European Institute of Innovation & Technology

A body of the European Union

MAKING INNOVATION HAPPEN FOR A STRONG & RESILIENT EUROPE

RESULTS OF THE EIT STAKEHOLDER FORUM 2020

March 2020, Budapest

FOREWORD

In just over a decade, the EIT has become Europe's largest innovation ecosystem. Our network is made up of over 2 000 partners from business, research, and academia working through eight EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities across 60 Innovation Hubs in Europe and beyond. We are reshaping Europe's innovation landscape and developing smart solutions to challenges like climate change, digital transformation, and health. Our community is fostering economic growth and job creation, delivering cutting-edge products and services, and educating the next generation of innovation leaders. We are Europe's tried, tested, and proven innovation engine.

The EIT is entering a new phase. At this critical juncture, our priorities are clear: agility, impact, and integration. We need to learn from our experiences over the past ten years to sharpen our model and better catalyse innovation across Europe. In a very short timeframe, our community has mobilised EUR 60 million as part of its Crisis Response Initiative to address the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a model for swift action in the future. We need to draw the best talent into our ecosystem and nurture innovation across all of Europe. We need to better connect our 60+ hubs with each other and the communities they serve. Additionally, we must be more demanding in terms of performance management.

Last year, we worked hard to engage with our stakeholders through the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020. Our mission was to get direct feedback from the people most affected by our work. Their input will inform our activities for 2021-2027, help us build stronger partnerships, and sharpen our impact across Europe and beyond. In the following pages, you will be able to learn more about the EIT's evolution, its wide-ranging work with stakeholders and partners, and the valuable feedback provided by stakeholders through the EIT Stakeholder Forum's events and consultations. Happy reading!

Gioia Ghezzi
Chair of the EIT Governing Board

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1. INTRODUCTION

The EIT was created to tackle Europe's biggest societal challenges through innovation. In the last 10 years, we have supported more than 3 200 ventures, helped launch over 1 170 products and services, and enabled start-ups to raise over EUR 3.3 billion in external investment across Europe. During 2014-2019, we channelled about EUR 1 900 million in grants to innovative activities; nearly 1 200 million to innovation, over 360 million to entrepreneurship education, and over 160 million to start-up support. This was accomplished with remarkable efficiency – less than 2% of our budget for 2014-2020 went to the administrative costs of running the EIT.

The EIT is based on a truly unique model. We create Knowledge and Innovation Communities (EIT KICs) for long-term cooperation towards strategic goals and transformation. Our eight EIT KICs work on issues that matter to Europeans: climate change, renewable energy, digital transition, urban mobility, raw materials, smart manufacturing, food, and health. They educate entrepreneurs, nourish ventures through business creation and acceleration services, and empower innovators to find solutions to pressing challenges like COVID-19. Most recently, as part of our Crisis Response Initiative, we channelled EUR 60 million to over 200 vulnerable businesses and rapid response projects in 32 countries to support Europe's recovery.

Our journey has not been without its challenges. To get here, we had to learn some important lessons. First, we learned that our EIT KICs are best able to deliver results through tailored guidance, incentives, and support. Second, we learned that we need to raise the EIT's visibility among research and innovation stakeholders and citizens. We introduced a strong EIT brand identity in 2015, but it remains a challenge for us to communicate our wide-ranging work to various audiences. Third, we realized that more effort needs to go to sharing our results and best practices with stakeholders. This is essential for coordinating our work and building synergies. Lessons like these have helped us improve the EIT model and deliver on our ambitions. If we want to effectively support innovation, we need to be innovative ourselves.

This is a critical moment in the life of the EIT. The EU's new multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 has been adopted. Horizon Europe and the EIT Legislative Package are about to enter into force. In sum, our strategy, priorities, and legal basis for 2021-2027 are in place. To prepare for the delivery of new activities to support innovators across Europe, we have carefully listened to our stakeholders and captured their views, which are summarised in this report. We are committed to becoming more impactful, inclusive, and streamlined. This is the perfect moment for us to take ideas on board and make smart adjustments to better deliver on our mission, which is to raise Europe's innovation capacity.

Martin Kern
Director of the EIT

EIT STAKEHOLDER FORUM 2020: THEMES

Against the backdrop of a new era, the EIT organised its **Stakeholder Forum 2020**[1] with big ambitions. One goal of the Forum was to increase the visibility and awareness of the EIT Community's activities and achievements to date. However, it also provided a platform for stakeholders to contribute to the implementation of the EIT's Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027 and future work more broadly. In July 2019, the European Commission laid out a new Strategic Innovation Agenda (SIA) for the EIT that set out our major priorities for 2021-2027. The following **five themes** were drawn from the SIA to guide the work of the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020:

EIT Regional Innovation Scheme post-2020 – The EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS) was launched in 2014 to help close innovation gaps across Europe's regions. For 2021-2027, the EIT will bolster the EIT RIS, widen its activities, and improve the regional strategies of the EIT KICs. This will be supported by 10-15% of the EIT's overall budget.

