

i3 Instrument

Smart specialisation at work across Europe's regions

What i3 has delivered so far

Since its launch in November 2021, the Interregional Innovation Investments (i3) Instrument has channelled €570 million of ERDF funding into cross-border innovation, with a further €176 million committed for 2025–2027.

i3 was purpose-built to do one thing: turn regional Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) into real, investable, cross-border value chains, at funding rates of up to 70–100% and with at least half of resources reserved for less developed regions.

For the Vanguard Initiative's network of 20+ regions, i3 has been the financial bridge between pilot-scale innovation and market deployment. Across our thematic Pilots, i3-funded projects have mobilised over 100 partner organisations, dozens of regions, and hundreds of SMEs, moving technologies from lab-scale (TRL 4) to market-ready (TRL 6+) in under three years. The four case studies on the following pages show what that looks like in practice.

VANGUARD INITIATIVE AND THE I3 INSTRUMENT

€60+ million

i3 funding secured

12

projects financed

80+

regions involved

The opportunity ahead

The 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework is the moment to build on what i3 has proven. Europe now has a tested mechanism for turning regional specialisation into cross-border industrial capacity; one that reaches regions of various innovation development stages and that delivers at the crucial pre-deployment stage, where competitiveness is realised. Keeping i3 clearly identifiable and adequately resourced in the next budget would let the Commission scale a model that already works, at a moment when industrial resilience and strategic autonomy depend on getting deployment right.

VANGUARD INITIATIVE'S CALL



We call on the European Commission, Parliament and Council to maintain i3 as a distinct, adequately resourced instrument in the 2028–2034 MFF.



VANGUARD INITIATIVE

TURNING I3 FUNDING IN INDUSTRIAL CAPACITY



SMART HEALTH PILOT **InnoMedCatalyst**

Period:2024–2026

14 partners across 12 regions

Strengthening Europe's precision-medicine ecosystem; startups, hospitals and clusters working together to move digital health solutions from prototype to investable business case.

» **Results & connections**

47 startups were guided through two accelerator rounds, most progressing from TRL 4→6, supported by 40+ mentors. Three Demo Days were held across Europe (Bologna, Iași, Madeira) and three regional forums connecting hospitals, startups and healthcare authorities. A matchmaking network is now feeding into Vanguard's own VInnovate funding scheme.



ADVANCED MANUFACTURING FOR ENERGY-RELATED APPLICATIONS PILOT **I3FLOAT**

Period:2025–2028 ·

24 partners across 8 regions

Building the interregional value chain behind Europe's floating offshore wind industry, from foundation technology to component supply.

» **Results & connections**

Regional Innovation Hubs, including 4 clusters, 4 floating platform developers and 11 suppliers, from Basque Country, Andalusia, Flanders and Occitanie/PACA were linked together with 4 Connecting Nodes (Campania, Canary Islands, Varna and Western Pomerania), which are set up for technology replication — it also includes two Open Calls that will bring up to 50 SMEs, many from less developed and outermost regions, into the supply chain.



EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE MANUFACTURING PILOT BATMASS

Period:2023–2025

15 partners across 11 regions

Building the first EU Circular Battery Valley, turning battery by-products and "black mass" back into battery-grade materials.

» Results & connections

Four demonstrators on collection, second life, recycling and remanufacturing connect research organisations (Politecnico di Milano) with industrial battery players (Orano, Verkor) and regional agencies across less developed, transition and developed regions.



3D PRINTING PILOT 3DOP

Period:2023–2025 ·

38 partners across 18 regions

The project improved cost-efficient metal printing, embedded electronics, automated dental manufacturing and factory automation for additive manufacturing.

» Results & connections

More than €42.5 million in follow-on investments (public funding & private investment) were generated as well as new sales linked to project innovations. 2 products are commercialised, alongside several validated industrial demonstrators. More than 60 SMEs are engaged beyond the consortium with applications reaching 10 industrial sectors.

i3 Instrument

One instrument worth keeping.

InnoMedCatalyst, I3FLOAT, BATMASS and 3DOP are just four examples of what the i3 Instrument does best: turning Europe's regional strengths into competitive cross-border value chains that create economic opportunities and jobs where they are most needed.

Our vision

Improve and strengthen I3 instrument to make it fit for purpose in the new MFF.

Cohesion and competitiveness are not conflicting goals: i3 is proof that they are complementary.