



ACTIVITY REPORT 2021/2022

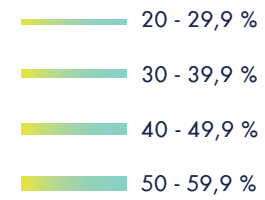
REGIONS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



COVER DATA VISUALISATION

FIGURES

Tertiary Education rate among people of the age group between 25-34. Latest data, at the least 2020.



Population of the country



REGIONS FOR
THE NEXT
GENERATION

A decorative green line graphic that starts on the left, curves downwards and to the right, loops back to the left, and then continues to curve upwards and to the right.



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A EUROPE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION



PRESIDENT'S VISION

The events of the past twelve months have upended all the norms and expectations we take for granted as Europeans. Just as we began to recover from the pandemic, a war erupted at the heart of Europe. Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine threatens the fundamental values we have built our Union on: democracy, freedom, civil and human rights can no longer be guaranteed.

These enormous challenges force us to reimagine cooperation within Europe and among regions. Our support for Ukraine and its citizens, who bravely defend our common values, is an indicator of how committed we are to a future worth living for all Europeans. Europeans are showing solidarity with Ukraine in their daily lives. Like thousands across Europe, my family welcomed a teenager from Ukraine fleeing the war, and learned of the hardships faced at home through no fault of their own.

Our members have also answered the call to action to support Ukraine; sending vital aid, medical supplies and coordinating the welcome of refugees arriving in their communities. The AER itself has had the honour of welcoming eight new Ukrainian members. We will do our utmost to honour the faith they have shown in us to support them on their path towards a peaceful, European future.

As AER, it is our task to contribute to the strengthening of European democracy. We do this because the politicians in our organisation directly represent the citizens of 140 regions. An AER opinion poll in 2021 showed that a majority of Europeans want dialogue on the future of Europe to include neighbours such as Ukraine and the Western Balkans. With around a third of our members based outside the EU, we bring a vital pan-European perspective to the EU debate.

In 2022, I was privileged to represent the AER in the Conference on the Future of Europe. It has been an extraordinary process where the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council, regional and local representatives as well as randomly selected citizens from all over Europe discussed how the EU should develop. 325 proposals were presented unanimously in Strasbourg. The French President Emmanuel Macron and others showed their commitment to work for changes in the EU Treaties and make citizens' proposals come true. It was especially moving for me to see a young Swedish girl from Karlskrona, Thilde Karlsson, one of the citizen representatives, standing next to President Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, at this presentation. This also reminded me of the very successful major conference

on the Sustainable Development Goals that we were able to host with the Grand Est region in Strasbourg last year, where we discussed the perspectives of future generations and adopted our Agenda 2030 Manifesto.

Going forward, we aim to involve more citizen representatives in our network using similar approaches to the one of the Conference for the Future of Europe. In this regard, we have entered into new partnerships with think tanks and are analysing successful models of public participation in policy-making. The successful work of our Task Forces on Democracy and the Conference has paved the way for this.

Perspectives for the youth, the continuation of our democratic culture and freedom for all Europeans are eminently important, but by no means the only challenges that our European polity must face. With economic progress, climate protection and the innovative power of technologies, they have one thing in common: they can only thrive from the bottom up – thanks to regionally rooted citizens, politicians and businesses. That is why, in times of crisis, we must ensure that decision-making powers are not further centralised but, on the contrary, that regions have a strong say in shaping the transformations of our living and

working environments as closely as possible to the citizens. In this way, we can shape a brighter future for Europe's next generation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for our successful work in the past year: my colleagues in our statutory bodies, the tirelessly working Secretariat, all members and Seconded Officers, and our inspiring partners from politics, civil society, academia and business.

– Magnus Berntsson, AER President

CREATING NEW PERSPECTIVES, STANDING UP FOR VALUES

SECRETARY GENERAL'S FOREWORD

If we want to strengthen cohesion in Europe and our way of life, we can achieve more by working together. This is why the AER has made it a priority over the past year to strengthen cohesion within our network and with strategic partners. Our aim is to create new perspectives for the communities in our regions in uncertain times, and to stand up for our common values with strong partnerships.

There are many voices in the European debates. This is particularly true of the circles around the EU, sometimes referred to as the "Brussels bubble". It is natural that institutions and NGOs compete for attention. But this should not blind us to the fact that especially in times of crisis, alliances are more important than individual actions.

This is the path we are taking. With the European Committee of the Regions and fellow associations, we have formed advocacy coalitions and successfully fought for more regional voices in the Conference on the Future of Europe. The partnership approach with others also applies to our support to Ukraine and demanding more subsidiarity in addressing the Covid-19 crisis.

The expression "Brussels bubble" seems increasingly a cliché of the past. At this moment of challenges, internal and external, the EU is becoming more accessible to both citizens and bottom-up networks such as the AER. We

have taken advantage of this to intensify our dialogue with the Institutions. Democracy and citizens' engagement, a successful recovery and sustainable development, as well as societal cohesion are the current priorities of our institutional work. Five Commissioners have contributed keynotes to our events or met with us for bilateral exchanges over the past year and a half. Our profile as a pan-European organisation has also enabled us to contribute to the further development of the EU's neighbourhood policy. On average, the Secretariat is involved in a high-level political meeting more than once a week, and Board Members come up with an even higher number of meetings with top decision-makers for the benefit of us all.

High-level meetings are not the only way we help the AER members, but also through a dense network of expert contacts. This has enabled us to make the EU aware of risks for cross-border projects, and to support our members in word and deed. The webinar series "Unboxing the Multiannual Financial Framework", for example, was attended by several hundreds of interested parties. All events taken together, we have an annual attendance of 2,000. We offer up to 30 training and mutual learning events a year, and have further digitised our member services in the process. A growing share of our knowledge transfer and Bureau activities are made possible through interaction with our EU-funded projects.

Many years of building expertise in our network is bearing fruit. Since this year, AER has been consortium leader of a major EU-wide project on the integration of migrants on an intercultural basis – a priority where many regions want to innovate. AER's highest EU funding to date has been made possible by building on previous projects and the Intercultural Regions Network. Our aim is to create lasting results in the projects, such as toolkits, which will be useful for many years to come. Every year, we support more than 1,000 regional and local stakeholders in the framework of our European projects.