New EIT Action to support the innovation capacity of Higher Education Institutions in Europe – The EIT Community has developed a wide range of cutting-edge educational programmes to support entrepreneurial skills and thinking. For 2021-2027, the EIT will launch a new action to boost the innovation capacity of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe, starting with a pilot of approx. EUR 90M in 2021-2027.

EIT Community: Open and Inclusive – The EIT is committed to increasing its openness and transparency. Under Horizon Europe, the EIT will adopt new good governance principles, open up its activities to a wider range of partners, and share more information with stakeholders and the public.

Strategic Synergies between the EIT Community and other EU Programmes & Instruments – For 2021-2027, one of the EIT's priorities will be to build strategic synergies with other EU programmes & instruments. Europe will only recover and innovate if the EU's various tools are working in harmony.

Reinforced Engagement with EU Member States – Under Horizon Europe, the EIT will strengthen its relations with EU Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC). It will strengthen its structured cooperation with MS/AC and communicate more information about its activities and opportunities to national authorities. MS/AC will also advise EIT decision-making and EIT National Contact Points will be established across Europe.

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[1] https://eit.europa.eu/who-we-are/our-stakeholders-partners/eit-stakeholder-forum

EIT STAKEHOLDER FORUM 2020: FORMATS

The EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020, as a platform for stakeholder feedback and engagement, consisted of **three meetings** and **three online consultations**. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these meetings and consultations took place online between September and December 2020. The following three meetings were organised as part of the Forum:

✓ **EIT Open Sessions with European R&I Stakeholders**
  - When: 22-24 September 2020
  - What: Two EIT-organised sessions at the European Research and Innovation Days 2020

✓ **10th Annual EIT Community Meeting with the European Commission Services**
  - When: 11-12 November 2020
  - What: Two days of presentations, discussions, and workshops with colleagues from the European Commission, several EU Agencies, and the EIT KICs

✓ **EIT Member State Configuration Annual Meeting**
  - When: 7 December 2020
  - What: One day of presentations and discussions with representatives from EU Member States, the European Commission, and the EIT KICs

Three online consultations were also launched as part of the Forum to give stakeholders and the public a chance to directly comment on our work. Each was open for over four weeks in EU Survey. They covered the following topics, reflecting three of the five SIA themes mentioned earlier:

✓ **EIT Regional Innovation Scheme post-2020**
✓ **New EIT Action to support the innovation capacity of Higher Education Institutions in Europe**
✓ **EIT Community – Open and Inclusive**

On the next page, you will find an executive summary of the recommendations we received from stakeholders during the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020. This will be followed by a breakdown of each of the Forum's events and consultations. The last section of the report will go into detail about the varied recommendations we received from stakeholders according to the Forum's five guiding themes.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020, we were able to get feedback on the most important areas of our work for 2021-2027: fostering regional development, supporting innovation in higher education, ensuring our community's transparency & openness, building synergies with other EU programmes, and cooperating with EU Member States. Below is a short summary of the feedback we received from our stakeholders in each of these five areas:

EIT Regional Innovation Scheme post-2020 – Stakeholders put forward a number of recommendations for refocusing the EIT RIS, optimising its operations, and better connecting the EIT KICs with local innovation ecosystems. Their suggestions included the following:

- ✓ New EIT activities in areas such as support for start-ups in the proof-of-concept stage, training on fundraising strategies, and synergies with technical universities' acceleration programs.
- ✓ More autonomy for the EIT RIS Hubs and their integration into the core activities of the KICs.
- ✓ Additional information-sharing, tailored activities, and stronger connections with citizens and regional authorities.

New EIT Action to support the innovation capacity of Higher Education Institutions in Europe – Stakeholders were enthusiastic about the EIT's role in supporting innovation in higher education. They offered the following recommendations, among others:

- ✓ Strengthening the EIT's role as mediator between the research & innovation sector and EU programmes & instruments.
- ✓ Better integrating the EIT's educational offerings into university programmes, European guidelines, and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.
- ✓ Leveraging the EIT's added value in project-based learning around real-world challenges.
- ✓ Widening the EIT's activities to a broader range of partners and less innovative universities.

EIT Community: Open and Inclusive – Stakeholders were positive about the clarity of information they receive about how to get involved in the EIT Community's activities and communication with the EIT KICs. However, they made the following suggestions:

- ✓ Sharing more qualitative information about the EIT KICs' results and operations, best practices, success stories, and lessons learned.
- ✓ More transparency and publicity regarding open calls, rules on participation, and selection procedures.
- ✓ Using Horizon Europe as an opportunity to sharpen communication practices.

Strategic Synergies between the EIT Community and other EU Programmes/Instruments – Stakeholders were enthusiastic about the EIT's added value in building synergies with a wide range of EU programmes and instruments. Their suggestions included the following:

- ✓ Creating a two-way innovation pipeline between the EIT and the EIC through information-sharing and project-based cooperation.
- ✓ Involving the EIT KICs in the programming cycle of European Structural and Investment Funds and in the broader alignment of Innovation Policy and Cohesion Policy.
- ✓ Investing more in circular economy-related activities and relations with the European Commission's DGs ENV, RTD, GROW, CLIMA, JRC and EASME.
- ✓ Supporting new education models and competency frameworks, helping SMEs with education & training, and harmonising with Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and the European University Initiative.

