIE calls and derive recommendations for future actions in order to enhance their attractiveness for applicants and increase interest in regional innovation collaboration across Europe. Since the reasons for participation to the calls are expected to be heterogeneous across European regions, the analysis integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, aiming for nuanced insights that reveal regions' decision processes while acknowledging that regions may differ in their motivations to apply and in terms of the challenges they encounter.

The study is structured as follows. Following this introduction, section 2 presents the methodology and study design focusing on a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. It also details the sample of regions and respondents analysed and presents the analytical framework of the study. Section 3 focuses on the analysis of the key areas of concern identified. Section 4 presents the main policy recommendations and possible future directions for the EIE calls. Following the main content of the report, Annex 1 (removed from this version due to anonymity promised to the selected regions), Annex 2 provides the questions that guided the qualitative interviews, Annex 3 the questions included in the thematic focus groups and Annex 4 the content of the quantitative survey.

2. Methodology and Study Design

2.1. Mixed-Methods Approach

The analysis follows a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative approaches (focus groups, interviews, case studies) provide contextualized insights into regions' motivations and decisions and are aimed at revealing mechanisms and providing rich narratives. The survey adds breadth and representativeness, enabling validation of themes and capturing variations across a larger set of regions. Together, these methods offer a balanced and comprehensive analysis, combining depth and generalizability to understand both why and how regions respond (or fail to respond) to the Regional Innovation Valley initiative and specifically to the related EIE calls and the call for expression of interest.

Table 1 provides an overview of the role of the different approaches, joint with the number of regions that was covered as well as the heterogeneity in terms of innovation performance (based on Regional Innovation Scoreboard, RIS), the type of call(s) - (Call for Expression of Interest, CEI, or the European Innovation Ecosystems, EIE) the regions responded to (if any) and whether unsuccessful applicants were included.

Table 1: Mixed-Methods Approach

Method	Role in the analysis	Nr of regions	RIS type (L, S, M, E)[(1)]	RIV calls
Focus groups (2)	- Provide a collective understanding of shared challenges, motivations, and barriers to participation. - Facilitate discussions that reveal contrasts between regions, uncovering emergent themes. - Help identify key factors for further exploration in the other methods, esp. the survey.	17	All	CEI, EIE
Interviews (14)	- Offer more detailed insights into the unique experiences of individual regions. - Allow for further probing of issues raised in the focus groups. - Capture context-specific information that might not emerge in group settings.	13	All	CEI, EIE, NA[(*)]
Case studies (5)	- Provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing participation in using a contextualized approach. - Illustrate practical examples and lessons that highlight diverse regional experiences.	5	L, S, M	CEI, EIE, NA[(*)]
Survey	- Offer more generalizable evidence on the prevalence of key factors affecting participation across European regions. - Validate and quantify findings from qualitative methods. - Identify regional patterns that inform policy recommendations.	135[(**)]	All	CEI, EIE, NA[(*)]

[(1)] Leader, Strong, Moderate, Emerging Innovators

(*) Including unsuccessful applicants
(**) From the 135 responses, 89 were retained for the empirical analysis.

Source: own elaboration

2.2. Data Collection Methods

Two focus groups were organized, with each concentrating on one of the thematic areas of the RIV calls. The first focus group on food security, which was the least chosen thematic area by regions in the calls. The second focus group addressed the thematic area of digital transformation, which was the most selected option.

We chose to separate the 2 **focus groups** by thematic focus area as this allows more in-depth discussion with participants. In addition, this format also assisted to identify both common and differing opinions about participants' experience with respect to the particular thematic focus area. Each focus group session took 1,5 hours and contained participants from regions who were successful in CEI and/or EIE calls. The first focus group (food security) had participants from 10 regions; the second one (digital transformation) from 7 regions. Participating regions varied in innovation performance.

The participants were asked open-ended questions, designed to explore the reasons behind participation or non-participation in the "Regional Innovation Valleys" calls for proposals. We structured the questions as follows:

- The first part consisted of questions that ask the participants about their views on regional collaboration for innovation and the main benefits and barriers they see in such collaborations.
- The second part addressed the experience with the RIV-related calls, i.e. the Expression of Interest for Regional Innovation Valleys (CEI) call and the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) call. Rather than focusing on specific elements of the different calls, the questions encouraged a discussion on how common elements of the calls are perceived.
- The last part focused on the "Regional Innovation Valley" label and whether (or how) the participants felt it has added value.
- A concluding question asked participants whether they would have any suggestions for future calls.

The questions are included in Annex 3 for reference. The actual number of questions was limited such that they could be addressed in a single focus group session. The transcripts of the focus groups were reviewed in order to label and group participants' comments. In both focus groups, 4 key areas of concern emerged from the discussion, which we used to structure the discussion of the findings. In particular, participants' experiences related to the co-funding element, patterns of regional collaboration, the added value of the RIV Label, and finally, the scope of thematic focus areas.

Complementing the focus groups, we did 13 **interviews** (12 with regions, 1 with an EU consultancy firm). Table 1 gives an overview of the methods and their respective sample of regions. The regions contacted for the interviews were selected according to their level of involvement in the RIV initiative. Out of the respondents, 2 did not apply to any EIE call or submit to an expression of interest, 2 faced rejections of their EIE application(s), 3 were successful through the CEI and 5 were successful in the EIE Call. In addition, the sample was also designed to account for a variety of innovation performance and geographical distribution across regions. Table 2 below presents the

