

23-24 November 2026

Bridging R&I and Higher Education: National and Regional Policies in Practice

ERA Structural Policy Workshop

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Workshop objectives and structure

The proposed focus of the upcoming workshop will be on national and regional pathways to the articulation between Research & Innovation (R&I) and Higher Education (HE): what is already happening, and how can the EU support it.

Starting point

Several Member States, Associated Countries to Horizon Europe and regions have developed reforms, funding schemes or governance arrangements that speak directly to the objectives of the Structural Policy, often building on the existing national framework of institutional support for R&I, or establishing original collaborations across regional and national borders. Some of these initiatives contributed to the development of innovation ecosystems that were presented at the last workshop of this structural policy in June 2026.

The workshop will take stock of what Member States and Associated Countries are implementing (or planning to implement) to improve articulation between R&I and HE policies, what can be learned from them, and how these efforts can be supported also under the next MFF.

Scope

The workshop will look at national and regional experience using concrete examples of reforms that showcase how Member States and Associated Countries are exploiting the potential of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) as system drivers; developing funding schemes that actively reduce fragmentation; testing governance models that bring R&I and HE policy closer together.

These case studies will be grounded in what Member States can point to today. Such an approach aims to a broader and more balanced Member State involvement, inviting all countries – not only the ones implementing the Structural Policy – to bring forward their own experience, whether well-established or still emerging, with the aim to hear from a genuinely diverse set of national and regional contexts.

Considering the ongoing work on the next MFF, discussing and identifying what already works at national and regional level, and where EU support has made and can continue to make a genuine difference is a timely and concrete contribution of this Structural Policy.

Organisational details

Germany and Czech Republic will act as co-hosts for this workshop, together with the core group of the Structural Policy (European Commission, Coimbra Group, EURASHE and YERUN). It might be therefore organised at two venues: the Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate to the EU and/or the Prague House. The workshop will take place on 23 and 24 November 2026.

Structure

A first part of the workshop will focus on the presentations by Member States and Associated Countries of their existing national initiatives.

A second part of the workshop will revolve around a roundtable discussion on lessons learned, areas for improvement and future pathways for national and regional instruments and EU support. The outcome of this discussion will feed directly into recommendations of this Structural Policy.

To identify and shape the case studies, a call for contributions will be launched in early September and circulated to Member States both within the Structural Policy and beyond it through the ERA Forum channels, inviting them to flag relevant national or regional initiatives. This will feed directly into the design of the workshop's agenda and speaker line-up.

Programme

Monday, 23 November Afternoon

- *Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, Avenue de Tervueren 60, 1040, Brussels*

- **13:30 - 14:00 Registration and welcome coffee**

- **14:00 - 14:15: Welcome and setting the scene**
  - Welcome by the co-hosts: Germany and Czech Republic
  - Opening by the European Commission (DG RTD) and the core group of the Structural Policy (Coimbra Group, EURASHE, YERUN)

- **14:15 - 15:30: Session 1 – Case studies' presentations**
  - Presentations by Member States and Associated Countries of concrete national and regional reforms/ funding schemes/ governance models:
    - 1. Case study by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMFTR), the Rhine-Main-Universities (RMU) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)
    - 2. Case study by the Italian Ministry of University and Research
    - 3. Case study by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK)
  - Questions and answers

- **15:30 - 16:00: Coffee break**

- **16:00 - 17:15: Session 2 – Case studies' presentations**
  - Presentations by Member States and Associated Countries of concrete national and regional reforms/ funding schemes/ governance models:
    - 4. Case study by Regieorgaan SIA (Taskforce for Applied Research), the Netherlands
    - 5. Case study by Masaryk university – University Campus Bohunice – Biotechnological and LifeScience Hub
    - 6. Case study by University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences
  - Questions and answers.

- **17:15 - 17:30: Wrap-up of day 1**
  - Key takeaways and preview of Day 2.

- **17:45 - 19:30: Networking cocktail**

Tuesday, 24 November Morning

- Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU, Rue Caroly 15, 1050, Bruxelles

- **08:45 - 09:00: Welcome and recap of Day 1**
  - Common threads from the case studies and set-up of the parallel roundtables

- **09:00 - 09:40: Parallel thematic roundtables**
  - Each roundtable is moderated, with a rapporteur, and open to all participants:
    - Roundtable A – Funding and fragmentation: which national and regional schemes reduce fragmentation between R&I and HE in practice, and how can EU instruments complement them?
    - Roundtable B – Governance and coordination: what arrangements work to bring R&I and HE policy closer across ministries and between national and regional levels?
    - Roundtable C – HEIs and RPOs as system drivers: which enabling conditions, incentives and forms of cooperation allow institutions to play that role, including across regional and national borders?