Reinforced Engagement with EU Member States – EU Member State representatives made several suggestions about how the EIT can strengthen its cooperation with MS. These included the following:

- ✓ Sharing more information about operations, results, and the EIT KICs with national authorities.
- ✓ Communicating more clearly about how potential partners can get involved at the national level.
- ✓ Investing in EIT National Contact Points, as well as the EIT Member States' Representatives Group.

Europe is facing a wide range of challenges, including post-COVID recovery, climate change, and digitalisation. Innovation will be essential in overcoming them. We will draw on the Stakeholder Forum's recommendations to improve our work to catalyse European innovation. Please consult the following pages to learn more about the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020, its constituent events and consultations, and the detailed recommendations we received from our stakeholders throughout the process. Thank you to our stakeholders for their support and feedback in these important times.

3. EVENTS

Three major EIT events were organised within the framework of the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020. First, the EIT held **Open Sessions with Research & Innovation Stakeholders** during the European Research and Innovation Days 2020 to engage with the trailblazers at the heart of European innovation. Second, the EIT held its **Annual Meeting with the European Commission Services** to strengthen its synergies with one of its key stakeholder networks within the EU. Third, the EIT organised its **Annual Member State Configuration** meeting to build ties with representatives of the EU's national governments and innovation networks.

EIT OPEN SESSIONS WITH RESEARCH & INNOVATION STAKEHOLDERS

The European Research and Innovation Days is the European Commission's annual flagship event for discussing the future of research and innovation in Europe. The second edition of the European R&I Days took place during 22-24 September 2020. The EIT Community participated in the event through the EIT Hub, which hosted a variety of online sessions, and the EIT Booth, which was set up in the event's virtual exhibition space. Over the course of the R&I Days, **over 5000 participants followed sessions linked to the EIT and over 800 participants visited the EIT Booth**. The EIT's participation in the event was widely covered via its communications channels and amplified by the EIT KICs, resulting in over 275 000 impressions.

During the R&I Days, the EIT Hub hosted four open sessions and two workshops. Two of these open sessions formed part of the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020. The first of these focused on the **EIT Regional Innovation Scheme post-2020**, the second dealt with **Supporting the innovation capacity of Higher Education in Europe**. More information about these sessions can be found below.

SESSION ONE: EIT REGIONAL INNOVATION SCHEME POST-2020

Organised on 23 September, this session focused on the key achievements and challenges of the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS) and the new elements introduced by the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027. Launched in 2014, the EIT RIS aims to widen participation in the EIT's activities and strengthen the capacity of Member States and Horizon 2020 Associated Countries with moderate-modest innovation capacity (according to the European Innovation Scoreboard). In total, **348 viewers tuned in for the event with an average play time of 40 minutes, highest among all the EIT's sessions at the R&I Days**.

The following speakers took part in the session: Goncalo Amorim, Executive Director, Building Global Innovators; Maria da Graca Carvalho, Member of the European Parliament; Karina Angelieva, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Republic of Bulgaria; Karel-Herman Haegeman, Scientific Officer, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission; Phoebe Koundouri, Professor, Athens University of Economics and Business; Martin Kern, EIT Director.

'What we need now is to find some mental transformation of our economic, social, and financial system…We need to think big, we need big changes, we need systems innovation. And this is exactly what the EIT Community is bringing…'
- Phoebe Koundouri, Professor, Athens University of Economics and Business

'I support some structural changes…One of them is for the EIT to be outreached, to be connected and understood by all the national and regional actors…as an example for modernising higher education from the point of view of skills. For me, the keywords for the future of the EIT will be skills, innovations, entrepreneurship, start-ups.'
- Karina Angelieva, Deputy Minister of Education and Science, Republic of Bulgaria

SESSION TWO: SUPPORTING THE INNOVATION CAPACITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Organised on 24 September, this session focused on the key elements of the new EIT Action to support the innovation and entrepreneurship capacity of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe, as introduced by the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027. The new action will build on the EIT's work and accomplishments in the field of education support. In total, **332 viewers tuned in for the event with an average play time 26 minutes.**

The following speakers took part in the session: Véronique Perdereau, Professor of Robotics, VP for Europe, Sorbonne University; Patrick Prendergast, Provost of Trinity College Dublin; Carlos Rich, Strategy Officer and Director of International Division, Atlantic Copper; Janusz Janczukowicz, Head of the Centre for Medical Education, Medical University of Lodz; Márton Herczeg, EIT Head of Strategy and Impact.

