
Work plan 2023-2025

Action Group 1 «Research and innovation»

Interreg
Alpine Space



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Support EUSALP



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- T** The Action Group 1 overall goal is
1. to develop an effective
 - a. research
 - b. and innovation ecosystem for the Alpine Region (AR).
 2. This will be pursued through
 - a. the capitalisation of the activities and results achieved in the last years
 - b. and through the AlpGov and AlpGov II Project
 - c. as well as through the establishment of connections with relevant projects funded at the European and transnational level.

The AG1, for the next working period 2023-25, would like to:

- (i) promote Research & Innovation actions on strategic topics for the AR, such as Climate Change Adaptation, water reservoirs and digitalisation,
- (ii) give a new impulse to the establishment of the network of Alpine Region Universities and Research Centres,
- (iii) promote networking and collaboration among institutions, in order to facilitate the establishment of joint actions on common challenges and topics within the Alpine Region
 - a. combining in integrated management
 - b. the green and digital 'twin' transitions
 - c. for delivering a sustainable, fair, and competitive future.
- (iv) Specific attention will be given to the inclusion of the EUSALP Youth Council within the AG activities in order to
 - a. promote the prioritisation of topics relevant for Alpine Region youths.
- (v) Finally, the AG1 will capitalise what the EC and Member States have already achieved, by adapting and orientating the existing well-functioning developed mechanisms, instruments and procedural approaches on transnational cooperation on EU level, to the EUSALP perspective.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

The Action Group 1 overall goal is to develop an effective Research & Innovation ecosystem for the Alpine Region (AR). This will be pursued by capitalising on the activities and results achieved in the last years through the AlpGov and AlpGov II Project.

Therefore, in the framework of the Support EUSALP project, the AG1 for the working period 2023-2025, will promote networking activities among key stakeholders as well as foster collaboration with different EUSALP Action Groups.

In particular, all the activities will be addressing actors from university, industry, government-public and civil society with a quadruple helix approach.

The AG1 will address the “New European Innovation Agenda” mainstream, as the European way “to bring down greenhouse gas emissions, to make our economies more digital and to guarantee Europe’s food, energy and raw materials security.”¹ In more detail, the AG1 work will take into the account the Innovation Agenda focus on start-ups and the idea “to develop new technologies to address the most pressing societal challenges, and to bring them on the market.” with a very concrete and effective approach².

The AG1 will stress the relationship between research activities and their impact on the economic system, with a focus on medium and small enterprises, as on the vocational training system (see also the European flagship action “Pact4Skills”³).

These topics will be addressed in coordination with other AGs and in particular with AG2 and AG3.

In accordance with the 5 Common EUSALP Main Topics endorsed by the General Assembly held in 2022, AG1 intends to focus on the following topics: (i) green transition (with a specific focus on climate change effects in the AR, the use of water resources, the deseasonalization and tourist differentiation in mountain areas, the valorisation of biodiversity and agrobiodiversity resources in rural and mountain territories), (ii) digital and energy transition (e.g. coworking and CoworCare and digitalisation in remote and rural areas, digital innovation hubs, facilitation of start-ups and innovative businesses in the Alpine Region) in the field of the energy systems and green technologies supporting cross-sectoral research and innovation collaboration that can increase sustainability and security of energy supply, including acceleration of the development and improvement of advanced clean hydrogen technologies).

This will be pursued through the:

1. Facilitation of the open discussion concerning the establishment shared/common R&I activities, via the involvement of Universities, Research Centres and Innovation Agencies, Clusters, Start UPs and SMEs and public regional governments within the work of the Action Group and the EUSALP Strategy;
2. Establishment of new relationships and promotion of networking activities between the Alpine Region R&I ecosystem actors (public authorities, universities, researchers, students, enterprises, etc.)
3. Supporting the alignment and coordination of R&I initiatives / measures on the topics of the Green and Digital Transition, both at national, regional and transnational level, for example through developing mirror/coordinated actions and related financing tools

¹ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda_en

² Innovation agenda

³ https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/index_en

and, in compliance with the rules of the respective Funds, any possible joint/complementary calls on specific topics of AR relevance and a profound innovation workshop scheme for universities and research entities.

The AG1 intends to involve the Youth Council through a dynamic dialogue through activities consistent with the young people's expressed needs.