- **09:40 - 10:10: Reporting back from the roundtables**
  - Rapporteurs present the main findings, followed by reactions from the floor

- **10:10 - 10:30: Coffee break**

- **10:30 - 11:30: Closing plenary session – Future pathways and EU support**
  - Moderated by **Joerg Niehoff**, Deputy Head of Unit of RTD A2 – ERA, Spreading Excellence and Research Careers
    - Plenary discussion on lessons learned, areas for improvement and needs of national and regional instruments from the EU, including under the next MFF: where has EU support made a difference, and where can it do more?

- **11:30 - 11:45: Closing**
  - **Elvira Uyarra**, Professor of Innovation Studies at Alliance Manchester Business School
    - Reflections on key takeaways from the discussion and the actionable recommendations that can be formulated as a result

- **11:45 - 12:00: Conclusions and next steps**
  - Summary of the main messages and next steps towards the recommendations of the Structural Policy
  - Closing remarks by the co-hosts.

Case studies

Excellence Clusters as Ecosystem Anchors at Regional, National and European Level (National policies in Practice: The German Excellence Strategy / A Regional Example: the Rhein-Main Universities (RMU) / A proposal for the European Level: NEXUS)

Country: Germany
Geographical scope: Geographical scope Regional, National and European Level (Germany / Rhine-Main Metropolitan Region / European Level)
Target Groups: Universities, non-university research organisations, hospitals, companies, start-ups, public actors, civil society partners, researchers, doctoral and postdoctoral students.

Submitted by BMFTR, the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, to the EU, and HRK, Germany's Excellence Strategy strengthens cutting-edge research through two funding lines: Universities of Excellence and Clusters of Excellence. Currently, 70 Clusters across 43 universities provide seven-year funding horizons, institutional autonomy, and shared infrastructures.

Regionally, the Rhein-Main Universities (RMU) alliance (Goethe Frankfurt, JGU Mainz, TU Darmstadt) unites 91,000 students and hosts five Clusters of Excellence (RAI, PRISMA++, SCALE, CPI, TAM), having been selected as an Excellence University in October 2026. Nationally and at the European level, the proposed NEXUS instrument aims to build similar bottom-up seven-year research clusters across EU Member States.

Key success factors and challenges

Key success factors and mechanisms:

- Open scientific competition and international peer review combined with seven-year funding horizons and institutional autonomy.
- Time and resources to build shared infrastructures, doctoral environments, cross-faculty governance, and professional support.
- Regional proximity enabling partners to share facilities, build trust, coordinate investments, and attract international talent.

Impact achieved:

- 70 Clusters of Excellence hosted by 43 universities across 13 German federal states.
- Strengthened cooperation between universities, research organisations, hospitals, companies, and start-ups.
- The RMU alliance represents 91,000 students, 16,000 faculty staff, and 1,500 professors across five Clusters of Excellence, recently designated as an Excellence University/Consortium

Contact: BMFTR, Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate to the EU, and HRK.

From the NRRP to an integrated ecosystem for knowledge and innovation: the Italian hub-and-spoke policy package connecting universities, research organisations, and territories

Country: Italy
Geographical scope: National scope (Italy), with the contribution of regional and local authorities participating in the governance of the ecosystems.
Target Groups: Universities and RPOs; young researchers and PhD students; SMEs and large enterprises; start-ups and spin-offs; regional and municipal administrations. Users of Research/Technological Infrastructures (ITEC); students and academic staff involved in TNE initiatives.

Through NRRP M4C2 and M4C1 investments, Italy has built an integrated R&I ecosystem networking universities, public research organisations, businesses, and territories across National Centres, Extended Partnerships, Innovation Ecosystems, and Research/Technological Infrastructures.

The model structures collaboration across four levels (National, Hub foundations/consortia, Spoke universities/RPOs, and enterprises) with mandatory rules: each initiative includes 5 to 10 spokes, allocates at least 40% of resources to Southern Italy, and ensures at least 40% female representation among newly hired staff.