'There is a great capacity for learning within European system universities…from the success that the KICs have had in implementing the knowledge triangle. Creating a learning space in Europe for innovation and entrepreneurship - that is the new initiative by the EIT for building innovation capacity in higher education institutions.'
- Patrick Prendergast, Provost, Trinity College Dublin

'We should be concentrating always on closing the gap between academia and industry. And activities within the EIT, EIT RawMaterials really help with that.'
- Carlos Rich, Director of the International Division, Atlantic Copper

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Participants in the first session, EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS) post-2020, came to the number of conclusions about the EIT and its regional activities looking forward. They agreed that the EIT RIS had successfully widened participation in the activities of the EIT KICs in countries with modest-moderate innovation performance, but they stressed that there is more work to be done. They highlighted the **opportunity for synergies** with smart specialisation strategies and pockets of excellence across the regions. Additionally, they emphasised the **value of the EIT in the internationalisation of companies**.

Participants in the second session, Supporting the innovation capacity of Higher Education in Europe, also offered feedback on the EIT's ambitions for higher education. They agreed that education is often the missing link between innovation, research, and business. To fill this gap, they stressed that **talent must circulate through industry and academia** in a continuous cycle of development. Additionally, they highlighted that innovation is about moving away from routine expertise. For education, this means **responding to real-world challenges**, emerging policy priorities, and operational processes.

EIT COMMUNITY MEETING WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION SERVICES

The 10th Annual EIT Community Meeting with the European Commission Services, which took place during 11-12 November, consisted of an open plenary and four thematic workshops. Its aim was to inform participants, including representatives from the EIT Community, the European Commission, and various EU Agencies, about the EIT's key achievements within the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 (MFF 2014-2020) and foster discussion about synergies for 2021-2027. The meeting also served as a platform for colleagues to provide their feedback on cooperation with the EIT Community.

PLENARY

On the first day of the Annual Meeting, November 11, the EIT organised an open plenary focused on the EIT's results within MFF 2014-2020, including the EIT Community's response to COVID-19, and the EIT's vision for synergies under the new MFF 2021-2027. **116 participants attended the plenary**, including representatives from the EIT Community, the European Commission, and several EU Agencies.

Several speakers took part in the plenary. Antoaneta Angelova–Krasteva, Director for Innovation, International Cooperation, and Sport at DG EAC, spoke about the European Commission's ambitions for synergies with the EIT. Dr. Carina Benstöm, Research Coordinator at the University Hospital RWTH Aachen, talked about her journey with the EIT-supported '[Mobile Autonomy for Children in end-stage Heart failure](#)' (MACH) Project. Martin Kern, EIT Director, and Márton Herzceg, EIT Head of Strategy and Impact, presented the EIT's accomplishments and ambitious plans for the future.

WORKSHOPS

On the second day of the event, November 12, the EIT held four invitation-only online workshops:

Workshop 1, _EIT-EIC: Working together for Europe's innovators_, gave participants the chance to learn about and discuss EIT-EIC (European Innovation Council) pilot activities for 2020-2021 and additional EIT-EIC synergies for 2021-2027. **18 participants** attended the workshop, which was co-hosted by the EIC, including representatives from the EIT Community, the European Commission, and EU Agencies.

Workshop 2, _Synergies with the European Structural and Investment Funds_, informed participants about the EIT's work under the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme and fostered discussion about how Member States can best cooperate with the EIT KICs and the European Structural and Investment Funds. The workshop was attended by **28 participants** from the EIT Community and the European Commission.

Workshop 3, _European Green Deal: Circular Economy and Resilience_, presented the EIT Community's work to support a European Circular Economy and fostered discussion about future synergies for sustainability. The workshop was attended by **24 participants** from the European Commission and the EIT Community.

Workshop 4, _Re-skilling challenges post-COVID 19_, gave participants the chance to discuss digital education, best practices for Horizon Europe, and the EIT KICs' education-related activities in the age of the pandemic. **17 participants** attended Workshop 4, including representatives from the EIT Community, the European Commission, and EU Agencies.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Participants came to numerous conclusions about the past, present, and future of strategic synergies with the EIT. In the plenary, participants stressed that the EIT can make a real impact with its integrative, cross-sectoral approach. They highlighted that the EIT Community can offer policy advice and create entry points for synergetic cooperation. In Workshop 1, participants really emphasised the important of a **two-way innovation pipeline** between the EIT and the EIC. They also advocated for better **information-sharing** among the EIT KICs in areas like due diligence and evaluation outcomes and stressed the importance of **ecosystem-building** that brings both Knowledge Triangle stakeholders and EU-level actors together.

In Workshop 2, participants expressed their support for involving the EIT KICs in programming and **project-level synergies**. They also called for more **information exchange** between national/regional authorities and the KICs, as well as harmony between KIC- and European Commission-level approaches. In Workshop 3, participants advocated for closer cooperation between the EIT KICs and the European Commission regarding Product Policy, the ETV Programme, the EBA and Resource Efficiency. They also suggested that a **project summary repository** might improve awareness of the EIT Community. In Workshop 4, participants highlighted the importance of developing **new educational models** to fit the digital age, including by drawing on EU-level competency frameworks like EntreComp and DigiComp. They also emphasised the value of **professional entrepreneurial education**, helping SMEs prioritise education and training, and scaling up educational activities for pan-European impact.