With new offers and flexible approaches, but also successful established services such as the Eurodisney programme for young professionals, we managed to largely prevent a loss of members during the Covid-19 crisis – and were able to welcome nine new ones in the last twelve months. Regional policy challenges are changing and growing all the time, which is why we use interactive formats to brainstorm together, especially in times of hybrid collaboration. This helps us anticipate future needs of our members. Active feedback from them has contributed to launching new working groups and task forces on future-relevant topics such as the bioeconomy, energy transition and sustainable tourism.

Practical support in the increasingly demanding governance on the ground and the common stand for core beliefs beyond party political boundaries are the brackets that hold our community together. They will allow us to successfully shape togetherness in Europe for the citizens despite numerous, at times fundamental changes. If we continue to work together in this spirit, we will succeed in offering the people in our regions perspectives for their individual and collective development in the future.

– Christian Spahr, AER Secretary General



OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD



PRESIDENT
Magnus Berntsson
Västra Götaland (Sweden)



VICE PRESIDENT TREASURER
Christian Debève
Grand Est (France)



VP FOR INNOVATION & ECONOMIC TRANSITION
Kenneth Backgård
Norrbotten (Sweden)



VP FOR DEMOCRACY, GOVERNANCE & VALUES
Nina Bjorby
Västerbotten (Sweden)



VP FOR SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE
Albert Castellanos Maduell
Catalonia (Spain)



VP FOR COHESION, DIGITALISATION & PUBLIC SERVICES
Lilijana Madjar
Zahodna Slovenija (Slovenia)



VP FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION & WIDER EUROPE
Lukas Mandl
Lower Austria (Austria)



VP FOR INCLUSION, DIVERSITY & EQUALITY
Marina Medarić
Primorje-Gorski Kotar (Croatia)



VP FOR INNOVATION & ECONOMIC TRANSITION
Micheál Ó hÉanaigh
Donegal County Council (Ireland)



VP FOR SOCIAL POLICY & PUBLIC HEALTH
Mihai Ritivoiu
Timiș (Romania)



VP FOR INTERREGIONAL & GLOBAL COOPERATION
Jean-Luc Vanraes
Brussels-Capital (Belgium)



VP FOR EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION & SKILLS
Alessandra Zedda
Sardinia (Italy)



VP FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT
Damir Zobenica
Vojvodina (Serbia)

ADJUNCT MEMBERS



PRESIDENT OF EURODYDSEY
Esther Estany
Catalonia (Spain)



PRESIDENT OF THE SUMMER ACADEMY
Rune Fredriksen
Viken (Norway)



ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE AER SUMMER ACADEMY
Jenny Evjen
Viken (Norway)



HONORARY PRESIDENT
Hande Özsan Bozatli
Istanbul (Turkey)

EX OFFICIO MEMBER

MONITORING AND EVALUATION GROUP

CHAIR: Andrew Joy,
Hampshire (United Kingdom)

MEMBER: Ana Verushi,
Korça (Albania)

ELECTION COMMITTEE

CHAIR: Thomas Hartman,
Västerbotten (Sweden)

BRINGING EUROPE CLOSER TO CITIZENS: INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS & ADVOCACY

In 2021-22, as Europe emerged from the Covid-19 crisis, the AER continued to deliver on our Political Priorities for 2020-25. The AER urged European governments and institutions to seize the new opportunities presented by the post-pandemic recovery and the green and digital transition to build a more sustainable, inclusive Europe.

We embraced new ways of engaging with institutional stakeholders and helped members connect and deliver our advocacy work together. By guiding policy-making and through punchy social media messaging and content, AER delivered more effective advocacy with a broad reach. We also invested in strengthening links regionally and globally, undertaking joint advocacy work with other networks of local and regional authorities to deliver on our priorities.

At this critical time, we continued to drive collective action by convening Bureau Task Forces and supporting them to develop joint policy positions and meaningful advocacy work.



From challenges created by the pandemic, to longstanding challenges like climate change, technological innovation and demographic shifts, these positions addressed the major challenges of our time.

And as this report shows, the AER maintained strong relationships with key institutional stakeholders.

We were heavily engaged in the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE), contributing members' ideas and priorities as set by the AER Drafting Group established with responsibility for developing our recommendations for the future of the Union. The AER President, Magnus Berntsson, represented our network in the Plenary Sessions of the Conference and its Working Group on Migration, successfully influencing its final outcome.

Together with the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and other associations of regions and cities in the #Cohesion Alliance, AER continued to support the fundamental role of Cohesion Policy in responding to the Covid-19 crisis, and in accelerating economic and social rejuvenation across all parts of Europe.

Speaking at the high-level debate on Cohesion implementation with the European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, in January 2022, our President made the case for supporting regions to address the challenges brought by Covid-19, and underlined the need to meaningfully involve them in the development and implementation of national recovery plans.

Our participation in the European Summit of Regions and Cities in Marseille and the 8th Cohesion Forum in Brussels, in March 2022, also provided an opportunity to reaffirm the need for a place-based recovery and growth model; one that recognises the strengths and challenges of our territories to make the recovery a reality for all.



We helped AER members make the most of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and NextGenerationEU Package with information sessions on EU funding programmes and relevant services and tools supporting regional authorities to access and manage EU funding. These online sessions were organised within the framework of the SKILLNET Project, funded by the Erasmus+ Programme.

Within the framework of the European Week of Regions and Cities, in October 2021, AER hosted a workshop on 'Engendering Equality across Europe's Regions' where politicians and civil society representatives discussed the barriers preventing women from participating more actively in the political process, and how locally elected politicians can encourage more women to take part in civic life.

Over the last year, working with the Council of Europe remained integral to AER's efforts to promote multi-level governance in the management of diversity and migration, and create truly inclusive and prosperous communities across Europe. In recognition of our work, AER was granted observer status to the Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI). We are also very proud that our nomination of the Chair of the Intercultural Regions Network (IRN) and Minister of Equality and Feminism of the Government of Catalonia, Tània Verge Mestre, to the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Intercultural Integration of Migrants was approved.

