



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

The President

The Chair (SEDEC - Commission for Social Policy,  
Education, Employment, Research and Culture)

Brussels, *date of official registration*  
PCab/KT/JZ/dfm – D/150 (2022)

Subject: Call for expressions of interest for participation in the Pilot Action on Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI

Dear CoR members,

Dear political leaders of local and regional authorities across the EU,

We would like to invite expressions of interest from regions, cities and national authorities for participation in this Pilot Action on Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI.

The Pilot Action will involve up to 24 European participants (Member States, regions or groups of regions) who feel driven to transform their economies and societies and who are willing to explore the new Partnerships for Regional Innovation – PRI in the design and implementation of their own strategic policy framework dealing with innovation, industrial development, sustainability transitions and broader economic and social development.

The experience, contacts, cooperation, shared interests and expertise that this initiative seeks to make available to local and regional authorities across the EU will help them successfully address the societal challenges we all currently face. In the longer term, this exercise may help to attract the necessary investment and mobilise in a coherent way all relevant policies and funding instruments.

The deadline for applications is 25 April 2022. You will find more information and instructions on how to apply in the annex enclosed with this letter.

The CoR looks forward to fruitful cooperation with you on the new PRI.

Yours faithfully,

*Signed*  
Apostolos Tzitzikostas

*Signed*  
Anne Karjalainen

Encl.: Background information on the Pilot Initiative Action on Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI

Annex - Background information on the Pilot Initiative on "Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI"

## **Call for expressions of interest to participate in the joint Committee of the Regions- Joint Research Centre European Commission Pilot Action on "Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI"**

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is inviting expressions of interest from regions, groups of regions and Member States to participate in the CoR-Joint Research Centre (JRC) - European Commission Pilot Action on "Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI".

The Partnerships for Regional Innovation are a complementary approach, which builds on positive experiences with smart specialisation strategies. The ambition is to test tools for a stronger directionality towards the twin transition, with economic, social and environmental sustainability, including at local level and in rural areas. It will also elaborate a platform facilitating EU-wide networks of networks. The Pilot does not imply that the regions revise their strategies. It is complementary to strengthen synergies and the impact of innovation, including the development and diffusion of deep-tech technologies for solutions to sustainability challenges for all territories.

### **The Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI Pilot Action**

The **Pilot Action** will involve up to 24 European territories (regions, groups of regions or EU Member States) who: i) share a strong ambition to transform their economies and societies and ii) are willing to explore renewed partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI in the design and implementation of their own strategic policy framework dealing with innovation, industrial development, sustainability transitions and socio-economic development (e.g. their smart specialisation strategies).

PRI aims to enhance the coordination and directionality of regional, national and EU R&I policies to implement Europe's green and digital transitions and to tackle the innovation divide in the EU. PRI will be firmly anchored in the EU policy framework, supporting the implementation of the European Green Deal, Horizon Europe, Cohesion policy and NextGenerationEU.

Particular attention will be placed on tools and governance mechanisms that mobilise multiple sources of funding and policies to amplify impact, and that can help connect regional and national initiatives to EU initiatives for the twin transition. More information is available below.

The main reference document underpinning the Partnerships for Regional Innovation - PRI Pilot Action will be the forthcoming "PRI Playbook", currently being developed by the JRC-European Commission with the support of a Scientific Committee of recognised experts. The initial edition of the PRI Playbook (forthcoming, May 2022) will showcase proven tools, inspired by leading innovation policy practice across Europe and the world. Over the course of the pilot, the tools will be further improved, adapted and tested against the realities of European regions and Member States. As a result, the PRI Playbook will be further developed and improved to offer operational guidance in an accessible and modular format, including a user-friendly online version. The PRI Playbook is aimed at inspiring all levels of government to better leverage policies for innovation, including in domains outside the traditional remit of research and innovation policy.

The JRC will support the pilot and work closely with regions and Member States to co-develop the Playbook, linking participants to appropriate in-house or external expertise, developing relevant policy intelligence, documenting and disseminating broader lessons. The Pilot will also be supported by the dedicated Scientific Committee and other relevant experts.

The Pilot seeks to enhance synergies across EU investment programmes (e.g. Next GenerationEU, Structural Funds, Horizon Europe) and EU instruments, including the European missions (e.g. for transformative climate adaptation).

### **Eligibility criteria and how to apply**

European regions, groups of regions and Member States are invited to express their interest in participating in the CoR-JRC pilot to test elements of the PRI approach. Joint applications from groups of regions across Member States or from multiple-levels of government in the same Member State or region (e.g. one or more regions and one or more national ministries) united by common economic or societal challenges are also welcome.