The vast majority (91%) of participants, who took part in a survey about the event, found it to be quite useful and nearly all of them **(95%) were ready to recommend next year's meeting** to their colleagues. A large share of respondents (85%) expressed that the plenary had enhanced their knowledge of the EIT's activities and results. Most (81%) felt that they had learned a great deal about the EIT's ambitions for Horizon Europe and priorities for strategic synergies in the future.

Participants in the workshops expressed similar enthusiasm. A large majority (84%) of respondents gave a high rating for the workshops and most (73%) would recommend next year's edition to their colleagues. A large share **(84%) of respondents felt they had learned a lot about EIT's ongoing activities** and most (69% and 79%, respectively) expressed that the workshops enhanced their knowledge of cooperation among the EIT Community and the European Commission, as well as opportunities for synergies.

EIT MEMBER STATE CONFIGURATION MEETING

The EIT Member State Configuration (MSC) is an annual meeting between the EIT and representatives of EU Member States. Since its launch in 2014, the meeting has fostered close cooperation between the EIT, EU Member States, and Associated Countries to Horizon 2020. The 2020 MSC took place on 7 December. Its objectives were to take stock of the EIT Community's achievements during 2014-2020 and outline its plans for the next programming period (2021-2027). It provided a platform for MS representatives to offer their input on the EIT's future and enhanced engagement with EU MS under Horizon Europe.

Several high-level speakers took part in the 2020 MSC. Gioia Ghezzi, Chairwoman of the EIT, introduced the meeting and outlined some of the EIT's priorities. Antoaneta Agelova-Krasteva, Director at DG EAC, provided the European Commission's perspective on the EIT and its future under Horizon Europe. Martin Kern, EIT Director, presented on the EIT's accomplishments and future plans. Additionally, Péter Lakatos, former EIT Digital Master Student and Co-Founder of Entremo, presented on his innovation journey and the support he received from EIT Digital and EIT Health. The rest of the meeting consisted of discussions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Member States offered their feedback on the EIT's work through three Q&A discussions. Firstly, participants expressed their desire to receive **more information** about the EIT's work, especially the KICs and their relations with the EIT HQ. They also highlighted the importance of the **financial sustainability** of the KICs. They stressed the value of self-sustaining innovation communities. Additionally, participants made the case that the EIT and its KICs should create **stronger connections** with national and local ecosystems. They expressed the need for the EIT to focus more on impact and success stories. Finally, participants agreed that the **EIT Member States' Representatives Group**, the EIT's bolstered framework for engaging with MS in 2021-2027, will provide a strong platform for information-sharing and cooperation.

A majority **(80%) of delegates found the event useful**. They were particularly enthusiastic about how much they had learned about the EIT's ambitions for Horizon Europe and the EIT Community's response to COVID-19. Participants were happy about the opportunity to give input on the EIT's future engagement with EU Member States post-2020.

4. ONLINE CONSULTATIONS

Three online consultations were organised within the framework of the EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020. The goal was to give our stakeholders and the public a chance to comment directly on our work and inform our future activities. Run through EU Survey, each consultation was open between 1 October and 15 November 2020. The first consultation covered the **EIT Regional Innovation Scheme post-2020**. The second dealt with the **New EIT Action to support the innovation capacity of Higher Education Institutions in Europe.** The third covered the **EIT Community – Open and Inclusive.** These topics reflect three of the five core themes of the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027.

EIT REGIONAL INNOVATION SCHEME POST-2020

The EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (EIT RIS) was launched in 2014 to close Europe's innovation gaps. The EIT RIS helps local innovators access the EIT Community's activities, creates linkages among key regional innovation actors, and offers tailor-made programmes to support vibrant innovation ecosystems in countries with lower innovation performance. As laid out in the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027, the EIT plans to strengthen the EIT RIS in several ways. The EIT KICs will give the EIT RIS a central role in their multi-annual strategies, dedicate more resources to their regional efforts, and leverage local, regional, and EU-level synergies to boost their impact.

Through the online consultation, respondents were asked to comment on how the EIT RIS could generate more start-ups and innovations, align more closely with national and regional programmes, and increase its impact in local communities. Respondents came from **45 organisations and 18 countries**. Nearly a quarter worked for research institutions, while almost 20% came from higher education and another 20% from the EIT KICs. About 11% of respondents worked in the corporate/industry sector and the remainder in NGOs and Other areas. Of the 18 countries represented, 12 were EIT RIS-eligible countries.[2]

Firstly, respondents suggested **new areas and directions for EIT RIS funding**. Some suggested that more funding should be devoted to supporting those at the very early stages of the innovation process. Others highlighted the importance of linking EIT support with other EU programmes. Some respondents

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[2] EIT RIS-eligible countries:

- EU Member States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain.
- H2020 Associated Countries: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine.

suggested the relaxation of pre-financing requirements, the simplification of rules, and more information about co-financing opportunities with other EU initiatives.