Also in partnership with the Council of Europe, in June 2021, we organised the first Intercultural Regions Academy, 'Building Capacity for Intercultural Policies: Competence, Skills, and Knowledge', nurturing the understanding among elected and non-elected regional representatives of intercultural integration as an approach to public policy development.

We are particularly proud that our project application under the European Commission Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), 'EU-Belong: An Intercultural Approach to Migrant Integration in Europe's Regions' was successful. With the goal of promoting the development and implementation of comprehensive intercultural integration strategies at regional level, the project had its kick-off meeting in February 2022.

On the wider international level, 2021-22 has been another year of fruitful engagement with the United Nations. We stepped up our efforts to mobilise regions towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) with an impactful high-level Conference co-hosted with the region of Grand Est (France) in October 2021, to encourage cooperation between all levels of government to make meaningful progress towards achieving the SDGs.



In July 2021, in the context of the 9th Session of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the AER President delivered a speech at the Local and Regional Governments Forum about reducing inequalities and fostering social inclusion and prosperity. AER also collaborated with Regions4 in the organisation of the event 'Building a Sustainable and Resilient Future: Subnational Governments Leading Integrated Approaches for People, Planet, and Prosperity'.



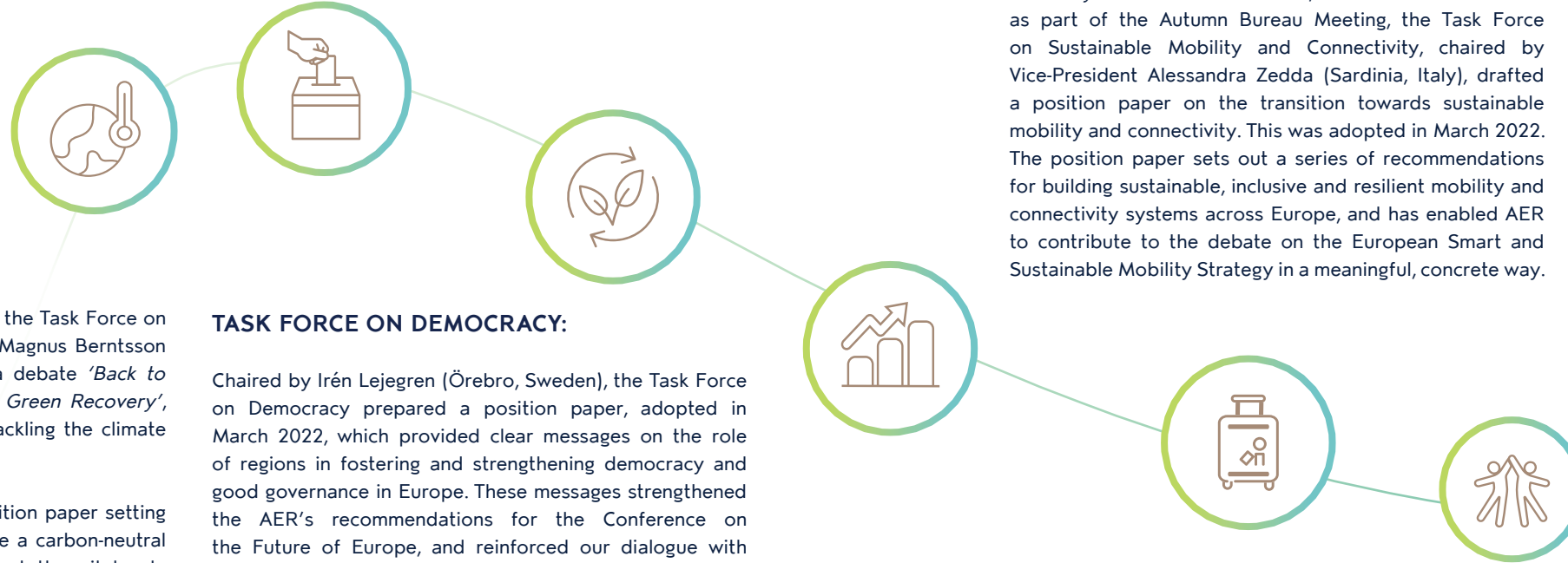
Over the last year, AER continued our engagement with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), taking part in the fifth Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs in April 2022 and the fourth meeting of the Expert Group on Multi-level Governance and Public Investment for Regional Development held in May 2022.

Our successful advocacy towards European and international institutions is built on the work of our Bureau and its Task Forces, the political voice of our members.

As an observer organisation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process, the AER attended COP26 in Glasgow, strengthening our voice in discussions on the global climate agenda.

During the Annual Meeting of the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments in February 2022, our President shared key recommendations towards the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. In view of the 66th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and 10th Session of High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, AER Secretary General, Christian Spahr, presented our messages on gender equality and climate change.

OUR POLITICAL TASK FORCES



TASK FORCE ON CLIMATE:

In June 2021, as part of EU Green Week, the Task Force on Climate, chaired by the AER President, Magnus Berntsson (Västra Götaland, Sweden), organised a debate *'Back to Our Future – Regions leading Europe's Green Recovery'*, which explored the role of regions in tackling the climate crisis and delivering a green recovery.

The Climate Task Force produced a position paper setting out recommendations on how to achieve a carbon-neutral Europe by 2050. This paper highlighted the vital role of regional governments in accelerating climate action and delivering the climate targets. The paper, adopted in December 2021, provided AER's input into the European Commission proposals for the European Green Deal and UN Climate Change Conferences.

In October 2021, in collaboration with the Government of Catalonia and Regions4, the Task Force organised a Workshop on *'Biodiversity for Sustainable Development'* in the framework of the Conference *'Agenda 2030: Transforming Regions, Changing the World'*.