list of regions interviewed. For confidentiality purposes, the names of the regions cannot be publicly disclosed, but the RIS type and the EIE call to which the region applied, is indicated on the respective Table. On the basis of the insights gathered, 5 case-studies were elaborated which are included in Annex 1 (Removed from this version due to anonymity promised to the selected regions). The questions asked during the interviews aimed to provide a general framework for understanding the motivations, challenges, impacts, and expectations of regions engaging with the RIV initiative through the EIE calls or the call for expression of interest. More precisely, they explored the **motivation** behind the decision to participate or not and assessed **perceived benefits**, such as recognition, funding, and capacity-building opportunities, highlighting the expected utility of the RIV Label. In addition, it examined the **alignment between the EIE calls and regional priorities or challenges**, with the purpose to identify gaps in the current design of EIE calls and assess factors (e.g., resources, policy focus, administrative burden) that influence participation decisions. The questions also aimed to evaluate whether the RIV initiative facilitates meaningful connections among regions and **stimulate stakeholder engagement** within and across regional boundaries. Finally, the interviews also delved into the region's individual experience **and capacity-building aspects** of the application process. They assessed whether the initiative prompted regions to critically analyse their strengths, weaknesses, and barriers while identifying areas for improvement in the application process. Depending on the level of participation of the regions within the RIV initiative, we also included questions related to the co-funding element and its influence in the application process and participation. The full set of questions of the interviews are included in Annex 2.

Table 2. List of regions interviewed (Name of regions are anonymized)

RIS Type	RIV call
Innovation Leader	Non-participant
Moderate Innovator	Non-participant
Innovation Leader	Rejected (EIE)
Moderate Innovator	Rejected (EIE)
Strong Innovator	CEI
Moderate Innovator	CEI
Strong Innovator	CEI
Strong Innovator	EIE
Strong Innovator	EIE
Strong Innovator	EIE
Strong Innovator	EIE
Emerging Innovator	EIE

Source: own elaboration

The analysis of the interviews highlighted four main areas of priorities, in line with the insights from the focus groups. The respondents' comments could therefore be grouped into (1) the co-funding element, (2) the collaboration patterns across regions (3) the (expected) value of the RIV label and (4) the scope of the thematic focus areas.

To gather further evidence on these insights, a **survey** was designed and distributed to NUTS2 regions at EU level and Horizon Europe Associated Countries. For each area of concern, two main sets of questions were asked. The first one was related to challenges, while the second one was related to expectations and possible solutions. The items to be measured were based on the qualitative insights provided during the interviews. For each question, the respondents were asked to rank four different items in order of importance, following the example provided in Table 3 below. All the survey questions are included in Annex 4.

Table 3. What are the main challenges related to the RIV thematic focus areas ("burning challenges")? Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important).

Questions	1	2	3	4
The scope of thematic areas is too broad				
Thematic areas do not align with your region's innovation priorities				
The possible changing thematic focus of RIV calls makes long-term planning difficult for regions				
Your region faces challenges finding partners in thematic areas that match your specific regional strengths				

Source: own elaboration

On 31 October 2024, the survey was distributed and promoted to regions for their voluntary participation until 15 November 2024. Different channels were used to reach as many regions as possible, including a direct email through the Regional Innovation Valleys Generic Mailbox, promotion through Transforming Territories Newsletter, the Joint Research Centre corporate LinkedIn page, the New European Innovation Agenda website, and by reaching out to regional networks. At the end of each focus group session, the participants were encouraged to complete the survey. The survey questions are included in Annex 4.

We received 135 initial responses and removed those of respondents who indicated they were unaware of the Regional Innovation Valley initiative (and who could not answer the remaining items) or who participated only in the Interregional -Innovation Investment Instrument (which was out of scope for the study). For some regions we received multiple responses (24 cases), which we handled as follows. In case multiple responses for a single region indicated inconsistent degrees of involvement with the Regional Innovation Valley initiative (10 cases), we retained the answer that reflected the highest degree of involvement, with "Did not participate" the lowest involvement and "Successfully applied to more than one scheme" the highest degree of involvement (see Table 4). In case multiple responses for a single region were consistent in terms of the degree of involvement with the Regional Innovation Valley initiative (14 cases), we took into account all answers by averaging them. This left us with 89 responses that entered the analysis, representing regions from 25 countries.

Table 4: Participation modalities of RIV survey respondents

Modality	Frequency	%
Did not participate	11	12,4
Rejected	5	5,6
CEI	48	53,9
EIE	8	9,0
Successfully applied to more than 1 scheme	17	19,1
Total	89	100,0

Source: own elaboration

The 11 regions that responded to the survey but that did not participate in any RIV call were asked about their reasons not to apply. The most-often cited reasons for non-participation are the difficulties in meeting co-funding requirements and insufficient time to prepare an application (see Table 5). These concerns are also relevant for the regions that did participate, as we will discuss in sections 3.1 and 3.2.

Table 5: Non-participants (N=11) - Reasons for non-participation

Non-participants (N=11)	Percentage*
The co-financing requirements were too difficult to meet	**90**
The thematic focus of the RIV calls (burning challenges) did not align with our region's innovation priorities	10
The value of the RIV label was unclear	30
The timespan to prepare the application was not sufficient	**70**

Note: % of regions that ranked the option as 1st or 2nd most important.

Source: own elaboration

2.3. Study Framework

Interregional cooperation is influenced by a complex interplay of tangible (material) and intangible (non-material) determinants. These determinants shape how and why regions collaborate across various domains, including economics, politics, culture. In order to assess **regions' overall views on interregional collaboration**, the survey started by asking the regions about their experiences with drivers and obstacles for collaboration. Respondents had to score 10 potential collaboration determinants on a scale from 1-5, which were later aggregated into 2 groups containing 5 determinants: access to funding, access to R&I infrastructure, commercialization opportunities (labelled as tangible determinants), political support and governance, benefits of knowledge

exchanges (labelled as intangible determinants, see Table 6). Regions' success in participating in Regional Innovation Valley Initiative was coded on an ordinal scale, ranging from 1 (no participation) to 5 (successful application in more than one scheme). This exploratory analysis shows fairly similar and relatively high scores across the determinants for interregional collaboration (on average 3.6). While access to funding and political support and governance receive the lowest score relative to other collaboration determinants, the latter is significantly and positively correlated with RIV success, which aligns with the later results discussed in section 3, which highlight regions' concerns with navigating the RIV initiative. Furthermore, regions that leverage interregional collaboration more for commercialization opportunities tend to be more successful in RIV initiative (a significant correlation of 0.25) while the link with knowledge spillovers is less outspoken (0.13).