Secondly, respondents identified areas for **improving EIT RIS operations**. Some suggested that the EIT should reorient its operations towards national innovation actors, including policymakers, regulators, and civil society. Others suggested that the RIS Hubs should be given more autonomy and involved more closely in the core activities and networks of the EIT KICs. Some respondents also made suggestions about new indicators for measuring the impact of the EIT RIS, both quantitative and qualitative.

Thirdly, respondents made suggestions for **better connecting the EIT KICs with local ecosystems**. One the one hand, some promoted the importance of awareness-raising and capacity-building with stakeholders across local innovation ecosystems. Others suggested that the EIT RIS should be more closely tailored to the needs of local settings, especially through rigorous research and ecosystem-mapping. Some respondents also stressed the need to better connect the EIT with regional authorities.

More details on stakeholders' recommendations can be found in Section 5, Main Recommendations. The Synopsis Report from the Public Consultation on the future of the EIT RIS is available **HERE**.

NEW ACTION TO SUPPORT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a critical role in the innovation process. While some HEIs are becoming more innovative and integrating into innovation value chains, many are not well-equipped for the innovation age and falling behind leaders in the United States and China. As laid out in the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021-2027, the EIT plans to launch a new action to boost the innovation capacity of HEIs in Europe. The EIT will use the new action to integrate a wider number of HEIs into its ecosystem and launch new activities to support innovative and entrepreneurial education in Europe, including by improving the EIT Label.

Through the online consultation, respondents were asked to comment on how the EIT Community could help European higher education become more innovative and entrepreneurial. Respondents came from **46 organisations and 20 countries**. The majority (60%) worked for higher education, while almost 13% came from the EIT KICs. The remainder worked for research centres, businesses, public institutions, and civil society. Of the 20 countries represented, 18 were EU Member States. Two-thirds of respondents were already members of the EIT Community.

Most respondents agreed with the general argument that HEIs in Europe are struggling in terms of innovation, but they highlighted that the differences between countries. Many highlighted that the EIT has an important role to play in supporting higher education. Some respondents stressed the EIT Community's role as a **purveyor of best practices** and mediator with other EU initiatives. Others suggested that the EIT's

educational offerings should be better **integrated into the programmes of universities** and that the EIT should engage more with universities' technology transfer, incubation, and acceleration activities.

Some respondents expressed that the EIT is well placed to support a more entrepreneurial mindset among HEIs. They suggested that the EIT roll out new programmes across the whole innovation cycle, highlighting the EIT Community's added value in terms of **project-based learning** around real-world challenges. At the same time, respondents pointed out a few areas of improvement. Some suggested that the EIT KICs put more emphasis on **relationship-building with higher education**, especially smaller institutions that find it more difficult to participate. Others suggested that the EIT Community ease its administrative complexity and improve its transparency. Additionally, some felt that the EIT Community could improve its visibility and engage with a wider variety of HEIs, not just the largest institutions.

More details on stakeholders' recommendations can be found in Section 5, Main Recommendations. The Synopsis Report from the Public Consultation on the new EIT Action to Support Higher Education Institutions is available **HERE**.

OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

To boost its impact under Horizon Europe, the EIT Community is seeking to further increase the openness and transparency of its activities and operations. Through the online consultation, respondents were asked to comment on the openness and transparency of the EIT Community and suggest ways of improving it. Respondents came from **50 organisations and 21 countries**. The majority (70%) had already been involved with the EIT Community. Of the 20 countries represented, 16 were EU Member States.

Respondents were quite positive about the clarity of how innovators, entrepreneurs, and students can participate in the EIT Community's activities. They were also positive about general communication with the KICs and the openness of the KICs' strategic agenda revisions. However, respondents expressed some concerns about the openness of the EIT Community to non-partners and the transparency of selection procedures. Respondents advocated for **more visibility** of the EIT Community, more publicity around calls, and better **clarity about rules on participation** in the EIT KICs.

More details on stakeholders' recommendations can be found in Section 5, Main Recommendations. The Synopsis Report from the Public Consultation on EIT Community: Open & Inclusive is available **HERE**.

5. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

The EIT Stakeholder Forum 2020 was a major effort at gathering the views of our various stakeholders and partners. Between September and December 2020, we engaged with European research & innovation stakeholders, colleagues in the European Commission, representatives of EU Member States, and the public. Our aim was to present as much as possible about our wide-ranging work and get meaningful feedback as we enter a new era in the life of the EIT.

Below you can find an overview of the recommendations we received from our stakeholders over the course of the SF 2020. We are committed to shaping our activities for 2021-2027 with these messages in mind. However, it is important to note that these recommendations do not represent policy positions or opinions on the part of the EIT. Thank you to all our stakeholders for their valuable input.

EIT REGIONAL INNOVATION SCHEME (EIT RIS) POST-2020

Refocusing Resources

EIT stakeholders offered numerous ideas about how the EIT RIS could be refocused to better serve local and regional ecosystems in EIT RIS countries. Some suggested new areas for EIT RIS activities, including support for early-stage projects that are at the proof-of-concept stage, support for spin-offs, support for acceleration and incubation programmes with technical universities, helping start-ups with fundraising strategies, and financial incentives for entrepreneurial education. Others emphasised the importance of better integration with other EU programmes and instruments and their resources.