TASK FORCE ON DEMOCRACY:

Chaired by Irén Lejegren (Örebro, Sweden), the Task Force on Democracy prepared a position paper, adopted in March 2022, which provided clear messages on the role of regions in fostering and strengthening democracy and good governance in Europe. These messages strengthened the AER's recommendations for the Conference on the Future of Europe, and reinforced our dialogue with European Commission Vice President for Democracy and Demography, Dubravka Šuica.

As part of the AER Conference *'Agenda 2030: Transforming Regions, Changing the World'*, the Task Force on Democracy organised a workshop called *'The Future is Yours: Inclusive & Participatory Institutions for All'* to discuss the importance of democratic and inclusive governance in achieving the SDGs; exploring the role of local and regional governments in the implementation of SDG 16 and its contribution to the delivery of the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

TASK FORCE ON SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY:

Informed by conclusions from the debate *'The Road to Recovery and Green Transition'*, held in December 2021 as part of the Autumn Bureau Meeting, the Task Force on Sustainable Mobility and Connectivity, chaired by Vice-President Alessandra Zedda (Sardinia, Italy), drafted a position paper on the transition towards sustainable mobility and connectivity. This was adopted in March 2022. The position paper sets out a series of recommendations for building sustainable, inclusive and resilient mobility and connectivity systems across Europe, and has enabled AER to contribute to the debate on the European Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy in a meaningful, concrete way.

TASK FORCE ON JOBS, GROWTH & INVESTMENT:

In March 2022, the Task Force on Jobs, Growth & Investment, led by AER Vice-Presidents Alessandra Zedda (Sardinia, Italy) and Damir Zobenica (Vojvodina, Serbia), convened a Bureau debate on the opportunities and challenges for regional authorities in driving Europe's sustainable economic growth and recovery. The input provided by AER members informed the content of the upcoming Bureau position paper, which was adopted at the 2022 Autumn Bureau meeting in Brussels.

TASK FORCE ON TOURISM OF TOMORROW:

To address the issues of transforming the sector and to fulfil its potential as an engine for inclusive regional growth, Bureau members made the decision to establish a Task Force on Tourism in December 2021. Chaired by AER Vice President for Youth, Culture & Tourism, Mícheál Ó hÉanaigh (Donegal County Council, Ireland), the Task Force held its Bureau debate during the Autumn meeting on challenges and opportunities for the recovery of this vital sector of Europe's economy.

TASK FORCE ON YOUTH:

The AER is also committed to underlining the benefits that creating more opportunities for young people offer to regional recovery and green and digital transition. Recognising the opportunities of the European Year of Youth to identify ways of better supporting youth participation, autonomy and wellbeing at regional level, in March 2022, Bureau members created a Task Force on Youth, chaired by the AER Vice President, Mícheál Ó hÉanaigh. This Task Force convened at the AER Summer Academy in Donegal, Ireland, and adopted a set of recommendations that will inform the Bureau's advocacy work on youth empowerment in 2023.

INNOVATING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: MUTUAL LEARNING

Inventing spaces and building communities for exchange and policy learning

The ways in which communities gather, develop and nurture links has been challenged since 2020. This has been an opportunity to ask new questions on what creates value for regions.

The AER has always at its core provided a space for experience exchange and policy learning. The community the AER creates between its member regions, that have both highly diverse contexts and shared challenges, is an essential element for mutual learning to happen.

IN 2021-2022, WE FOCUSED ON:



1. Identifying needs & expectations

The digitalisation of events challenged us to identify and specify needs together. Opportunities to share and hear from peers in other regions about what they are looking for, coupled with spaces to think together are key to developing activities that create value for regions.

In this context, the AER put together collaborative workshops and guided exchanges with regions to capture and clarify needs. We used design, coaching and co-development to yield better results:

- ⦿ the first online INCLUD-EU workshop provided a space for regional representatives to share their experiences in the field of inclusion—notably the challenges they faced during lockdown—and innovations they witnessed or implemented;
- ⦿ the AER facilitated an online knowledge exchange workshop with the members of the Executive Board, and;
- ⦿ organised an online workshop with its members to capture challenges and needs on the topics of youth, the bioeconomy and culture, and identify practices regions would like to share, and;
- ⦿ facilitated one-on-one meetings to specify needs and expectations, and offer support with regions wishing to take part in the new working groups.



Extensive work was done to better understand the current stakes in AER regions via surveys, emails and one-on-one calls. Based on these discussions with regions, new knowledge transfer activities were developed, along with frameworks for sustained peer-learning.

For instance, a number of members expressed interest in exchanging experiences and learning about regional practices to develop the green hydrogen ecosystem. In May, AER organised a mutual learning meeting entitled 'Green (H)ydrogen—Powering our Regions' Future'. Led by AER Vice President for Sustainability, Environment & Climate, Albert Castellanos (Catalonia, Spain) this was an opportunity to share regional experiences, hear from the European Commission about the state-of-play vis-a-vis hydrogen and the energy transition, learn about funding opportunities, and get technical insights. As a follow-up, collaborations will be initiated within the network, for the development of projects and mutual learning activities.

2. Providing diverse opportunities for knowledge transfer

Continuity and innovation both nurture the vitality of networks. In this context, our European projects offer an opportunity to develop activities and dig deeper into a topic. This in turn creates shared knowledge, which can be captured and further shared. Over the last year, AER put particular emphasis on:

- ◉ the design of events;
- ◉ highlighting exceptional regional practices;
- ◉ integrating transversal topics like citizens' participation, the SDGs, gender equality and social inclusion in thematic activities.

SKILLNET: peer learning on the future of skills

The SKILLNET project provided opportunities for members to share their experiences, build shared knowledge, and identify barriers and enablers to improve regional policies and practices. The webinars also provided insights on EU funding initiatives, as well as highly successful information sessions on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

INCLUD-EU: mutual learning for better inclusion policies and practices

In this project, the AER facilitates structured and meaningful exchanges, to raise awareness, encourage experience-sharing, and build partnerships.

During the second INCLUD-EU workshop, organised in the context of the AER event 'Agenda 2030 Transforming Regions, Changing the World', speakers in the online marketplace presented examples, adding a request for advice for their peers in the room. The consortium then worked on proposals together and shared feedback on the spot with the invited experts.