Table 6: Determinants of interregional collaboration and RIV success

	Mean	Standard deviation	Correlation with RIV success
TANGIBLE DETERMINANTS			
Access to funding	3.28	.77	.03
Access to R&I Infrastructure	3.49	.82	.14
Commercialization opportunities	3.81	.91	**.25***
INTANGIBLE DETERMINANTS			
Political support and governance	3.27	1.09	**.24***
Benefits of Knowledge Exchanges	3.98	.78	.13

N=88, RIV success. 1=No-participation, 2=Rejection, 3=CEI, 4=EIE, 5=More than one modality. * p<0.05

Source: own elaboration

Looking beyond the overall determinants of current interregional collaborations, the survey asked about **issues that regions consider most important for improvement of the RIV initiative**. These issues are based on the answers provided by respondents to both interviews and thematic focus groups. Overall, regions marked the co-funding arrangements and the RIVs' ability to foster interregional collaboration as the primary areas of concern, followed by increasing the value-added of the RIV label and the scope of the thematic focus areas (see Table 7). We will therefore discuss the key areas in that order in section 3.

Table 7: How could the RIV initiative be better adapted to your regional needs?

Answer	all regions N=89	non-part N=10	rejected N=5	CEI N=48	EIE N=8	Multiple schemes N=17
By providing greater clarity to the scope of thematic focus areas	37	20	-	50	0	29.4
By revising the co-funding element	**65**	**80**	**-**	**56.3**	**75**	**76.5**

By enhancing the value of the RIV label	46	50	-	33.4	52.5	**70.6**
By further facilitating collaboration patterns across regions	**51**	**50**	**-**	**60.4**	**52.5**	23.6

Note: Values indicate the percentage of regions that ranked the option as 1st or 2nd. Values in bold indicate per column which of the 4 answer options are most chosen as 1st or 2nd most important (in case of a tie, the option most often ranked as 1st).

Source: own elaboration

3. Analysis of Key Areas

The discussion of the results for each key area starts by highlighting the main observations from the focus groups, which are contextualized further using the case studies and interviews. After discussing the qualitative evidence, we summarize the results from the survey. From the gathered evidence we infer potential policy recommendations.

3.1. The Co-funding Element

Regions indicate **difficulties in meeting the 50% co-funding threshold** as a top issue. It was also suggested that a more differentiated approach to the co-funding rate to account for **differences in financial capacity between regions.**

An issue that received broad support in the discussion related to the co-funding rules is that regions feel there is **insufficient guidance on, and flexibility in combining, co-funding possibilities**, including with respect to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Regions in particular highlighted the need for more flexible co-funding mechanisms or even argued in favour of unified regulatory framework between ERDF and HE funds. Drawing on the case study evidence, one of the regions interviewed encountered difficulties coordinating cohesion funds with the EIE funding and emphasized the need for more adaptable co-funding mechanisms tailored to regional needs. Similarly, another region faced obstacles in coordinating ERDF with other funding sources, particularly HE. The differing timelines and regulations of these frameworks made fund integration complex. They explicitly called for a unified regulatory framework between ERDF and HE, proposing a dedicated ERDF regulation to streamline the blending of these funding sources.

Other regions insisted on the need for capacity-building programs to help regions with limited budgets to participate. For some others, real or potential financial constraints were a reason not to apply. Both focus groups highlighted the **role of the managing authorities** (MA) who are responsible for providing guidance and support to regions in aligning regional and EU funding mechanisms. Some regions experience a lack of support from MAs, which is attributed to a lack of familiarity of some MAs with EU policies. Also, **coordination problems** arise from the NUTS2-focus[1] of the EIE while some regions do not have formal structures at that level or the need for further development in aligning internal structures to regional and European priorities.

The survey findings reflect the qualitative evidence and provide further insights. In particular, regions indicate **difficulties in meeting the 50% co-funding threshold** as a top issue (see Table 8). When asked about ways to facilitate the co-funding of EIE-RIV projects, regions replied along the same lines, pointing to a **higher co-funding rate** (also by regions who were successful in EIE calls) and the need for **clearer guidance on combining different funding instruments**.

[1] In some cases, RIV beneficiaries also involved NUTS3 level.

Table 8: The Co-funding Element - Survey Evidence

	all regions N=89	non-part N=10	rejected N=5	CEI N=48	EIE N=8	Several modalities N=17
What are the challenges related to the co-funding element of RIVs?						
The 50% co-funding requirement was too difficult to meet	**63.6**	**80**	**100**	**62.5**	**52.5**	47.1
There was limited guidance on how to combine different EU funding tools (e.g., ERDF, Horizon Europe) to meet co-funding requirements	**70.5**	**70**	**80**	**66.6**	**52.5**	**82.4**
State aid rules limited our ability to use national or regional funds for co-financing RIV initiatives	19.3	20	20	20.9	25	17.7
There was insufficient alignment between ERDF managing authorities or other funding programs to facilitate co-funding	46.6	40	0	50	50	**52.9**
What would facilitate the co-funding of RIV projects?						
Increase the co-funding element attached to the call up to 70%	**73.6**	**60**	**100**	**75**	**75**	**70.6**
Providing clearer guidance on how to combine different EU funding streams (e.g., ERDF, Horizon Europe) for RIV projects	**67.1**	**60**	**60**	**69.7**	**50**	**76.4**
Facilitate stronger collaboration with ERDF managing authorities	36.4	50	20	37.5	37.5	29.4
Create more flexible state aid rules to allow national funds to be used more effectively for co-financing	22.7	30	20	18.8	37.5	23.6

Note: Values indicate the percentage of regions that ranked the option as 1st or 2nd. Values in bold indicate per column which of the 4 answer options are most chosen as 1st or 2nd most important (in case of a tie, the option most often ranked as 1st).