Key success factors and challenges

Success Factors:

- Mandatory regional and gender quotas ensuring territorial cohesion and inclusivity.
- Neutral legal platforms (Hubs) enabling competing universities to cooperate effectively.
- Cascade funding mechanisms opening public R&I funding to private enterprise participation.
- Full integration of advanced education, doctoral training, physical infrastructure, and industrial policy.

Challenges:

- Tight 3-year execution windows and heavy reporting burdens along the Spoke–Hub–Ministry chain.
- Researcher contract expirations mitigated by a €60.7M national plan supporting tenure-track transitions for up to 2,000 researchers.

Impact achieved:

Quantitative level:

- 60 universities, 29 public entities, and 133 businesses across 11 ecosystems at launch. For iNEST: ~400 businesses, ~€40M in cascade calls, ~900 publications, and ~500 researchers hired. For NODES: over 300 businesses reached.
- 33 Research Infrastructures and 10 ITECs funded.

Qualitative level:

- Durable institutional structures (foundations, consortia, shared labs) connecting actors nationwide with performance-based public funding allocation.

Contact: Ciro Franco, on behalf of the Ministry of University and Research (ITALY)

TÜBİTAK 1004 Centre of Excellence Support Programme: "High Technology Platforms" Call "Co-creating Strategic R&D Platforms between Higher Education, Research Infrastructures and Industry"

Country: Turkey
Geographical scope: National - Turkey
Target Groups: The programme targets research universities and their research infrastructures, certified national research infrastructures, TÜBİTAK research centres and institutes, private-sector R&D/Design Centres and public R&D units. Depending on the call, technology-based start-ups can also participate. Researchers, doctoral and postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers benefit from the joint research environment created by the platforms.

Launched in 2018, the TÜBİTAK 1004 Centre of Excellence Support Programme builds high-technology platforms in national priority areas. Its aim is to help national research infrastructures and higher education institutions specialise and develop into centres of excellence through structured cooperation with private-sector R&D/Design Centres and public R&D units.

The programme requires mixed institutional participation under a shared Technology Acquisition Roadmap, a common governance model, an intellectual property framework, and an integrated portfolio of R&D projects (covering Technology Readiness Levels 3–6). This structure ensures that higher education institutions and research infrastructures act as long-term R&I partners rather than providers of isolated research projects.

Key success factors and challenges

Key success Factors:

- Cross-sector collaboration embedded in the funding architecture with a shared roadmap and governance structure.
- Funding a portfolio of connected projects rather than a stand-alone project for up to 48 months with regular progress reporting.
- Continuously open 1001 calls allowing additional research teams to develop complementary projects with existing 1004 platforms.

Challenges:

- Coordinating institutions with different missions, decision-making processes, and incentives.
- Reaching early agreement on intellectual property, responsibilities, and commercialisation pathways.
- Sustaining platforms and moving results beyond TRL 6 after programme funding ends.

Impact achieved:

According to TÜBİTAK's 1004 portal, the programme involves 73 universities, 16 public R&D centres, and 110 private organisations across 265 projects, with 1,642 researchers and 831 fellows. By 2026, six earlier platforms have been completed while support continues in areas like sustainable mobility, battery technologies, smart cities, and health technologies. Notable examples include the 3B-YİP 3D printing platform, SÜİT sustainable cities platform, and BATEG electric vehicle battery platform.

Contact:

Taskforce for Applied Research SIA: Empowering Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences as Integrated Education and Research Institutions

Country: The Netherlands
Geographical scope: National, with regional and European aspects
Target Groups: Research groups, lecturers and professors (lectoren) at Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences, as well as management and leadership.

Taskforce for Applied Research SIA is the Dutch public funding organisation dedicated to strengthening practice-oriented research at Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). Its mission is not only to fund research projects, but also to strengthen the structural connections between higher education, research and professional practice.

Through funding programmes like RAAK (Public, SME, PRO), network activities, capacity-building initiatives, and strategic collaboration, SIA stimulates an integrated approach where research and education mutually reinforce one another. On a thematic level, SIA helps ministries mobilise the potential of UAS by building collaboration around societal challenges, such as the Practical Knowledge for Food and Nature programme (4.6 mln). Furthermore, the 'Fellowships for lecturer-researchers' scheme launched in September 2025 enables lecturers to develop practice-based research skills two days a week alongside teaching duties.