The workshop included a study visit on inclusive and sustainable urban planning, as well as a session providing insights on how to fight hate speech; highlighted by regions as a very current topic.

The AER also organised a series of webinars around the priorities of the EU Action Plan on Inclusion and Integration. This year, the topics addressed were:

- ◉ cross-sectoral approaches for housing;
- ◉ access to education and training.



CUBES: empowering different sectors of society in the governance of culture

The project created tools and training modules for policymakers, NGOs, public bodies and educators in order to foster grassroots ownership of cultural assets. The objective being to gradually enable the administration of cultural resources within a sustainability framework. A workshop on innovating cultural heritage brought together practitioners, policymakers and experts to discuss current challenges and opportunities for European regions. The training modules are available at cubesproject.eu/login

Knowledge generated is being used for policy learning and advocacy in other AER activities.

SCIROCCO EXCHANGE: knowledge transfer for integrated care systems

In this project, which focused on health systems innovation, we developed a knowledge transfer programme, which was personalised for nine health and social care authorities. The integration of care is fundamentally about improving health outcomes for the population; enabling greater participation of citizens, and better efficacy of health systems. Because it is **at the crossroads of the digital transformation, democracy, wellbeing, demographic change and economic development**, the integration of care systems is relevant in many aspects for regions.

The project led to the publication of different scientific articles, and had a transformative impact at a moment where healthcare is at the forefront of European and global agenda.



3. Developing tools and frameworks for sustained peer-learning

The AER can be described as a knowledge transfer lab. The network has built an expertise in facilitating knowledge transfer activities among peers. Tools and frameworks have been constantly evolving at the AER over more than thirty years, making it a lab for change in the public sector.

AER WORKING GROUPS:

Our Working Groups provide a framework for members to initiate mutual learning activities on any topic relevant to regional policy-making. Working Groups are one of the bottom-up modalities for sustained peer-learning: they can be initiated by any region, provided the objective is in line with the AER values.

Of note in 2022, a Working Group on the Bioeconomy & Skills was set up in Spring by Innlandet (Norway), Värmland (Sweden), Lower Austria (Austria), Gelderland (the Netherlands). It also includes Donegal County Council (Ireland), Eastern Slovenia (Slovenia), Adana (Turkey) and Fribourg (Switzerland). Building on a successful knowledge transfer event on Hydrogen on 17 May 2022, the AER has formally launched a new Working Group on opportunities for regions in the hydrogen economy, under the leadership of the Government of Catalonia.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER TOOLKIT

To make knowledge transfer accessible to as many people as possible, the AER developed a toolkit, which can be used either on an ad-hoc basis or for the preparation of a series of knowledge transfer activities. The toolkit builds on over three decades inventing and exchanging regional experiences in the AER network and the application of the AER expertise in the SCIROCCO Exchange project. You can view the toolkit on the AER website.

NEW METHODOLOGIES: COACHING & CO-DEVELOPMENT

The AER is implementing new methodologies in the facilitation of knowledge transfer, in particular coaching and co-development. Co-development is a professional development approach that focuses on the interactions between participants to promote understanding and better practices. It is a form of community of practice, open, collaborative and appreciative group approach. It is a shared space of reflection and learning based on the experiences of members.

A co-development session was organised in the context of the INCLUD-EU workshop organised by the AER, to allow participants to tap into the expertise of peers. The session generated collective intelligence to solve complex problems in a hands-on way with concrete steps to be implemented right away.

Coaching and co-development will both be used in future project activities as well as in AER working groups.

HOW TO SET UP A WORKING GROUP— IT'S SIMPLE!

1

SHARE YOUR IDEA WITH THE SECRETARIAT:

we will help you specify needs and clarify objectives

2

IDENTIFY PARTNERS AND DRAFT YOUR PROPOSAL:

a region that wishes to set up a Working Group should find at least three other regions to support it

3

SUBMIT PROPOSAL FOR APPROVAL TO AER'S EXECUTIVE BOARD:

the Executive Board checks that the Working Group's objective and activities are in line with AER's values and priorities

4

APPOINT A CHAIR AND DEFINE THE WORK PLAN:

at its first meeting, Working Group members will get to know each other, share expectations, appoint a Chairperson and agree on joint activities



BUILDING COMMUNITIES, CREATING BLUEPRINTS: PROJECTS & FUNDING

THE PROJECT UNIT: OUR STRATEGY, ITS DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

HOW WE WORK

Since its creation in 2016, the AER Project Unit has had a precise strategy: to ensure the work of our European projects make a real difference to our members.

What drives our work is the ambition to deliver services on EU projects and funding that create additional value to the regions. These include developing blueprints, creating engaging content and generating financial support to implement projects. Projects are embedded in all AER's workstreams; developed around the AER's Political Priorities, statutory activities within the Bureau, Working Groups and Programmes.

In EU projects, the AER develops and implements activities meaningful to members, and takes on projects most relevant to regional development. The AER leverages our competence and reputation developed over years in priority areas for members; covering everything from Cohesion policy and inclusion, to vocational skills, healthcare and youth empowerment.

On top of the input the Project Unit gets internally, the voice of each region feeds into the design of projects and other services that meet their specific needs and objectives. This is why we organised initiatives like the 'Project Campfire Session' in December 2021. This was a chance to talk directly with members, suggest project activities where they could get involved, and to hear inputs from them on topics, services and more.

Beyond project development and implementation, the Project Unit provides a broader scope of services to members. This includes gathering information on funding opportunities through the EU funding digest (for EU and non-EU members), training sessions, partner searches and consortium building, and ad-hoc activities upon request. The AER also designs activities open to members outside project consortiums so they too can benefit from new knowledge and networks.

THE AER PROJECT UNIT:
OUR ONE-STOP-SHOP
FOR EU FUNDING
FOR REGIONS!

IMPROVED SERVICES TO MEMBERS

Over the period 2021-2022, the AER delivered additional services to members, namely training sessions accompanied by certifications and publications. This was thanks to the funds coming from the projects in the AER's portfolio, and the resources and expertise of the expanded EU Projects team.