Source: own elaboration

Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations need to be linked to the overall goals of the RIV initiative. These goals aim to strengthen Europe's innovation ecosystem by 1) fostering interregional collaboration and 2) addressing disparities in innovation performance across regions. By addressing this, the RIV initiative actually has dual goals of fostering innovation and bridging regional disparities. These goals are sometimes in conflict with each other.

Based on the analysis of the data collected, the following recommendations can be extracted as input for reflection for the next round of calls.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The uniformity of the 50% co-funding rule could also be evaluated in the light of differences in financial capacity between regions. Clarify the co-funding rules to the regions by providing them with more guidance.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Provide specific and regular information (e.g. through dedicated communication channels) to NCP Regional Managing Authorities, so that they have sufficient capacity to handle questions of the regions about the co-funding element.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Foster better communication between stakeholders. This would help to mitigate frictions related to co-funding rules, not only between regional representatives and funding authorities, but also between regional representatives in Brussels and local authorities to foster better alignment with and awareness of European initiatives. The use of non-technical language in guidance documents would make the application process more accessible, especially for regions with limited administrative and technical capacity.

3.2. Collaboration Patterns

The focus groups indicate that finding partners as such is not perceived as a major hurdle; many regions rely strongly on existing networks as a key channel. Furthermore, existing regional priorities determine which regions are considered to collaborate with, especially if there are specific gaps in capabilities, such as the lack of university partners in the own region.

The interviews revealed that several regions felt that finding suitable partners was hindered by the short application period, which limited the time available to prepare adequately and engage a wider range of stakeholders. The issue was also emphasized in the interviews. In some cases, the limited time was considered a key reason not to apply.

The matchmaking events for EIE calls are intended to support regions in finding suitable partners but are seen by several regions as lacking focus due to the broad thematic focus areas and as insufficiently able to match regions with complementary strengths. Interviews confirmed the events are primarily seen as a vehicle for establishing initial connections after which there is substantial attrition once regions are confronted with co-funding complications (see also section 3.1).

Importantly, as it relates to a key objective of the RIV initiative, some regions are hesitant to collaborate with less developed regions due to concerns about resource competition and too large gaps in capabilities. Conversely, some regions are uncertain about their ability to compete with more advanced regions due to the perceived gap in innovation capacity and may therefore decide not to participate. As a result, collaboration between highly heterogeneous regions often proves difficult. Opening up infrastructure may act as enabler for matching regions with differential innovative capacity. Regions point out setting up partnerships is easier when they have similar thematic interests as well as comparable innovation performance levels and both have a track record in terms of capacity for executing European projects. Also, sharing infrastructure can be an enabler for collaboration, especially for more mature projects of a higher Technology Readiness Level. Finally, it is clear that also innovation-leading regions signal difficulties with securing co-funding from regional authorities who may not be convinced of the added value of the collaboration with other regions.

The survey evidence confirms that alignment of priorities between regions is not the primary obstacle standing in the way of interregional collaboration (see Table 9). Conversely, finding partner regions with complementary capabilities is more often experienced as a challenge by regions. To a lesser extent, setting up consortia with regions that have a very different innovative capacity is a concern, but more so for regions that were rejected. Echoing the findings on co-funding arrangements, the survey also indicates that besides it being a concern for individual regions, the coordination on co-funding is also a source of friction between regions. Regions relied on several channels to become aware of the RIV initiative without outspoken differences between channels or

between subsamples of regions. Regions' preferred mechanism to set up consortia for upcoming calls is building on existing networks, but also leveraging existing initiatives and infrastructure. Rather unsurprisingly, non-participants and rejected regions indicate a stronger preference for matchmaking events than other regions. Finally, there is moderate support for increasing the directionality of RIV calls, with the clear exception of regions that were unsuccessful in applying.

Table 9: Collaboration Patterns - Survey Evidence

	all regions N=89	non-part N=10	rejected N=5	CEI N=48	EIE N=8	Several modalities N=17
What are the main challenges related to the creation of RIV consortia?						
Forming consortia with regions with highly divergent innovation capacities	44.3	50	**60**	**43.8**	37.5	41.1
The lack of alignment between regional priorities	38.6	40	40	35.4	37.5	47
Finding partners with complementary capabilities	**55.7**	**50**	**60**	52.1	**75**	**58.8**
Reaching agreement between consortia partners on securing the complementary funding for the RIV Call	**61.4**	**60**	40	**68.8**	**50**	**53**
What sources were useful to learn about the RIV initiative?						
EU Support Actions (e.g., S3 Community of Practice, Partnerships for Regional Innovation Pilot Action)	**55.6**	40	40	**62.5**	**50**	**52.9**
Matchmaking events, conferences, and tailored workshops (e.g., RIVs Matchmaking event, Info Days on the RIVs co-funded calls)	48.8	**60**	40	**47.9**	37.5	**52.9**
Website (e.g., European Commission website updates, Matchmaking Map, FAQs)	44.3	**50**	**60**	41.7	50	41.2
EU Networks (e.g., ERRIN, EURADA, Vanguard Initiative, Enterprise Europe Network, National Contact Points, etc.)	**51.1**	50	**60**	**47.9**	**62.5**	**52.9**
What would facilitate the creation of consortia for upcoming RIV applications?						
Building on existing collaborations through existing networks (e.g., Enterprise Europe Network, ERRIN, EURADA, S3 Community of Practice)	**54.6**	**50**	**60**	**54.1**	37.5	**64.7**
Organizing matchmaking events to identify suitable partners	46.6	**60**	**80**	41.7	**50**	41

	all regions N=89	non-part N=10	rejected N=5	CEI N=48	EIE N=8	Several modalities N=17
Leveraging comparative regional advantages, such as specialized hubs (e.g., deep-tech hubs, living labs, testbeds)	50	40	40	50	**52.5**	**52.9**
Increase further the directionality of the RIV calls	**48.8**	50	0	**54.2**	**50**	41.1

Note: Values indicate the percentage of regions that ranked the option as 1st or 2nd. Values in bold indicate per column which of the 4 answer options are most chosen as 1st or 2nd most important (in case of a tie, the option most often ranked as 1st).