Stakeholders highlighted that EIT RIS countries have particular characteristics, including administrative burdens, low liquidity, and less entrepreneurial thinking, which should be taken into account when developing activities. One such characteristic is the strong presence of multinational corporations (MNCs) and the relative weakness of local companies, which are less able to benefit from higher education institutions that are geared towards supporting MNCs. To help innovators from EIT RIS countries benefit the most from EIT activities, stakeholders proposed the easing of pre-financing requirements, the simplification of rules, and more information about co-financing opportunities with other EU initiatives.

Optimising Operations

Stakeholders made several suggestions on improving operations in EIT RIS countries. Some stakeholders advocated for the EIT to engage more closely with local innovation actors like national authorities, local

governments, civil society, and citizens. Working to shape local policy environments was a recurring topic. Additionally, stakeholders emphasized the value of capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities to catalyse a stronger culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in EIT RIS countries.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of better localisation. One important recommendation made was to give the RIS Hubs more autonomy and involve them more closely in the core activities of the EIT KICs and their networks. Some stakeholders suggested that RIS Hubs should be equipped to develop local strategies and form networks with one another and other hubs within Horizon Europe and Digital Europe. Stakeholders emphasised the value of involving the RIS Hubs in the development of smart specialisation strategies. Additionally, they made suggestions for measuring the impact of the EIT RIS. They highlighted quantitative indicators like start-ups created and investment attracted, as well as qualitative indicators like the influence of supported start-ups in their ecosystems and the formation of innovation clusters.

Connecting Communities

Stakeholders also put forward a number of recommendations about connecting the EIT KICs with local, regional, and EU ecosystems. One central point was the importance of awareness-raising and information-sharing with stakeholders across local innovation ecosystems. Stakeholders suggested that more informational events should be organised about the EIT RIS, more information should be shared through channels like newsletters and websites, and more emphasis should be given to engaging with students in EIT RIS countries. Additionally, stakeholders suggested that networking activities should be strengthened to circulate best practices between EIT RIS countries and countries with higher innovation performance.

Stakeholders also suggested that the EIT RIS should be more closely tailored to the needs of local settings. Some stakeholders emphasised the value of mapping local ecosystems to better target EIT RIS activities. Others highlighted the importance of connecting with citizens and giving them a voice in shaping agendas so that innovations are addressing actual socio-economic challenges. Additionally, stakeholders suggested that the EIT KICs link up with national authorities dealing with regional development, including European Regional Development Fund authorities, as well as European programmes like the ERA Hubs, Digital Innovation Hubs, Clusters, and the European Structural and Investment Funds.

NEW EIT ACTION TO SUPPORT THE INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP CAPACITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIS) IN EUROPE

More Mediation

Overall, stakeholders agreed with the argument that HEIs in Europe are struggling in terms of their capacity for innovation, albeit with significant differences among countries. To support higher education in Europe, stakeholders stressed the EIT Community's role as a mediator between Knowledge Triangle actors and with other EU programmes and instruments. They argued that the EIT Community should look beyond its immediate partners and engage with a broader range of businesses, research centres, educational institutions, students, and citizens. Stakeholders also stressed that the EIT should be working to develop joint programs with external partners and synergise with university alliances.

Stakeholders also argued that the EIT's educational offerings should be better integrated into the programmes of universities. One the one hand, this means that the EIT should engage more with universities' technology transfer offices, incubators and accelerators, alumni, employer organisations, and training providers. It also means aligning the EIT KICs' educational offerings with European guidelines and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. Stakeholders also suggested that there is space for the EIT to support events and fora for linking students, staff, industry, and public authorities.

Project-Based Education

Stakeholders offered several recommendations about how the EIT can support innovation in education. They suggested that the EIT help HEIs assess their innovation needs, connect with ecosystems, and leverage the portfolios of the EIT KICs. Some stakeholders stressed that the EIT should support projects along their entire maturity cycle to allow for academic research to occupy a more central role in their development. They also highlighted the value of innovation-focused learning materials, train-the-trainer activities, and methodologies.

Stakeholders emphasised the EIT Community's added value in developing project-based learning around real-world challenges. This includes applied research projects and enterprise-oriented pilots supported by networks of academic and research centres. At the same time, stakeholders stressed that programmes should remain focused on societies and avoid promoting entrepreneurship for its own sake in isolation.

Clarity & Diversity

Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of clarity and diversity for the EIT's educational actions. Many stakeholders argued that the EIT should open up to a broader range of partners in higher education.

They emphasized diversity in terms of different types of HEIs (public, private, teaching- vs. research-focused), levels of experience among HEIs, and scientific indicators. Stakeholders suggested that the EIT incentivise less innovative universities to join its activities through EIT RIS Hubs, allow such universities to participate in projects as complementary partners, and create room for early-stage projects to thrive.