WHO WE ARE

The Project Unit has grown over the past years in both activities and services to members as well as in the team size. From expertise in finance to policy, the projects awarded by the European Commission have allowed the AER to welcome colleagues with cross-sectorial profiles that better serve the needs of our members.

In view of the results of the projects within the organisation's structure, the AER focused on a better integration of the EU funds into the AER budget and finances. The goal is to foster transparency for members and donors about the way EU funds are accessed and managed by the AER.

1

Build a consortium:
for your existing
proposal with the
right partners in our
networks

2

Join a consortium:
let us know your
priorities and we
will share interesting
project opportunities
with you

3

**Build knowledge &
networks:**
join our peer-learning,
matchmaking and
capacity-building events
in-person and online

4

Be our project partner:
from applications to
implementation, AER
runs projects with
members directly

WORKING TOGETHER TO GET THE MOST FROM EU PROJECTS AND EU FUNDS 2021-2027

In the post-pandemic period, the AER adapted the organisation of certain project activities to help them bounce back from the pandemic; notably providing information and training sessions on how to avail of new EU funds within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027.

The period 2021-2022 has been fruitful in terms of project implementation thanks to six EU projects aligned with the AER political priorities, and embedded in its policy and advocacy work. Additionally, it marked the conclusion of four EU projects and the start of a new flagship project led by the AER. Lastly, in this period, the AER established itself as a unique expert partner in mutual learning and knowledge transfer activities; providing opportunities for AER members beyond the project's consortia.

CAPITALISING ON EU PROJECTS AND MAKING THEM SUSTAINABLE FOR THE NETWORK

The EU projects where the AER is involved are designed to bring new content to AER workstreams, create the basis for upcoming initiatives and thematic foci, and develop products that can stay within the network. This is well reflected in four projects that were concluded within the last year: Cubes, SKILLNET, Scirocco Exchange and Y-FED.

CUBES

The CUBES project focused on cultural administration for regional and local authorities, sustainable development, and empowerment of local communities as active players in the management of their cultural resources. Aligned with the UN's 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this project built on the work of the AER Task Forces on Digitalisation and Democracy and the AER Working Group on Culture.

CUBES led to the creation of the following products and initiatives for the AER members:

- ⦿ a digital platform providing free e-training for civil servants and representatives of local communities to gain knowledge on how to administer cultural resources in their territories;
- ⦿ an online workshop co-funded by the project and organised with the AER Working Group on Culture, titled 'Innovation on Cultural Heritage' that included high-level speakers from the EU's Parliament and the Commission, as well as a wide audience of policymakers, practitioners and experts;
- ⦿ a policy paper setting out evidence-based recommendations for sustainable cultural administration, digitalisation and reskilling priorities.

The activities organised within CUBES highlighted the interest of the AER member regions in cultural heritage and sustainable tourism as ways to boost the green and digital transitions, and nurture social cohesion and economic development. This led to the creation of a new Task Force on the Tourism of Tomorrow in December 2021.

Y-FED

The Y-FED project was developed with JEF Europe (Young European Federalists), with the objective of bringing Europe closer to its young citizens. Due to its connection with the EU democratic system, the project was framed in the context of the AER activities for the Conference on the Future of Europe and the AER Task Force on Democracy. The results of the Y-FED project are still available and ready-to-use by the AER and the regions when it comes to information on the citizen's perception of Europe and the new priorities for the next generation. Specifically:

- ⦿ The AER Polling Report 2021 'Expectations of Citizens Across European Regions'. Conducted in seven European countries, this report gathered data on citizens' expectations and priorities on the future of Europe, serving as a source of information for policymakers;
- ⦿ The advocacy training organised by the AER for 24 young Europeans to enhance their knowledge of the European institutions and the Youth Strategy, followed by the implementation of eight advocacy actions in eight European countries promoting the European Youth Goals. The insights and content shared during the training has been compiled in a dedicated handbook available on the AER website, and a video to inspire young people shared by AER.

The work carried out by the AER in the context of Y-FED helped amplify the voice of young people in the context of the Conference of Europe. It also enhanced the knowledge of our network when it comes to citizens participation in policy development. This continued with the organisation of the AER-ENoP Forum on 'New Forms of Democratic Engagement' on 1 and 2 June 2022.

SKILLNET

The AER joined SKILLNET in Spring 2020, at the very start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through online activities, this project allowed the AER to deliver the action plan developed by AER member regions in 2019 in the context of the Working Groups, and inform regions on European funding opportunities. SKILLNET had an important mutual learning component that allowed regions to share experiences, build knowledge, and foster partnerships and collaborations. Notably:

- 18 mutual learning webinars on different aspects of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), with a particular focus on skills for the green and digital transition. The findings of the webinars, as well as information on relevant funding opportunities, are available on a dedicated section of the AER website “Partnerships in Focus”;
- three online training sessions titled ‘*Unboxing the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027*’ which provided in-depth insights to members on different EU funds. The information shared during these training sessions are consolidated in a user-friendly booklet available to members, and;
- an advocacy action at EU level together with the consortium promoting an inclusive approach to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) excellence.

The knowledge developed in the context of the SKILLNET, the deep involvement of regions, and the policy angle that was central to the project played a role in the setting up the new Task Force on Jobs, Growth and Investment.

Armed with this growing expertise on skills, the AER and our network has “the skillset” required to make real impact during the European Year of Skills in 2023.



SCIROCCO EXCHANGE

Led by the Digital Health and Care Division of the Scottish Government, this project drove the activities of the AER Digital Health Network. Scirocco Exchange offered unique opportunities for regions to support the readiness and capacity of health and social care authorities for the adoption and scaling up of integrated care. The main activities and outcomes were:

- the development and implementation of a personalised knowledge transfer programme in nine European regions to prepare them for the transition towards integrated care and an improved system and service design;
- Evolution and innovation of AER’s knowledge transfer methodologies; available for member regions in a toolkit. This offers transferable expertise and tools for regional and local authorities and stakeholders looking to implement knowledge transfer activities tailored to their specific needs and objectives.