Source: own elaboration

Policy Recommendations

On the basis of the analysis above, the following recommendations can guide the reflection for the next calls.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Underline the long-term perspective and integration of regional strategies through the RIV is key to convince also innovation-leading regions of the added value of collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION 5. Further insist on comparative advantages of heterogeneous regions to create and/or strengthen value chains. While some regions act as deep-tech hubs, other regions can focus on setting up testbeds, living labs, or manufacturing. Nevertheless, the difference in regional priorities and the gap in capacity for innovation and project execution should be manageable to allow for fruitful partnerships. Therefore, in addition to having only open calls, **it could be considered to set up calls aimed specifically at emerging innovators** so the RIV initiative can better deliver on its inclusion objective. While in the interest of all regions, especially smaller regions would benefit from increased clarity and detail about what is required to participate, such as the types of partnerships, roles of participating entities, and expectations for resource mobilization.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Include calls that focus on mission-based efforts and **build on S3 priorities** to bring alignment and clarity to the regions throughout different EU initiatives, as well as calls aimed at **sharing infrastructures** to enable further collaboration between regions with differential innovative capacity.

RECOMMENDATION 7. Leverage existing networks (e.g. EEN, ERRIN, EURADA, Vanguard Initiative) to improve matchmaking mechanisms between regions. **Enhanced matchmaking events** could group regions around specific sub-challenges to facilitate more targeted connections. Advanced scheduling of matchmaking events, at least three to six months before the application deadline, would also allow for more meaningful engagement with potential partners.

RECOMMENDATION 8. Allow for longer preparation periods to better allow regions to align their ecosystems and coordinate effectively.

3.3. The RIV Label

The focus group discussions revealed that there is no common understanding among the regions of the benefits of the RIV label. While there was some agreement that the label can contribute to a region's reputation and visibility, there was little agreement about strategic advantages or disadvantages of not having the label as part of regions' innovation ecosystem development efforts, nor about its leverage for additional financial support. Some regions voiced concern about competition between the RIV label and their existing cluster brand or felt that the narrow focus of the RIV label was not aligned with their (multiple) S3 priorities.

Furthermore, regional representatives indicated that the meaning of EU innovation concepts, such as the concept of a "valley" itself, and terminology used in the calls is not always very clear. As a whole, regions have been heterogeneous in their response to and use of the RIV label, yet it was noted this has also been the case for other labels such as the Seal of Excellence.

In the survey, a majority of the respondents (59%) indicate that they expect to use the RIV label to strengthen interregional collaboration, and this result holds across the different RIV engagement subgroups (see Table 10). Regions also commonly expect the label to increase visibility and reputation as an innovative region. Expectations about the label's value in attracting additional funding are more heterogeneous among the different groups, with especially the non-participants (70%) expecting the label to deliver on this aspect. Conversely, regions have consistently low expectations about the label serving as a way to align regional with EU priorities, with only 25% of respondents citing it as a preferred use of the RIV label.

Table 10: RIV label - Survey Evidence

	all regions N=89	non-part N=10	rejected N=5	CEI N=48	EIE N=8	Several modalities N=17
How does your region expect to use the RIV label?						
A tool for enhancing our region's visibility and reputation within European innovation networks	**59**	**50**	**60**	**56.3**	50	**76.5**
A mechanism for strengthening interregional collaboration	**59.1**	**50**	**60**	**58.3**	**75**	**60**
A strategic advantage for accessing additional funding opportunities	56.8	**70**	60	56.3	**52.5**	58.8
A way to align our regional innovation strategy with EU priorities	25	30	20	29.2	12.5	17.7
How could the European Commission help you to use the RIV label?						
By providing guidance on how to leverage the label to access additional European and national funding opportunities	**51.1**	30	40	45.9	**75**	**70.6**
By organizing regular networking and matchmaking events to help regions build strategic partnerships	50	**50**	**80**	**50**	**50**	41.2

By offering capacity-building workshops and technical assistance to help regions develop and implement interregional projects	**73.6**	**80**	**60**	**66.3**	25	**54.7**
By facilitating communication channels between regions holding the RIV label and the European Commission	34.8	36.4	20	37.5	**50**	23.6

Note: Values indicate the percentage of regions that ranked the option as 1st or 2nd. Values in bold indicate per column which of the 4 answer options are most chosen as 1st or 2nd most important (in case of a tie, the option most often ranked as 1st).

Source: own elaboration

With respect to future support on the RIV label (see the 2nd panel in Table 10), it is especially the regions that have been successful in attracting funding in the RIV scheme that count on **guidance to leverage the label to attract more funding**, with more than 70% of those respondents citing it as a key use of the label. **Capacity-building workshops** are also perceived as interesting, especially – and perhaps unsurprisingly – by non-participants (80%). Rejected regions show a high preference for **networking and matchmaking events** aimed at building partnerships (80%).

Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the data collected, the following recommendations can be extracted as input for reflection for the next round of calls.

RECOMMENDATION 9. Provide more detailed information to regional authorities on the benefits of the label. In particular, guidance on how the label could lead to tangible benefits such as additional funding – where the Seal of Excellence may serve as an example – would be much appreciated by the regions, as the survey evidence indicates.

RECOMMENDATION 10. Rather than being restricted to the specific project, the RIV label may be more useful if regions can use it to **support their goals across all S3 priorities**. Complementing section 3.2, **more focused networking/matchmaking events and capacity-building workshops** tied to the RIV label would be valuable to many regions, especially those with a smaller RIV track record.