Key success factors and challenges

Key success Factors:

- Dedicated budget for the practice-oriented research of the UAS.
- Collective capacity building across the UAS sector with a long-term perspective.
- A focus on organisational development rather than project acquisition alone.
- Active involvement of institutional leadership and support structures.
- Peer learning and exchange of practices between institutions.

Challenges:

- Fragmentation between research and education functions within institutions.
- Insufficient organisational capacity for sustainable change.
- Large differences in organisational maturity between UAS sector.
- Budget cuts in education impact research capacity and priorities.

Impact achieved:

Taskforce SIA has contributed to a stronger integration of research within Dutch UAS and to a closer connection between higher education and research, securing a firm position within the Dutch public knowledge infrastructure. In 2025, Taskforce SIA had a 100 million euro budget for the development of practice-oriented research of Dutch UAS. In 2026, 45 applications in the 'Fellowships for Lecturer-Researchers' funding scheme were awarded funding across 16 different UAS spanning all educational sectors.

Contact:

Masaryk University - University Campus Bohunice – Biotechnological and LifeScience Hub

Country: Czechia
Geographical scope: Czechia / South Moravia, countrywide, larger region involving Slovakia and Lower Saxony Austria
Target Groups: Faculties of Medicine, Science, Sports Studies, and Pharmacy; researchers, Master's and doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, PIs, industry, and regional innovation ecosystem stakeholders

Established nearly three decades ago, Masaryk University's campus in Brno-Bohunice integrates cutting-edge research, education, clinical practice, and innovation. Bringing together multiple faculties, the MUNI BioPharma Hub, and the Central European Institute of Technology (CEITEC), the campus forms an internationally competitive life sciences hub.

CEITEC serves as both a scientific excellence centre and a test bed for institutional innovation, pioneering modern approaches to scientific governance, research management, and international recruitment. The initiative is supported by national/international grants, an EIB loan, and regional government backing.

Key success factors and challenges

Key success Factors:

- Sustained investment, institutional commitment, and incentive grant schemes to attract international talent.
- Reduced institutional fragmentation through shared infrastructure and joint supervision of Master's and doctoral students.
- Active regional cooperation with the South Moravian Innovation Centre (JIC) and Life Science Transfer Academy for tech transfer.

Challenges:

- Building an international brand and managing expectations regarding academic culture and administrative support.
- Regular international evaluations requiring institutional courage to close underperforming groups.
- Aligning traditional teaching-oriented university budgets with research excellence.

Impact achieved:

CEITEC and the campus have strengthened Masaryk University's international reputation, attracted outstanding researchers and prestigious European grants, reduced fragmentation across institutions and faculties, and promoted technology transfer, entrepreneurship, and regional economic development.

Contact: Karel Kubíček, Vice-dean, SCI MUNI,
karel.kubicek@muni.cz

Young Researchers

Country: Slovenia
Geographical scope: National
Target Groups: Young Researchers, PhD

In Slovenia, the public research and higher education sectors are formally, financially, and administratively distinct despite being of similar size. To bridge this gap, the 'Young Researcher' scheme was introduced in 1985 to shape research careers and transfer knowledge between public research organisations and the economy.

The scheme provides state funding for individuals while writing their doctoral theses, involving them in research projects and teaching. Having evolved from allocation via public calls to programme funding, institutions have independently decided since 2021 how many posts to advertise under stable programme financing.

A study by Udovič et al. (2026) highlights that while the scheme is highly rated, a key challenge is the difficult transition from Young Researcher to postdoctoral status. In response, public institutions are adopting transition measures, and the state has introduced a complementary 2-year national funding scheme for well-rated postdoctoral MSCA applicants who were not awarded EU grants.

Key success factors and challenges

Key success Factors:

- Slovenia is among OECD countries (due to this measure) in third place in terms of the number of people with a PhD relative to the working-age population.
- (ex-) Young researchers are strengthening cooperation between different spheres of the Slovenian NIS system at both the personal and institutional levels.
- A national consensus (among all stakeholders) that the measure of Young Researchers has been one of the most successful measures for strengthening public-public and public-private collaboration and to rejuvenate the human resources in R&D.
- Durability of the instrument.
- Adaptability of the instrument.
- Stability of the instrument.

Challenges:

- The instability of research careers.
- In the past, irregular calls for proposals under the scheme.

Impact achieved:

- Rejuvenation of the workforce
- A greater number of PhD holders
- Strengthening cross-sectoral research
- An increase in interdisciplinary research topics

Contact: