



[FOCUS ARTICLE] The Western Balkans' performance in Horizon Europe Missions

The targeting research [EU Missions](#) are the key novelties set up under Horizon Europe to both address major societal challenges and to stimulate co-creation and cooperation of different actors to mobilize investment in research and innovation and their impact for a greener and more digital Europe.

The EU Missions have transformative nature and are meant to bring research and innovation policy closer to authorities and citizens. The final objective is enabling such authorities and citizens, through new forms of governance and collaboration, to act together on five goals: restoring our oceans, revitalizing our soil, helping to adapt to climate change, making 100 cities climate neutral and saving lives of people affected by cancer.

Establishing this complex governance remains the biggest challenge, and there are ongoing efforts on making Missions work by creating communities of practice and exchanging knowledge on the ongoing efforts in setting up national governance processes.

This is now the third year of running the EU Missions which are delivered through calls for projects. The first set of calls was defined in the Horizon Europe [Work Programme 2021-2022](#). The latest set of such [calls, worth over 600 million EUR](#), has been launched in December 2022 through the Work Programme 2023-2024.

Currently, the Western Balkans are involved mainly in the following EU Mission activities:

The Western Balkans in the City Mission

Three Western Balkans Cities are on the way to becoming Climate Neutral and Smart Cities:

Within the City Mission, a call was launched to select 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030. In addition to the 100 EU cities, 12 cities from Horizon Europe associated countries were also selected. Among them are three cities from the Western Balkans: Elbasan (Albania), Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Podgorica (Montenegro). These cities will develop so-called "Climate City Contracts" with their regional stakeholders, which will include an overall plan for climate neutrality across all sectors such as energy, buildings, waste management and transport, together with relevant investment plans. The City Mission will receive 360 million EUR of Horizon Europe funding covering the period 2021-2023. This is an excellent opportunity for Elbasan, Sarajevo and Podgorica to scale and speed up climate action. Participants in this Mission will receive tailor-made advice and assistance from a dedicated Mission Platform run by [NetZeroCities](#).



To learn about their experience concerning the participation in the EU Mission "Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities" as associated cities, Western Balkans Info Hub conducted two interviews with the mayors of [Sarajevo](#) and [Podgorica](#).

The Western Balkans' involvement in the Ocean and Soil Missions projects

Within the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022, Albania, Montenegro and Serbia are involved in the Ocean Mission projects, while North Macedonia and Serbia participate in the Soil Mission projects.

Western Balkans Info Hub interviewed Pascal Lamy, Chair of the Mission Board of EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters", to [understand the involvement and challenges of the Western Balkans](#). Entities from the Western Balkans are active in Mission Ocean and Waters projects mostly in the Danube and Black Sea basins. More information on these ongoing activities is available [here](#). The European Commission warmly invites the Western Balkans and their regions to join the Ocean and Waters Mission. Additionally, regions from the Western Balkans have the opportunity to be associated with Mission projects funded under Horizon Europe through calls for "associated regions" launched by the projects. They can be financially supported to design plans for the replication of the innovative solutions developed by the projects. Projects funded under the previous work programmes are starting publishing [calls](#) for "associated regions". The new work programme for 2023 has been adopted and [calls](#) are open until 20 September 2023.

The current performance of the Western Balkans in the Missions, together with the steady progress in the participation of all the WBs in the EU Framework Programmes H2020 and now Horizon Europe (with a success rate at or even above the EU average success rate), clearly show that R&I actors in the WBs can further improve their involvement in Horizon Europe projects, including the EU's Missions if the national framework conditions (availability of funding, policy commitment, experience and knowledge of EU Missions) are supportive.

POLICY ANSWERS to support the WB's inclusion in the EU Missions

One of the objectives of the [POLICY ANSWER project](#) is to build bridges between the national and regional priorities and the EU priorities and provide support for the WB's inclusion in the relevant Horizon Europe Missions towards green, digital and resilient economies. As a first step, the current status of the performance of the Western Balkans in the EU Missions has been mapped and the recently published [Policy Brief](#) provides a good "Overview of the Western Balkans Research and Innovation Performance in EU Programmes and Initiatives", including the EU Missions.

As underlined by the WP4 leader, Sanja Damjanovic, in a recent [interview](#), POLICY ANSWERS activities currently focus on creating awareness about EU Missions in each WB economy and facilitating alignment of priorities and funding based on mutual interest. In parallel, the project also supports the WB's involvement in more mission-oriented projects and collaborates actively with relevant European initiatives and networks to facilitate knowledge transfer.

A special [Conference](#) will be organized on 13 September 2023 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The goal of this Conference is to stimulate policy dialogue on how to align the national/regional priorities with the EU priorities, with a focus on the policy-making and policy delivery functions across the three thematic areas - Digital Transformation, Green Deal and Healthcare. Both Missions and European Partnerships will also be addressed at this conference.

Open possibilities with the EU Missions Work Programme 2023-2024

[EU Mission Work Programme 2023-2024 worth over 660 million EUR - currently open calls](#)

The expectations of the new EU Missions Work Programme 2023-2024 are better preparation of local and regional authorities to face climate-related risks, optimizing minimally-invasive diagnostics cancer interventions, restoring at least 25 000 km of free-flowing rivers, providing Climate City Contracts with 100 cities, and rolling out of the Soil Mission living labs.

[EU Mission: Adaptation to Climate Change](#) - three new calls for proposals have been opened on 10 January 2023 with a total budget of 83 million EUR.

[EU Mission: Cancer](#) - four new calls for proposals have been opened for submission on 12 January 2023 with a budget of over 110.7 million EUR.

[EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters](#) - eleven new calls for proposals have been opened for submission on 17 January 2023 with a total budget of over 87.7 million EUR. In addition, two joint calls with other missions with a total budget of 31 million EUR have been launched: [OCEAN-SOIL](#) and [CLIMA-OCEAN-SOIL](#).

[EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities](#) - one new call for proposal has been opened for submission on 10 January 2023 with an indicative budget of 70 million EUR.

[EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe](#) - nine new calls for proposal have been opened for submission on 17 January 2023 with a total budget of 126 million EUR.

In addition to these calls new [Joint calls](#) for proposals were published: between the Cities Mission and the Mission on Adaption to Climate Change (total budget of 40 million EUR - opened for submission on 10 January 2023), between the Mission Climate Adaption, the Mission Ocean and the Missions Soil (total budget of 15 million EUR - opened for submission on 17 January 2023) and between Mission Ocean and Waters and Mission A Soil Deal for Europe (opened for submission on 17 January).

To what extent the Missions could attract additional funding sources in the WBs, beyond Horizon Europe

The level of national funding in R&I in the WBs remains at a rather low level (see [Policy Brief](#)). The Pre-accession IPA funds could provide an important supplementary budgetary source to increase the innovation potential and support the twin green and digital transition in the WBs. To capitalize on the full potential of investments in R&I the complementarities and synergies of IPA funds with national and EU funding programmes for R&Is should be fully exploited.

The [publication](#) by the EC of practical and user-friendly guidance on new opportunities to maximize synergies between Horizon Europe Regional Development Fund programmes (ERDF) could be a very useful base. The document contains legal and implementation details of opportunities for achieving synergies, such as for the Seal of Excellence, European Partnerships, and Teaming for Excellence, including EU Missions.

For more information on news around the EU Missions, [visit the Western Balkans Info Hub](#) within the Partnerships and Missions dedicated session.

Kosovo* (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.)