3.4. Scope of Thematic Focus Areas

A first issue that was raised was that the **scope of the thematic focus areas of the EIE calls is not always clear and is perceived as rather inconsistent**, i.e., some challenges are seen as narrow (healthcare, food security), while the others as seen as broad. In particular, the theme of food security is perceived by several regions as very specialized and not well aligned with regional priorities that tend to be broader, e.g. covering the agri-food sector or the entire food chain. Conversely, very broad thematic focus areas are perceived as not very helpful in finding partners as they provide little direction. For some regions, confusion about alignment of the thematic focus was a reason not to select a challenge in their respective application. Other regions recognized the relevance of the themes but there was no clear alignment with their immediate strategic priorities

at the time of the call so they decided not to participate. A second issue put forward by the participants is the need for **continuity in thematic focus areas** to allow for long-term strategic planning and better exploitation of project results.

The survey evidence shows **heterogeneous preferences between regions for the thematic areas** (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). While circularity and digital transformation attract most interest, global food security has the least broad appeal. Noteworthy is that none of the rejected regions among the respondents focuses on food security or fossil fuels as a thematic area. Regions are quite heterogeneous in terms of their preferred ways for achieving better alignment between regional priorities and the thematic focus areas. Non-participants are particularly sensitive to the **stability in thematic focus areas** but this is not a concern for rejected regions, who attach the great importance to clearer definitions of what the thematic focus areas entail. Among the other regions, there is a clear interest in **aligning the focus areas with smart specialization strategies**, as also highlighted in previous sections.

Table 11. Scope of Thematic Focus Areas - Survey Evidence

	all regions N=89	non-part N=10	rejected N=5	CEI N=48	EIE N=8	Several modalities N=17
What thematic areas of the EIE calls are of most interest to your region?						
Achieving circularity	**53.4**	40	**100**	**52.1**	**62.5**	**47.1**
Mastering the digital transformation	**64.8**	**60**	**80**	**66.7**	32.5	**59.2**
Increasing global food security	18.2	30	0	16.7	12.5	23.6
Healthcare	31.8	**57**	20	31.2	25	35.4
Reducing reliance on fossil fuels	31.9	30	0	33.4	**37.5**	35.3
What would facilitate the alignment of thematic focus areas with your regional needs?						
Further align RIV thematic focus areas with Smart Specialization Strategies	60.2	30	**60**	**68.7**	25	**70.5**
Minimize changes to thematic focus areas between consequent RIV calls	32.9	**70**	0	20.9	**62.5**	**41.2**
Provide clearer definitions and guidelines for RIV thematic focus areas	51.1	40	**100**	52.1	**37.5**	47
Develop a mission-oriented approach for each thematic focus area	**55.7**	**60**	40	**58.4**	75	**41.1**

Note: Values indicate the percentage of regions that ranked the option as 1st or 2nd. Values in bold indicate per column which of the 4 answer options are most chosen as 1st or 2nd most important (in case of a tie, the option most often ranked as 1st).

Source: own elaboration

Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the data collected, the following recommendations can be extracted as input for reflection for the next round of calls.

RECOMMENDATION 11. Strengthen the links between thematic areas and smart specialization strategies. While the thematic areas align well with priorities in some regions, others have to adapt their focus significantly to fit the call. In particular, EIE calls require regions to focus their efforts and single out one of their smart specialization priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 12. Further clarify the RIV concept to position RIVs as enablers of regional innovation ecosystems and value chains rather than as a way to steer regions' strategies in a particular direction. This would align with **regions' perception of Regional Innovation Valleys as a way to address several of their priorities**.

RECOMMENDATION 13. An attention point is that **changes in thematic focus areas across calls would be undesirable** as this runs counter to the development of long-term strategies and hinders the search for co-funding after a project ends.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Summary of Findings

The analysis revealed four critical areas influencing regions' participation in the RIV initiative's EIE call and Call for Expression of Interest:

1. **The Co-funding Element**

   Particularly for regions with limited capacity, a significant barrier seemed to be the 50% co-funding requirement. At times, managing authorities lacked sufficient capacities to provide adequate guidance on blending funding mechanisms. It could be indicated that certain inconsistencies between EU and regional funding rules tend to make it more difficult for some regions to participate.

2. **Collaboration Patterns**

   While finding partners was not a major obstacle, it was found that regions had to do their utmost to allocate sufficient resources in order to collaborate effectively with those at very different innovation levels. Matchmaking events were useful for some while others perceived them as unfocused. Tight application deadlines hindered meaningful partnership building. The conclusions of the study also brought to light that there is some level of hesitance to partner with less-developed regions due to perceived resource and capability gaps.

3. **The RIV Label**

   Regions acknowledged the potential of the RIV label to enhance visibility and foster collaboration but it was hinted out that a clear understanding was rather missing when it comes to the label's strategic benefits. There was concern about competition with existing regional branding and the need for clearer guidance on how the label could unlock additional funding and strengthen alignment with EU priorities.

4. **Scope of Thematic Focus Areas**

   The thematic focus areas were found to be rather inconsistently defined, leading to perceptions of misalignment with regional priorities. While some themes, like digital transformation, were broadly appealing, others, such as food security, lacked alignment with many regions' broader strategic goals. The need for thematic stability across calls was underscored to enable long-term planning and resource allocation.

4.2. Final Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings from the analysis, the following lessons can be drawn to enhance the effectiveness and inclusiveness of future RIV calls:

1. **Simplify Co-funding Mechanisms**

   Introduce more flexible co-funding rules, and consider reduced requirements for financially constrained regions. Improve capacity-building programs for managing authorities and regions to facilitate the effective blending of funds.

2. **Strengthen Collaboration Support**

   Extend application periods and improve matchmaking mechanisms to foster partnerships based on complementary strengths. Consider the introduction of targeted calls to encourage partnerships between regions with varying innovation levels, using infrastructure sharing and other incentives to bridge gaps.

3. **Enhance the Value of the RIV Label**

   Provide clearer guidance on leveraging the RIV label for financial and strategic benefits. Position the label as a broader benchmark to enhance the visibility of RIV-labelled regions to facilitate the support for multi-faceted regional innovation ecosystems, rather than narrowly focusing on specific projects. This tends to ease regions to attract others to collaborate together and bring about more trust along the process.