AER AS UNIQUE PARTNER FOR MUTUAL LEARNING, KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND MORE

The AER has successfully positioned ourselves as a unique expert partner in coordinating mutual learning and knowledge transfer activities for regions and wider stakeholder groups. Over the last year, AER successfully performed this role in the following projects that finished this year: Scirocco Exchange and SKILLNET, and in ongoing projects INCLUD-EU and EU-BELONG.

The AER-led Scirocco Exchange Work Package on Knowledge Transfer in particular allowed the AER to build on its expertise, to innovate and test the renewed knowledge transfer programme in eight regions; making it applicable in all policy fields and for all typology of organisation.

The result of this work was systematised into a specific publication, the “Knowledge Transfer Toolkit”, available on the AER website.

SCALING-UP THE AER’S ROLE IN EU PROJECTS: OUR BRAND NEW PROJECT, “EU-BELONG”

Projects are more embedded than ever in AER’s statutory activities and bodies, and the AER has proved itself ready and able to take on responsibility for leading ambitious projects.

EU-BELONG is one such example. EU-BELONG is a new project funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union, awarded to AER in 2020. It stems from work carried out within AER’s Intercultural Regions Network (IRN), and provides a framework and funds to scale up the Intercultural Cities Programmes of the Council of Europe at regional level, develop and test intercultural strategies in 11 European regions, and share the model in other regions and with the European institutions.

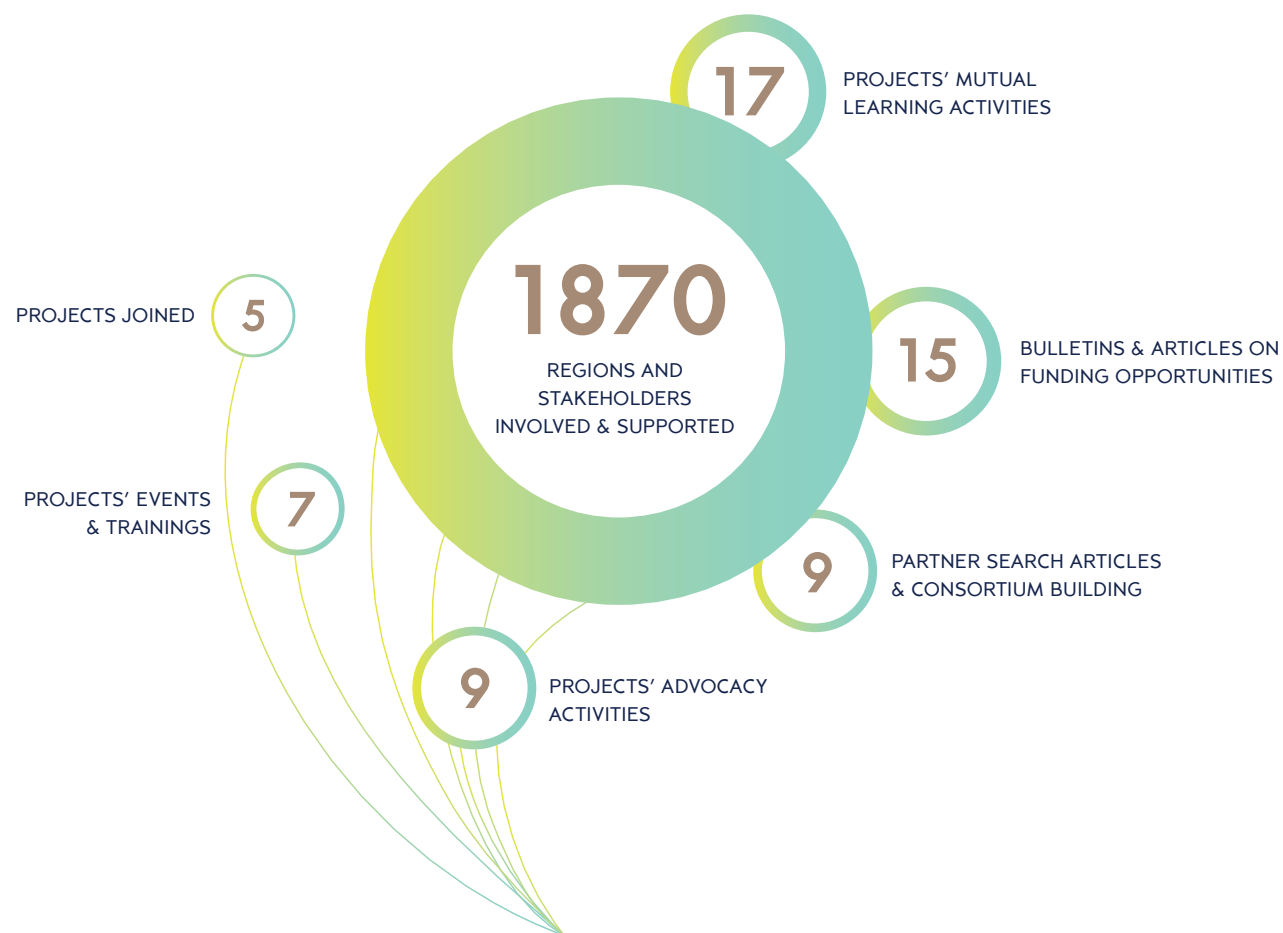
EU-BELONG was officially launched with a kick-off meeting hosted in Brussels on 23 and 24 February 2022. EU-BELONG continues to build on strong ties to another project, INCLUD-EU, where the AER is cooperating with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to promote the exchange of good practices between European regions on the integration of migrants.

The AER has worked closely within the IRN and with the Council of Europe, organising two in-person regional workshops as part of our Agenda 2030 Conference: ‘*Rethinking Services & Raising Awareness on Design in Shaping more Sustainable Services*’ and ‘*Hate Speech—Towards a Comprehensive Approach*’ (Strasbourg, 28-29 October 2021). This was followed by ‘*Inclusion, Creativity and Human Potential*’ (Venice, 14-15 June).

We also organised webinars on ‘*Cross-sectoral Approaches to Inclusive Housing*’ (7 April 2022) and ‘*Access to Quality Education and Training—An Intercultural Approach*’ (24 May 2022).