Applicants must demonstrate a high level of commitment to participate in the Pilot Action. Interested territories are invited to:

- Send a maximum ten-page PRI background report identifying local challenges they hope to address through PRI and documenting relevant experience and challenges in their administration(s), to [sedec@cor.europa.eu](mailto:sedec@cor.europa.eu)  
See hereunder additional information for details on the report to be delivered.
- The application should also include a statement of support from a high-ranking elected official (e.g. the governor of a region or a relevant minister) assuring that the participating authority will count with a strong mandate, including at political level, to explore new approaches and work across silos in government in line with the ambition of PRI.

The chosen territories will be announced in May 2022. Regional and Member States participating to the Pilot will not be expected to modify their innovation strategies or S3 strategies in the context of the pilot. More details available below.

### **More Information**

#### **About PRI**

The European Green Deal and the unprecedented European effort to support the recovery from the pandemic bring to the fore an upgraded role for innovation. The ongoing deep transformations of production and consumption systems are a momentous occasion to innovate, build stronger economies and fairer societies. In this context the CoR has partnered with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) to explore a new approach for the development of innovation partnerships fit for the green and digital transition.

Partnerships for Regional Innovation ('PRI' in short) come at a time of growing recognition that all parts of society need to join up forces to deal with the pressing challenges of our time. Partnerships for Regional Innovation will have a strong focus on innovation policy, but they will also encompass and inspire industrial, employment, education and social policies. PRI implies new ways of working across government departments and levels focused on addressing territorial challenges.

PRI places particular emphasis on actions with strong transformative potential: it focuses on the further development of aspects of innovation strategies such as broad stakeholder engagement and mobilisation, multi-level governance, synergies between policies and between funds, broad-based innovation for SMEs, the social dimension of innovation, and directions for innovation that lead to co-benefits for the economy, society and the environment.

Additionally, PRI seeks to accelerate transformative outcomes by introducing challenge-oriented innovation (such as local missions to coordinate actions under a coherent directional logic), exploring policy mixes for system-level innovation that include interventions from outside the traditional confines of R&I policy (such as employment, social, fiscal policy and also line ministries in energy, health,

transport, waste), promote innovation through regulation (such as 'regulatory sandboxes'), and demand-side policies (such as the creation of lead markets, the creation of innovation spaces during large physical investments, innovation for affordability).

On 15 April 2021 a [high-level conference](#) with the participation of close to 1000 stakeholders concluded that Smart Specialisation has the potential to become a decisive vehicle for economic transformation, fostering the new green and digital economy all across the EU. On 8 October 2021 Commissioners Gabriel and Ferreira jointly responded to the President of the Committee of the Regions agreeing to explore additional approaches to increase the focus of smart specialisation strategies on EU priorities through a joint pilot action on Partnerships for Regional Innovation – PRI, as developed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC).

### **Why do we need PRI?**

PRI comes as a response to the urgent call of the European Green Deal to address the unprecedented challenge posed by climate change in ways that strengthen social and territorial cohesion and ensure that Europe thrives in the green and digital economy of the future. As Europe and the world seek to recover from the effects of the pandemic, we need to build back stronger but also differently. Innovation is about doing things differently. PRI seeks to adopt a broad and systemic framing of innovation, recognising that the levers for transformative change and all its economic, social and environmental promise, lie not just in science and technology but also in the very design of our production and consumption systems.

There is a need for a strategic framework not just for growth, but also for other investments and stakeholder actions in our transition towards sustainable development paths. Elements of this framework - such as broad stakeholder coordination - are already present in smart specialisation strategies implemented across Europe over the past decade, whereas others will have to be introduced based on sound evidence and lessons from leading policy practice. PRI seeks to explore and experiment with new approaches designed to join up efforts across government and stakeholders, develop synergies and amplify impact.

### **The PRI Pilot Action**

The Pilot Action will involve up to 24 European territories (regions, groups of regions or Member States) and will be underpinned by the PRI Playbook. The Playbook has been conceived as an initial guidance document for the Pilot. The Playbook seeks to guide the ensuing policy dialogue, mutual learning and co-creation. The final version of the Playbook will be co-created with participants in the Pilot Action, drawing lessons from it. It will aim to develop agendas for territorial development that unite EU funds, and associated planning efforts from multiple levels of governance (national, regional) and multiple ministries for the Green and Digital transition of the European Green Deal.