4. **Clarify and Stabilize Thematic Areas**

   Define thematic areas with greater precision and align them closely with regions' Smart Specialization Strategies (S3). Maintain consistency in themes across calls to support long-term strategic alignment.

4.3. Future Directions for the RIV Initiative

As a way to conclude, the authors of this report recommend the following pathways to maximise the potential of the RIV initiative to foster interregional collaboration and innovation:

1. **Foster Sustainable Regional Innovation Networks**

   Focus on building enduring partnerships that address shared challenges across regions. Tailored calls for emerging innovators and mission-based efforts linked to S3 priorities can encourage inclusive participation.

2. **Leverage the RIV Label for Strategic Gains**

   The RIV label should evolve into a hallmark of innovation excellence, enabling regions to attract additional funding and align with broader EU goals. Workshops, case studies, and best-practice sharing can help regions maximize its potential.

3. **Support Long-term Regional Development**

   Given the emphasis of having a new Commission characterized by growth and investment, and Draghi's report on the future European competitiveness as a means to progress on the ambition for a fair and sustainable economy, creating synergies across regional innovation ecosystems and strengthening the connectivity of European Value chains is key to boost Europe's long-term competitiveness. Hence, emphasizing capacity building, equitable access to resources, and knowledge diffusion entail continued enhancements for example, in adapting burning challenges and funding models, which will in turn ameliorate the sustainability and scalability of long-term regional projects.

By addressing these areas, the RIV initiative can better serve its dual goals of fostering innovation and bridging regional disparities, positioning Europe as a global leader in sustainable and inclusive innovation ecosystems.

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List of abbreviations and definitions

Abbreviations	Definitions
CEI	Expression of Interest for Regional Innovation Valleys Call
EIE	European Innovation Ecosystems
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
HE	Horizon Europe
I3	Interregional Innovation Investments
NCP	National Contact Points
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
RIV	Regional Innovation Valley
R&I	Research and Innovation
S3	Smart Specialisation Strategies

List of tables

Annexes

Annex 1. Case Studies

Removed from this version due to anonymity promised to the selected regions

Annex 2. Interview Questions

Regional Innovation Valleys Initiative

Dear Regional representative:

It is a pleasure to contact you in the scope of the Regional Innovation Valley (RIV) initiative. Through this project, the European Commission seeks to inspire further territorial collaboration and assist RIVs to better address regional needs.

In this process, we are currently carrying out an exercise to steer the discussion and gather qualitative information on the last RIV calls.

We would be delighted to have a discussion with you organized around the questions below. Please note that these questions are meant to guide our discussion and may not necessarily need to be addressed in their entirety.

- What motivated your region to apply for the RIV Call? What value would you expect the RIV Label to provide to your region?
- What elements do you think would make the next RIV calls more adequate to your regional needs?
- What elements do you think will influence your participation or non-participation to the next RIV calls?
- Did the preparation of the RIV application assist in the planning of specific regional actions to strengthen your regions ecosystem? If yes, kindly provide main details.
- Do your region intend to apply to an EU RIV funded Call? In any case, can you elaborate on the reasoning of your reply.
- How can the RIV Label be of most benefit to help your region strengthen innovative actions (e.g. do you consider that connecting with other regions enhance your innovation capacity?)
- Did the application process assist your region to steer internal discussions with relevant stakeholders and connect with other regional actors outside your region?
- Did the filling out of the application lead your region to brainstorm further on the region's strengths / weaknesses? Did this process help in any way to overcome regional barriers?

- In your opinion, how can the application process be ameliorated?
- Did you consider the RIV matchmaking events of value to enhance your regional interregional interconnectedness?

Thank you for your attention.
We are looking forward for our discussion.

Best regards,

Annex 3. Focus Group Questions

Note that during the focus group sessions, we adjusted the approach (in terms of the questions' order, grouping…) to allow for a natural discussion.

I. Regional Collaboration in Innovation Ecosystems

Motivations for regional collaboration

1. What motivates your region to engage (or not engage) in innovation collaboration with other regions? Does that motivation depend on the thematic focus of the project (e.g. Increasing global food security, Mastering the digital transformation)?

2. How do you perceive the exchange of knowledge and expertise, in the specific thematic focus selected, between regions with different innovation capacities?

3. Did the five thematic focus areas as per the New European Innovation Agenda facilitate your regional direction towards one burning challenge while applying for the RIV Call? Did you find the thematic focus area selected by your region too narrow or too broad? Why or why not?

4. In what ways do complementary specializations between regions create opportunities for collaboration, in the specific thematic focus selected?

5. How do you view the role of shared infrastructure in fostering regional collaboration?

6. To what extent do policy and funding incentives encourage collaboration between regions? How do you perceive the synergies between the RIVs and other funding tools and the region's smart specialization strategy?

Barriers to Regional Collaboration

7. What challenges has your region faced when attempting to collaborate with regions with differing innovation capabilities, in the specific thematic focus selected? Do you find it difficult to find regional alliances with respect the specific selected thematic focus?

8. How does competition for resources or talent affect your region's willingness to collaborate with others? Is there a lack of talent or resources with respect to the thematic focus that you have selected? If yes, how could the EU enhance the current scenario to inspire more regional collaboration in this specific area?

II. Call-Related Reasons for Non-Participation

9. What aspects of the call's eligibility criteria were challenging for your region?

10. Did your region perceive the funding opportunities in the call as attractive or sufficient to address the specific thematic focus selected? Why or why not?

11. To what extent did the scope and long-term commitment of the projects influence your region's decision to participate?

12. How well did the call's thematic areas align with your region's innovation priorities?

III. Added Value of the "Regional Innovation Valley" Label

13. How do you perceive the potential benefits of being recognized as a 'Regional Innovation Valley'?

14. In what ways could the 'Regional Innovation Valley' label enhance your region's access to funding or collaboration opportunities?

