



EIT RIS Mid-Term Evaluation Results

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) launched the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) in 2014 to expand regional outreach to modest and moderate innovators, addressing regional disparities in innovation performance across Europe. In the current programming period, eligibility for the scheme is determined by countries' European Innovation Scoreboard scores. Significant progress has been achieved in expanding the geographical reach of EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) between 2021 and 2024, benefiting 17 EU countries, five Horizon Europe Associated Countries, and seven Outermost Regions.

The mid-term evaluation of the EIT RIS (2021–2027) aimed to assess progress, achievements, and the effectiveness of key guiding documents: the EIT RIS Implementation Framework (2022–2027) and the RIS Hubs Minimum Standards and Guiding Principles (2023–2025). The evaluation covered topics such as strategic alignment, collaboration, outreach mechanisms, financial sustainability, integration into EIT KIC operations, and gender mainstreaming. A combination of methods was used, including desk research, interviews, surveys, workshops, and case studies.

Findings indicate that the EIT RIS is making substantial progress towards its objectives. It has effectively strengthened the capacity of innovation enablers and actors, such as business accelerators, incubators, start-ups, scale-ups, SMEs, and educational and research institutions. Results achieved by KICs related to RIS often exceed expectations outlined in Business Plans and Strategic Agendas. The interconnected approach of the EIT RIS has been critical to its effectiveness.

Key Achievements (2021–2023)

- **Partners:** 1 185 new and established partners from RIS-eligible countries.
- **Innovations:** 719 innovations developed and tested; 501 marketed or launched.
- **Start-ups:** 3 361 start-ups and scale-ups supported, including 254 newly established.
- **Education:** 1 074 graduates from educational programmes, with 86 226 participants in non-degree training. Additionally, 46 start-ups were founded by graduates of EIT-labelled master's and PhD programmes.

Role of RIS Hubs

RIS Hubs provide critical on-the-ground presence, facilitating the implementation of RIS activities within KIC structures and fostering relationships with local stakeholders. They coordinate efforts with other RIS Hubs, Co-Location Centres (CLCs), and National Contact Points (NCPs). By 2025, the EIT aims to establish EIT Community Hubs in all eligible countries to act as one-stop shops for information and opportunities. The contribution of the Hubs to RIS KPIs is significant – 61% of RIS-based start-ups have received support in countries with a RIS Hub. Additionally, the Hubs have supported or referred more than half of all participants engaged in non-EIT-labelled education. About 44% of the innovations launched in RIS countries were also supported by the Hubs. However, challenges include inconsistent regional needs monitoring, short-term contracts hindering stability, and variable financial contributions. The intensity and effectiveness of



activities implemented by Hubs also vary. Transformation towards EIT Community RIS Hubs aims to address these issues.

Geographic and Strategic Insights

The capacity-building and networking activities, along with the “place-based” approach of CLCs and RIS Hubs promote closer interactions among Knowledge Triangle (KT) actors. However, the integration of the KT approach is not always geographically balanced. Approximately 50% of results and active partners are from Spain and Italy, which is understandable given their large populations. This also mirrors the relative participation of RIS countries in Horizon Europe, in line with the EIT’s focus on geographical spread rather than balance. By 2027, the EIT RIS aims for 15% of EIT KIC KPI targets to be achieved in RIS regions—a goal already significantly overperformed. In 2021-2023, the aggregated budgetary commitment to EIT RIS activities stood at just under 10.5%. Since 2021, RIS activities have been mandatory in KIC multiannual strategies, with most showing strong KPI-related outcomes despite varying levels of integration.

Challenges and Financial Sustainability

EIT KICs have encountered some unexpected challenges in aligning RIS activities with local strategies and ensuring consistent engagement. Unexpected positive outcomes include enhanced stakeholder engagement, innovative projects, and surpassing performance targets. Financial Sustainability (FS) is a key element of the EIT Legislative Framework, balancing the need to maintain FS for EIT RIS activities while ensuring it doesn’t hinder collaboration with RIS countries and regions. Although not all EIT KICs can provide a detailed breakdown of FS from RIS countries due to challenges in attributing revenues to specific countries (due to international mobility), the data collected suggests that RIS countries contribute significantly to FS through membership fees, the main revenue source for most EIT KICs. However, leveraging European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) remains inconsistent due to numerous, often complex, factors. Additionally, whilst there are some strong examples of attracting funding from IPA III, attracting funding from other sources remains weak. Only two communities, EIT RawMaterials (9%) and EIT Climate-KIC (1%), secured partial funding from alternative sources across 13 countries. Compared to non-RIS countries, the share of investment attracted by KIC-supported start-ups and scale-ups in RIS countries is in the range of 5-13%. Weaker economies and underdeveloped venture capital markets in RIS countries account for these disparities.

Education and Outreach

Stakeholders value the education and capacity-building initiatives, although some view EIT-labelled master’s programmes as costly compared to local alternatives. Better promotion of opportunities is suggested to address this perception. During the evaluation, KICs employed various communication and dissemination strategies to engage target audiences effectively.

EIT Community Cooperation

Efforts to align EIT RIS with EU, national, regional, and local initiatives have seen mixed success. The EIT Community Initiatives Smart Regions Initiative (SRI) Cluster and EIT Jumpstarter programme have played key roles in advancing EIT RIS objectives and driving systemic impact.



While EIT Community Initiative activities show strong collaboration, there is scope for improving scalability, sustainability, and inclusivity. The evolution towards EIT Community Hubs under the Scheme is expected to enhance on-the-ground synergies further.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the EIT RIS achievements and some observed challenges, the recommendations include:

1. establishing an **EIT RIS Panel** to support decision-making and improve information flow, as well as developing an **EIT RIS External Communication Strategy** to promote funding opportunities and streamline communication efforts.
2. **further collaboration with EU decision-makers to assess countries' needs and performance and allocate resources more effectively.**
3. ensuring the EIT, where appropriate, seeks increased participation in national and regional planning activities, engages **EIT Community Hubs to foster EIT Community collaborations and encourages KICs to pursue joint ESIF funding opportunities.**
4. revising Hub reporting to include media and online presence metrics and **leveraging Hub knowledge** to better understand local challenges. Additionally, it is recommended that KICs discuss the **FS metrics** related to EIT RIS.
5. building on current achievements, **support for young entrepreneurs could be enhanced**, including better communication about financing options rather than changes to fee structures, alongside initiatives targeting high-school students.
6. the EIT providing KICs with **top-down, clear guidance** on how to use the possibility of up to **100% co-funding**, the share of **EIT RIS activities that would contribute to the FS**, and **EIT RIS priorities and focus areas.**
7. assessing how the Cross-KIC SRI Cluster could enhance the programme's impact by linking it with a planned accelerator initiative (and vice-versa).