Participants in the Pilot Action will be expected to identify, in close collaboration with the JRC and the CoR, the areas they wish to focus the Pilot Action on. These can be socio-economic or policy challenges, specific economic sectors and/or policy areas or instruments. Participants with strong implementation ability and administrative capacity showing evidence of past or ongoing efforts to incorporate some of the features of PRI will be encouraged to take the lead in inspiring and driving forward pilot activities jointly with the JRC.

Activities under the Pilot Action will be tailored to the areas of most interest for each participant. They can include:

- Thematic workshops
- Exchanges of good practices
- In-depth policy reviews with the involvement of external experts
- Tailored analytical insights and support from JRC staff (e.g. resilience dashboards, complexity analysis...)

Each participating region will cover the costs associated to its participation to the Pilot.

The expected duration of the Pilot Action is 1 year.

The PRI Pilot will be designed in a way that it remains fully in line with the EU policy framework, avoiding duplication of activities and measures that already exist under Cohesion Policy, while fostering synergies with other EU policies, in particular the European Green Deal and Horizon Europe. In particular, the pilot is not linked in any way and may not prejudice the European Commission's assessment of the fulfilment criteria for smart specialisation during the 2021-27 programming period.

### **Selection of participants to the PRI Pilot Action**

The CoR, in close collaboration with the European Commission, will prioritise applications from places that stand to offer the most useful lessons for transformative innovation. These include territories that have already experience working across policy portfolios and levels of governance, experience with mobilising several funds for the same objectives in their strategy (e.g. through local missions) or which have experimented with novel approaches (of any kind) that have resulted in measurably high impact and are potentially of European relevance (e.g. for other territories with similar features).

The CoR and the European Commission may also consider favourably applications from territories that have not yet introduced elements of transformative innovation but have a strong ambition to do so. Preference will be given to territories that have made strides in evidence-based policy making as demonstrated by the completion of relevant impact assessments (or other evidence-based studies) and their systematic influence in shaping follow up strategies/policies.

In all cases, territories must have a dedicated governance structure for smart specialisation (or similar) and staff who would be ready to assume additional responsibility in engaging in the pilot. In selecting the territories chosen to participate in the pilot, the CoR and the European Commission will consider Europe's geographic diversity, always keeping in mind the overall purpose of the pilot.

### **The PRI Background report**

#### **What is a PRI background report?**

At the time of submitting their expression of interest to join the PRI Pilot, as part of their candidacy, territories will include a 10-page background report, (i) taking stock of the state of play of their S3 and other strategies for sustainability and socio-economic development, and (ii) offering proposals for the development and expected contributions of PRI.

#### **Who in is charge of producing the PRI report?**

The PRI background report will be produced by the relevant authorities interested to participate to the PRI Pilot and submitted to the Committee of the Regions by the closing date for expressions of interest.

### **Minimum Content of the PRI background report**

- A brief history of regional (and/or, where appropriate, national) policy efforts towards innovation-driven economic, social and environmental sustainability (including digitalisation).
- State of play of their Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027.
- A table with the territory's SWOTs (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) for economic transformation in line with the European Green Deal, justified/documentated with the inclusion of appropriate evidence and references.
- A list of key stakeholders beginning with relevant actors:
  - In wider government (across levels of government and ministerial portfolios)
  - Key producers of goods, services and knowledge (e.g. the top 10 at the region and top 10 at the Member State level);
  - Distinction between regional/domestic markets of relevance to the transition and export markets).
- A proposal for aspects of strategy development and/or implementation that would especially benefit from interregional or international learning.
- Willingness to organise a limited number of workshops involving participants to the PRI Pilot.

The background report will help the JRC and the CoR tailor their efforts to actual needs and would be a key input to the deliberations regarding the choice of appropriate support tools for the development of PRI in the territories.

### **Key dates**

- March 2022 – Call opens
- 25 April 2022 – Call closes
- End of April / early May 2022– Selected participants are announced
- May 2022 – draft PRI Playbook published ahead of the PRI Pilot launch event on 17 May
- November/ December 2022 - Presentation of the status of the PRI to Members of the CoR and other stakeholders
- June 2023 – PRI Pilot ends and Revised PRI Playbook presented to all interested EU regions, Member States and stakeholders

Contact: the CoR SEDEC commission secretariat: [sedec@cor.europa.eu](mailto:sedec@cor.europa.eu)