15. How do you view the long-term socioeconomic impact of achieving 'Regional Innovation Valley' status?

IV. Thoughts for Future Calls

16. What could be changed in future calls or initiatives to encourage your region to participate more actively?

Annex 4. Survey

General Information

Select country

Select region

Which institution are you representing?

A regional government

A regional innovation agency

A national/managing authority

Another regional authority

Other (please specify below)

What is the degree of involvement of your region in the Regional Innovation Valley initiative?

Did not participate

Submitted applications but was rejected

Is involved through the Call of Expression of Interest (CEI) avenue

Is involved through the European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE) avenue

Is involved through the Interregional Innovation Investments (I3) avenue

Is involved through the CEI and the EIE avenues

Is involved through the CEI and the I3 avenues

Is involved through the EIE and the I3 avenues

Is involved through the CEI, the EIE, and the I3 avenues

Would you consider (re)applying to future RIV Calls?

Yes

No

How could the RIV be better adapted to your regional needs?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

By providing greater clarity to the scope of thematic focus areas

By revising the co-funding element

By enhancing the value of the RIV label

By further facilitating collaboration patterns across regions

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

Scope of the Thematic Focus Areas

What thematic areas of the RIV calls are of most interest to your region?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important):

Achieving circularity

Mastering the digital transformation

Increasing global food security

Healthcare

Reducing reliance on fossil fuels

What are the main challenges related to the RIV thematic focus areas?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

The scope of thematic areas is too broad

Thematic areas do not align with your region's innovation priorities

The possible changing thematic focus of RIV calls makes long-term planning difficult for regions

Your region faces challenges finding partners in thematic areas that match your specific regional strengths

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

What would facilitate the alignment of thematic focus areas with your regional needs?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

Further align RIV thematic focus areas with Smart Specialization Strategies

Minimize changes to thematic focus areas between consequent RIV calls

Provide clearer definitions and guidelines for RIV thematic focus areas

Develop a mission-oriented approach for each thematic focus area

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

The RIV Label

How does your region expect to use the RIV label?

Please rank the following proposals from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

A tool for enhancing our region's visibility and reputation within European innovation networks

A mechanism for strengthening interregional collaboration

A strategic advantage for accessing additional funding opportunities

A way to align our regional innovation strategy with EU priorities

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

How could the European Commission help you to use the RIV label?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

By providing guidance on how to leverage the label to access additional European and national funding opportunities

By organizing regular networking and matchmaking events to help regions build strategic partnerships

By offering capacity-building workshops and technical assistance to help regions develop and implement interregional projects

By facilitating communication channels between regions holding the RIV label and the European Commission

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

The Co-Funding Element

What are the challenges related to the co-funding element of RIVs?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

The 50% co-funding requirement was too difficult to meet

There was limited guidance on how to combine different EU funding tools (e.g., ERDF, Horizon Europe) to meet co-funding requirements

State aid rules limited our ability to use national or regional funds for co-financing RIV initiatives

There was insufficient alignment between ERDF managing authorities or other funding programs to facilitate co-funding

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

What would facilitate the co-funding of RIV projects?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

Increase the co-funding element attached to the call up to 70%

Providing clearer guidance on how to combine different EU funding streams (e.g., ERDF, Horizon Europe) for RIV projects

Facilitate stronger collaboration with ERDF managing authorities

Create more flexible state aid rules to allow national funds to be used more effectively for co-financing

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

Collaboration Patterns

What are the main challenges related to the creation of RIV consortia?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

Forming consortia with regions with highly divergent innovation capacities

The lack of alignment between regional priorities

Finding partners with complementary capabilities

Reaching agreement between consortia partners on securing the complementary funding for the RIV Call

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

What sources were useful to learn about the RIV initiative?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

EU Support Actions (e.g., S3 Community of Practice, Partnerships for Regional Innovation Pilot Action)

Matchmaking events, conferences, and tailored workshops (e.g., RIVs Matchmaking event, Info Days on the RIVs co-funded calls)

Website (e.g., European Commission website updates, Matchmaking Map, FAQs)

EU Networks (e.g., ERRIN, EURADA, Vanguard Initiative, Enterprise Europe Network, National Contact Points, etc.)

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

What would facilitate the creation of consortia for upcoming RIV applications?

Please rank the following possibilities from 1 (least important) to 4 (most important):

Building on existing collaborations through existing networks (e.g., Enterprise Europe Network, ERRIN, EURADA, S3 Community of Practice)

Organizing matchmaking events to identify suitable partners

Leveraging comparative regional advantages, such as specialized hubs (e.g., deep-tech hubs, living labs, testbeds)

Increase further the directionality of the RIV calls

In case an additional answer applies to you, please specify

Determinants of Interregional Collaboration

Do you agree with the following proposals? (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree):

The availability of co-funding encourages you to engage in inter-regional innovation activities

Your region has access to sufficient funding for collaborative interregional research projects

Shared technological platforms facilitate the exchange of knowledge between your region and others

The availability of advanced research facilities in your region supports your involvement in interregional projects

Collaboration with other regions opens up new markets for your innovative products

Interregional R&I cooperation improves your ability to commercialize innovations in international markets

Political leaders in your region strongly support interregional research cooperation

The governance structures in your region facilitate effective collaboration with other regions

Your region benefits significantly from the knowledge exchange with other regions in joint research projects

Learning from other regions through collaboration improves your region's innovation capacity

Getting in touch with the EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you online (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

On the phone or in writing

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:

— by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),

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— via the following form: european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/write-us_en.

Finding information about the EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website (european-union.europa.eu).

EU publications

You can view or order EU publications at op.europa.eu/en/publications. Multiple copies of free publications can be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local documentation centre (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex (eur-lex.europa.eu).

EU open data

The portal data.europa.eu provides access to open datasets from the EU institutions, bodies and agencies. These can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes. The portal also provides access to a wealth of datasets from European countries.

Science for policy

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