Stakeholders also suggested that the EIT Community work on boosting its visibility and easing its administrative complexity. This means sharper communication about how to get involved with the EIT Community, the benefits of cooperation for universities, and what the process entails. Stakeholders also emphasized easing the administrative burden of participating in the EIT KICs, application processes and reporting requirements.

EIT COMMUNITY – OPEN AND INCLUSIVE

Stakeholders expressed positive views about the EIT Community's openness and transparency in several areas, especially regarding how to participate in the EIT Community's activities, general communication with the KICs, and the openness of the KICs' strategic agenda revisions. However, stakeholders also suggested several areas of improvement. Some stakeholders recommended that the EIT should share more qualitative information about the EIT KICs' results and operations and present more good practices, success stories, and lessons learned. They also suggested that more information be shared with those outside of the EIT Community.

Overall, stakeholders advocated for greater visibility of the EIT KICs in general - more publicity around calls, more open calls, clearer rules on participation in the EIT KICs' activities, ensuring a more stable operational framework, more transparency in selection processes, and improving the depth of feedback communicated to applicants. Stakeholders pointed to Horizon Europe as an excellent opportunity to develop better practices.

STRATEGIC SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE EIT COMMUNITY AND OTHER EU PROGRAMMES/INITIATIVES

Stakeholders were very positive about the potential for strategic synergies between the EIT Community and the EU's other programmes and instruments. They highlighted the EIT's added value in bringing together national, regional, and EU-level programmes through its integrative, cross-sectoral approach. Some suggested that the EIT Community offer policy advice in areas like Artificial Intelligence and Circular Economy and create points of entry for cooperation between EU programmes and EU Member States. Others emphasised the potential of the EIT Hubs as catalysts for regional cooperation. A large share of

stakeholders suggested that the EIT is well placed to synergise with new EU instruments like Next Generation EU and offer leadership in thematic initiatives like the European Battery Alliance.

European Innovation Council (EIC)

Stakeholders were enthusiastic about the future of EIT-EIC cooperation and offered several suggestions for building strong synergies. Many stakeholders emphasized the importance of creating a two-way innovation pipeline or flow between the two parties. They recommended linking up ventures from the EIC Accelerator to the EIT KICs' research-based innovation projects. To optimise the EIT's side of the pipeline, they suggested better information-sharing between the EIT KICs in terms of due diligence and evaluation outcomes. Additionally, to make the most of EIT-EIC cooperation, stakeholders recommended that the EIT focus even more on its biggest strength – innovation ecosystems. They argued that the EIT KICs should develop stronger links with EU-level actors, as well as national and regional innovation actors.

European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)

Stakeholders identified cooperation with the ESIF as an important priority for the EIT for 2021-2027. In this important moment of change, they highlighted that the EIT Community is well placed to catalyse innovation across regions and for tackling societal challenges. They stressed that the EIT KICs should be involved in the programming cycle and the broader alignment of Innovation Policy and Cohesion Policy. They recommended that more information be provided to national authorities about the KICs' operations and how they can fit into national planning. Additionally, they advocated for more clarity and consistency in terms of the requirements for and timelines of calls to ease cooperation with national actors.

European Green Deal / Circular Economy

Stakeholders drew attention to circular economy-related cooperation as a key contribution of the EIT to support the European Green Deal. They suggested that the EIT KICs' work in this area is given more visibility, in particular the Cross-KIC activity on Circular Economy Collaboration. Additionally, they recommended that the EIT Community should create a project summary repository to increase the ease of learning about and engaging with the EIT KICs. Stakeholders also pointed to the importance of upgrading EIT cooperation with the European Commission's DGs ENV, RTD, GROW, CLIMA, JRC and EASME as a strategic framework to make innovation happen in the transition to a circular economy.

Reskilling and Education

Stakeholders made several recommendations about the EIT Community's work on education, reskilling, and synergies with other EU programmes and instruments. They identified priority areas like Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the European University Initiative. Stakeholders suggested that the

EIT focus on supporting new education models and competency frameworks in line with EU-level initiatives like EntreComp and DigiComp. They emphasized the important of professionalising entrepreneurship education and promoting the spread of digital skills, especially in the age of COVID-19. They also highlighted the importance of helping SMEs prioritise education and training, components which are often missing from their planning and operations.

REINFORCED ENGAGEMENT WITH EU MEMBER STATES

Stakeholders made several suggestions about improving the EIT's relations with EU Member States. Member State representatives recommended that the EIT Community share more information about the operations of the EIT KICs, their performance, and roles with national actors. They suggested that the EIT Community share more information about its links with other European initiatives like the industry alliances. Additionally, they suggested that the EIT KICs communicate more clearly about how potential partners can get involved at the national level, including information about membership fees and conditions, through their websites and other channels.

Many representatives expressed strong support for the forthcoming EIT National Contact Points and their role as conduits of information and cooperation. They also pointed to the EIT Member States' Representatives Group, the EIT's reinforced framework for cooperating with MS, as an important step forward and opportunity for building stronger relations.