2. Composition and sub-groups

The Action Group 1 is led by Lombardy Region, Department for Economic Development
Action Group 1 is composed of **numerous** members coming from **the** Alpine Region States (Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Germany and France) and

from different organisations (Regional Authorities, Universities and Research Centres, and Innovation Centres). Action Group 1 also sees the involvement of **some** observers such as the European Commission - DG Regio, the Interreg Alpine Space Joint Secretariat, the Joint Research Centre, ISCAR, the Lake Constance International University and ANCI Liguria - Anci Piccoli Comuni.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

Stakeholder	Involvement in AG1 activities
Research Societies & University associations	Research societies and university associations (such as the EUA) should be involved in the AG1 activities in order to foster the prioritization of specific topics for the Alpine Region.
Clusters, Start UPs and SMEs	Stakeholders can be involved in the AG1 process with the aim to carry out every day R&I activities targeted to the territory. Considering the objective of creating qualified job opportunities and improving competitiveness, these stakeholders should be considered the final beneficiaries of an effective R&I AR ecosystem.
Research funding organisation	Research funding organisations should be involved as they are often the implementing agencies for research and innovation programmes on national & regional levels and have fast experience in setting up calls etc.
Research organisations	Research organisations should be involved as they can provide specific knowledge and expertise and should be part of sharing the common path in prioritising R&I topics for the Alpine Region.
Universities & Universities of Applied Sciences in the AR	Universities as drivers of change and knowledge should be involved within the AG1 in order to share a common path in the prioritisation of topics for the research activities as well as promoting exchanges within the AR (both for students and researchers) – Alpine Universities coalition
R&I departments at Regional and Ministerial (National) level	R&I Departments should be part of AG1 as they are involved in R&I strategic and decision-making processes and can contribute to the alignment of activities.

4. The role of the Youth Council

Research and innovation actions are essential to promote a sustainable and lively future in AR territories. In order to facilitate strategic R&I, the input and stimuli of young professionals and researchers is necessary. For this reason, the AG1 will support and endorse the involvement of Youth Councillors in the AG processes and strategic meetings, in order to align the priorities expressed by the experts to the ones of the youths of the Alpine Region. Within this working period, the AG1 foresees establishing a direct link with the EUSALP Youth

Council involving them in the organisation of dissemination and engagement moments specifically targeting youths and young researchers operating within the Alpine Region. To consolidate the flagship initiatives aimed at improving research networks, AG1 will evaluate with the YC the realisation of summer schools or workshops for young research professionals (Master and PhD students, and young researchers) on the priorities identified in the WP, exploring possible funding of activities (such as Erasmus+).

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

Within the framework of the 2020-22 Work Plan the Action Group 1, in accordance with the EUSALP Action Plan endorsed by the European Commission and the 48 Regions taking part in the macro-regional strategy, has worked on:

- The establishment of a blueprint for the development of a Research & Innovation Agenda (in line with the 2015 EUSALP Action Plan). The process has been initiated through the Interreg Alpine Space A-RING project which allowed the Action Group 1 to: (i) establish a common framework for discussion, (ii) identify the main common topics within the regional S3 strategies and (iii) explore the possibilities and steps towards the definition of a common R&I agenda; -;
- Improving relationships and networking activities between R&I ecosystem actors. This has been achieved through:
 - The Interreg Alpine Space ARDIA-Net Project, which explored 3 different options for cross-regional funding schemes based on 2 different approaches (from the cooperation between single projects to joint synchronised calls with the establishment of a trans-regional coordination office);
 - The Interreg Alpine Space A-RING project which explored the possibility to set up an Alpine S3 Lab - a common framework for managing authorities at the regional level to discuss common R&I priorities
 - The Alpine Region Universities Network initiative: two online exploratory meetings were organised (one in January and one in June 2022) which saw the active involvement of 26 Universities from 6 Alpine Region States. The meetings saw the organisation of specific working tables, which focused on Horizon Europe and Interreg Alpine Space projects with the aim of exchanging working topics and possible future project ideas.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

The activities that the AG1 will carry out are as follows:

Activity 1: Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and innovation in the Alpine Mountain Areas	
Supporting R&I activities to promote Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in the Alpine Mountain Areas, with emphasis on the economic and social ecosystem	Nowadays, mountain areas are experiencing rapid changes due to the effects that climate change is having on their overall ecosystem. These impacts are currently increasing natural hazards, reducing water and snow resources with consequences and increased vulnerabilities on key community systems, such as agriculture, biodiversity, energy, mobility, tourism, and water . Changes in these territories also strongly affect the lower, mid-hills, and floodplain ecosystems, negatively impacting the water supply, agricultural productivity, tourist, and health sectors. The implementation of innovative Climate Change Adaptation Measures and new solutions can help prepare for and adjust to the irreversible effects of CC, while at the same time leveraging any opportunities that may arise from the climate alteration.
Specific Activities	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CCA measures and new innovative solutions can help prepare for and adjust to the irreversible effects of CC, while at the same time leveraging any opportunities that may arise from the climate alteration. The AG1 will collect and promote the establishment of a portfolio of Nature-Based & good practices and solutions for Mountain Regions for instance, the ones analysed by the Horizon Europe Mission Clima - MountResilience project led by the University of Milan. The solutions and the good practice will be identified through a mapping activity aimed at promoting and capitalising on what has already been achieved by Alpine Regions. A special focus will be devoted to supporting the identification of commonly developed solutions for the diversification of tourism practices in Alpine Territories with Mountain Resorts, in close connection with the Action Group 2 sub-group on tourism. An example of such solutions is already represented by the Interreg Alpine Space TranStat project. Moreover, will be paid special attention to the mapping and knowledge exchange on key community systems such as agriculture, biodiversity and agrobiodiversity resources. Among others, the Next Generation EU AgriTech project will be a source of inspiration. 	<p>1 collection of Nature-Based Solutions and best practices implemented in Mountain Regions,</p> <p>1 Report focusing on the possible solutions and methodologies to be implemented in AR Mountain Territories</p> <p>1 scientific data collection</p>
Activity 2: Embedding	

<p>Paving the way to embedding activities through the S3 comparison and policy networking</p>	<p>The process of embedding aims at facilitating the connection between EUSALP activities and available funding opportunities by enhancing dialogue & exchange of information between Action Groups members and bodies in charge of managing S3 strategies and R&I programs. In this context, AG1 would like to build a policy table to explore and discuss the possible connection among S3 priorities of the Alpine Regions in view of reinforcing the mutual cooperation and paving the way to joint initiatives.</p> <p>This policy table could bring direct and indirect impact on the economic development of the Alpine region, involving actors from the Universities, the Research centres, the companies and the public governments.</p>	
