

POSITIONING PAPER for VANGUARD INITIATIVE (VI)

Driving European Competitiveness Through Interregional Innovation Collaboration

What We Stand For

The **Vanguard Initiative** is a network of European regions from within and outside the EU, committed to strengthening Europe's industrial leadership and competitiveness through collaborative innovation. Founded on the principles of place-based development and smart specialisation (S3), VI **connects regions that share the ambition to turn innovation into industrial impact**.

Born as an experimental space for the European Commission's smart specialisation strategy, VI has matured into a **Living Lab for Regions**—a collaborative arena where regions, industry, and research actors co-create solutions to Europe's competitiveness and sustainability challenges.

We believe that Europe's green and digital transitions must strengthen regional economies, create quality jobs, and ensure no place is left behind. Our collaboration model links **industry competitiveness, innovation, and diversity**—offering a unique, evidence-based approach that complements other European regional networks. **By acting together, we give regions a stronger voice** in shaping Europe's future under increasingly centralised frameworks such as the NRPPs.

What We Offer

The Vanguard Initiative offers a proven platform for **interregional collaboration**—where regions jointly design, test, and implement innovation strategies.

Through **our innovation platforms, the Vinnovate funding mechanism and our European policy engagement**, VI provides integrated innovation ecosystem support that connects research (RTOs), clusters, and SMEs along market-oriented value chains. Our model focuses on **all forms of innovation**—technological, social, and challenge-driven—and relies on the **willingness to collaborate** as the decisive factor for deepening and widening partnerships.

By capitalizing on our collective experience in S3, VI supports regions in shaping their joint innovation agendas, leveraging European instruments (I3, ECF, Horizon Europe) and developing geo-clusters of regions with similar economic characteristics.

What We Want

At a time when global challenges demand local solutions, VI calls for a renewed European commitment to **place-based innovation**. Real transformation happens regionally—where people's futures are shaped, and where collaboration fuels competitiveness and strategic autonomy. Our ambition is to:

- **Deepen interregional collaboration around Europe's strategic technologies** (digital & deeptech, cleantech, biotech and defencetech) identified through the STEP platform.
- **Embed inter-regional innovation ecosystem collaboration within** upcoming EU frameworks—namely the **European Competitiveness Fund, National and Regional Partnership Plans, and Horizon Europe**—ensuring an integrated toolbox for interregional value chain development.
- **Co-develop the European Value Chain Builder**, a matchmaking and support mechanism to strengthen industrial supply chains, particularly in clean and critical technologies.

VI regions share a sense of urgency: Europe must **collaborate to compete**. By connecting industry, research, and government actors, the Vanguard Initiative will continue to pioneer Europe's transformation towards a sustainable, inclusive, and competitive future.