Specific Activities		Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AG1 will operate, in collaboration with EUSALP TSS and within the framework of WP2 of the Interreg Alpine Space Support EUSALP Project, for the establishment of a working table involving policy officers managing S3 strategies. Two roundtables, one per year (2024-2025), will support discussions on topics and objectives on shared S3 issues and on possible joint activities either on the 21-27 programming period or on the future ones, reinforcing cooperation at all levels, especially with local business spheres. 	<p>Organisation of 2 working tables (2023, 2024)</p>	
Activity 3: Alpine Region Universities for a Green Transition		
<p>Improving relationships and networking activities between R&I ecosystem actors through already existing Universities Networks</p>	<p>Universities and Research & Innovation Centers are important agents of territorial development able to facilitate the implementation of sustainable models and to foster the implementation of the EU Green Deal. In order to do so, the enhancement and valorisation of existing a network of universities (formally or not formally established) working in synergy in order to promote research and development actions on AR's specific topics of interest could become a strategic asset for the Alpine Region, while promoting the upskilling and the acquisition of a specific set of skills tailored for concerned territories of current and future students, researchers and academics by means of promoting exchanges, common classes and interdisciplinary courses.</p>	
Specific Activities		Outputs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ambition of this alliance/network of universities is to jointly collaborate in teaching, research and outreach on AR's specific topics of interest, while promoting the upskilling and the acquisition of a specific set of skills tailored for AR territories of current and future students, researchers and academics by means of promoting exchanges, common classes and interdisciplinary courses. It is also quite beneficial to use universities' international and intersectoral openness to establish new forms of collaboration and co-creation with other fields of society, e.g. businesses, intermediates and civil society. • Additionally to the university network, a series of workshops will be deployed within the partnering universities, fostering the knowledge of European research and innovation funding schemes and enabling young researchers and PhD students to form their ideas into projects and competitive proposals. These workshops could have the involvement of representatives of alpine regional governments, of companies and educational and training agencies. This could foster the digital transition and reinforce the innovation through the PA engagement. 	<p>The organisation of 2 presence working tables/workshops (2024, 2025) involving AR Universities and Research Centres</p>
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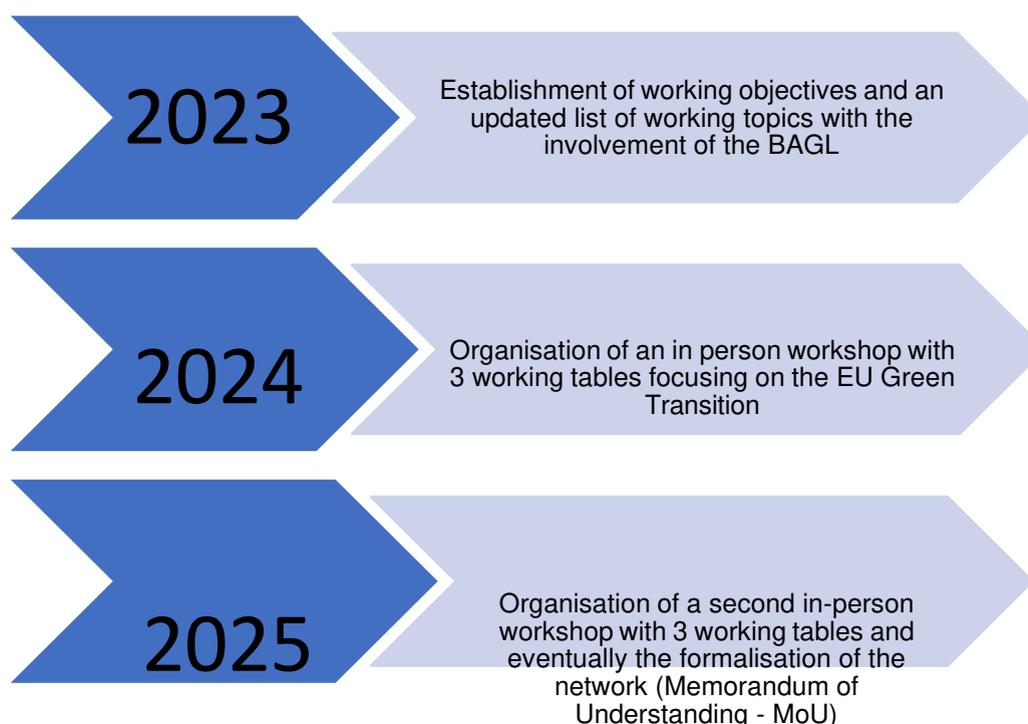
2. Strategic flagship initiatives

Nowadays, the Alpine Region faces a wide range of environmental, social and economic

challenges and need to remain competitive in a constantly changing society. These challenges threaten not only mountain communities at the core of the EUSALP strategy but also those in the lowlands that strongly depend on the ecosystem services that mountains provide. At the same time, there are many opportunities for innovative actions building on the specific characteristics of the Alpine Region – also with the support of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region - EUSALP. The promotion of sustainable growth is at the heart of the new priorities defined for the 2021-27 EU programming period. The European Green Deal is a new growth strategy set out to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, boosting the economy, improving people’s health and quality of life, and valorising and preserving natural assets while leaving no one behind.

On this matter, Universities and Research & Innovation Centers are **essential agents of territorial development** to facilitate the implementation of sustainable models and to foster the implementation of the EU Green Deal. The AG1 would facilitate & promote the establishment of a **framework for universities in the Alpine Region** to foster their cooperation in R&I and education focused on AR’s specific priorities and challenges (such as: hydrogen production and management, circular economy, digitalisation, environmental sciences; energy transition, biodiversity conservation and valorisation; climate change adaptation; water resource management). The network could collaborate with **Action Group 1 – to develop an effective Research & Innovation Ecosystem** and the other EUSALP AGs.

The proposed timeline and milestones are as follows:



The Universities joining the Alpine network to be jointly established could benefit from a unique opportunity of networking and dissemination among the quadruple helix actors (policy- makers, academia, civil society, industry) of the research outcomes and the key challenges that the Alpine Region is facing. A series of workshops will support participating universities in becoming successful stakeholders in the European research and innovation funding frameworks.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

The Action Group 1 will support the following cross cutting initiatives:

Objective	Activity	Objectives
Promoting sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water	Water scarcity significantly impacts the management of both mountain areas and their resources, as well as economic sectors that depend on water. Action Group 1, therefore, wants to articulate the cross-sectoral activities of the next three years by putting in place actions supporting the lead – Action Group 6 - that allow socio-economic development scenarios supporting the stakeholders. In detail, AG1 will promote actions that enable the sectors that drive the mountain economy (such as winter tourism, which is heavily dependent on water resources & agriculture) to find new channels for development and management methods towards an environmental transition due to the effects of climate change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elaborate transition processes to cope with the effects of climate change in ski territories (TranStat project); • develop a portfolio of Nature Based Solutions for Mountain Areas (MountResilience project)
Promoting digitalisation in the Alpine Region	The digital divide is one of the issues that still constitute a significant obstacle to living in mountain areas. It also causes greater instability in work and imposes sacrifices on workers, often affecting the most vulnerable sections of the population. For this reason, AG1 will work with Action Group 5 by promoting actions to support coworking and the growing phenomenon of coworkation in rural areas. The AG1 will also seek to facilitate access to agile work by promoting caregiving services that help young families or elderly relatives dependent on care. AG1 will contribute with the ARPAF CoworCare project (which ends in December 2023) by building an online coworking and caregiving services platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote access to coworking and coworkation spaces in rural, remote Alpine areas through the development of an online database and platform (CoworCare project) • Foster networking and

	<p>and drafting a manual/guideline with best practices of parenting and working matches).</p> <p>Technological innovation and innovation of processes and products are strongly impacting the revitalisation of social life and economy in the mountains and peripheral areas. Digital transformation allows new forms of sustainable businesses to be located in the mountain and peripheral areas, thus contrasting de-population and enriching the economic prospects of the territories. Forms of <u>public-private partnership collaboration, such as the (European) Digital Innovation Hub</u>, which are composed of the relevant actors of the quadruple helix model (university-industry-government-public), allow the experimentation of new technologies, solutions and business models focusing on AI, HPC, CS technologies and capabilities and their deployment also in a strategic sector for the development of the Alpine economy: Manufacturing, Agrobiotech, Energy&Environment. AG1, in close cooperation with AG2 and AG5, will animate and facilitate the dialogue among the Alpine (E)DIH to establish possible forms of collaboration and joint projects.</p>	<p>collaboration among Alpine (E)DIHs to exchange best practices, tools/ infrastructures and use cases.</p>
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COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

The AG1 aims to disseminate information on the main activities carried out in the action group using the existing collaboration with relevant stakeholders in the AR as well as through the link with the world of research. The involvement of aforementioned intends to be involved by the AG1 with the aim of obtaining relevant feedback during eventual meetings and, at the same time, setting up a network for the dissemination of the related results. Furthermore, the intention of AG1 is to disseminate information about the EUSALP strategy, its objectives and working groups as well as the main common priorities within partnerships of relevant projects (i.e. through the ARPAP CoworCare, Interreg Alpine Space TranStat, Horizon Europe MountResilience) and networks such as EUROMONTANA, NEMOR - Network for European Mountain Research, ISCAR and MRI - Mountain Research Initiative.

2. Events

For promotional purposes, the Action 1 Group will actively collaborate with other partners on Priorities and Cross-sectoral activities with workshops, seminars, conferences and public meetings. More specifically, the AG1 will:

- Organise 2 meetings involving the university and public and private network with the aim to provide a forum for discussion & thematic working tables;
- Organise events and workshops focusing on the topic of Climate Change Adaptation in mountain regions with the aim also to engage in new networking and partnership initiative the scientist, Labs, Scientific Institution and Centres in synergy with projects such as for example the Horizon Mission Clima “MountResilience” project and the Interreg Alpine Space “TranStat” project and other relevant ongoing projects.
- Organise specific moments of debate on the topic of digitalisation and coworking in remote and rural areas and on the networking and cooperation among Alpine Region (European) Digital Innovation Hubs.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	0
please describe if possible	
n. cross-border/transnational events	2
AR Universities and public and private bodies Coalition Working Tables	
n. joint policy recommendation	1
Policy Recommendation to promote CCA Actions in Mountain Regions	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme	0
please describe if possible	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes	1
ERASMUS + Projects incubated within the AR Universities Coalition Network	
n. of papers / research works to be published	2
Scientific Papers on CCA in Mountain Regions, MountResilience project	

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