PROJECT STATISTICS

2021-2022



CUBES

CUBES

Cultural Administration Boosting with the Engagement of Sustainability for Local Communities

- ◉ **Topic:** Governance of culture in a sustainable way
- ◉ **Role:** Partner
- ◉ **Programme:** Erasmus+
- ◉ **Outcome:** Online training programme for local authorities and stakeholders structured in four subjects (project management, community involvement and networking, marketing cultural work, and fundraising for culture) available in six languages (English, Romanian, Portuguese, Greek, Lithuanian and Bosnian) aimed to create and disseminate know-how regarding the sustainable administration of tangible and intangible cultural resources. The online training is available until 2024 (at least) and trainees will receive a certification upon its successful completion. Policy paper on cultural administration and sustainability.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 25,495.00 (100% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** <http://cubesproject.eu/>



SCIROCCO EXCHANGE

Personalised Knowledge Transfer and Access to Tailored Evidence-Based Assets on Integrated Care

- ◉ **Topic:** Integrated Care
- ◉ **Role:** Partner
- ◉ **Partner member regions:** Scottish Government (Lead Partner); and involvement of the AER Digital Health Network
- ◉ **Programme:** EU Health Programme
- ◉ **Outcome:** Personalised Knowledge Transfer Programme provided to nine national and regional healthcare authorities across Europe (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom) with diverse maturity and organisation of integrated care. Knowledge Transfer Toolkit. Knowledge Management Hub: a web tool to act as an integrator and facilitator for accessing personalised learning and support for integrated care.
- ◉ **Budget for AER:** € 123,068.00 (60% EU grant)
- ◉ **Website:** www.sciroccoexchange.eu



Y-FED

Europe is what we make of it

- ⦿ **Topic:** European Youth Goals within the new EU Institutions and the Conference on the Future of Europe
- ⦿ **Role:** Partner
- ⦿ **Programme:** Erasmus+
- ⦿ **Outcome:** Development and testing of a model for a reformed EU closer to its citizens that allows effective implementation of the European Youth Goals through hackathons and a youth simulation event. Advocating for the developed model of the EU at the local, regional, and European level through an advocacy training attended by 24 young activists, the implementation of eight advocacy actions at regional and local levels, and inputs during the AER Bureau Debate on Democracy. Development of a poll on the expectation of citizens across European regions.
- ⦿ **Budget for AER:** € 73,568.00 (85% EU grant)
- ⦿ **Website:** www.linktr.ee/yfed



SKILLNET

Sector Skills Network of VET Centres in Advanced Manufacturing

- ⦿ **Topic:** Skills development, employment, training
- ⦿ **Role:** Partner
- ⦿ **Partner member regions:** Involvement of the AER Working Groups
- ⦿ **Programme:** Erasmus+
- ⦿ **Outcome:** Set-up and animation of four Peer Learning Clubs as virtual spaces of mutual learning on the advanced manufacturing sector, advocacy and policy influencing, work-based learning and standards and “training the trainers”. 18 mutual learning webinars and three information sessions on EU funding opportunities (MFF 2021-2027). Booklet on EU funds within the MFF 2021-2027. Advocacy initiatives at EU level to influence the Vocational Education and Training (VET) agenda.
- ⦿ **Budget for AER:** € 100,718.00 (80% EU grant)
- ⦿ **Website:** www.skillman.eu



INCLUD-EU

Regional and local expertise, exchange and engagement for enhanced social cohesion in Europe

- ⦿ **Topic:** Integration of migrants
- ⦿ **Role:** Partner
- ⦿ **Partner member regions:** Catalonia; and involvement of the IRN members and partners (Council of Europe)
- ⦿ **Programme:** AMIF - Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds
- ⦿ **Outcome:** Mapping of existing integration practices at local and regional level in six European countries (Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Romania, the Netherlands) systematised in thematic briefings. Capacity-building activities for local and regional authorities to facilitate the integration of third-country nationals (six trainings and up to ten study visits). Implementation and assessment of five pilot integration projects. Regional exchanges on integration policy and practices through five workshops and five webinars aimed at fostering a more coherent approach to integration on an EU-wide scale.
- ⦿ **Budget for AER:** € 303,044.35 (90% EU grant)
- ⦿ **Website:** <https://includeu.eu/>



EU-BELONG

An Intercultural Approach to Migrant Integration in Europe's Regions

- ⦿ **Topic:** Intercultural integration strategies for regions
- ⦿ **Role:** Lead Partner
- ⦿ **Partner member regions:** Arad, Donegal County Council, Catalonia, Salzburg, Timis, Västra Götaland; and involvement of the Intercultural Regions Network members and institutional partners (Council of Europe and International Organisation for Migration)
- ⦿ **Programme:** AMIF - Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds
- ⦿ **Outcome:** Capacity building program for public authorities and local stakeholders both online and onsite. Elaboration of a multi-stakeholder model framework for intercultural integration in the regions. Design of a three-year integration strategy in each of the eleven partner regions, and implementation of eleven pilot integration projects. Knowledge sharing and dissemination activities at national and transnational level
- ⦿ **Budget for AER:** € 508,298.15 (90% EU grant)
- ⦿ **Website:** <https://aer.eu/eu-belong/>

DELIVERING FOR, AND EMPOWERING YOUTH: PROGRAMMES

EURODYSSEY—YOUTH MOBILITY BOUNCING BACK FROM THE PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic hit international mobility hard, curtailing mobility opportunities for young people in particular. It is therefore no surprise that AER's Eurodyssey programme faced immense challenges due to stringent sanitary and travel restrictions. However, the programme showed resilience, the participating regions still hosted and sent trainees, and we are proud to say that the programme has started to bounce back.

WHAT IS EURODYSSEY?

Created in 1985, Eurodyssey is the flagship youth regional mobility programme of the Assembly of European Regions, managed entirely at regional level, following one of AER's founding principles: subsidiarity and regional empowerment.

Eurodyssey provides fully-funded traineeships, allowing young people from diverse backgrounds to benefit from a paid traineeship abroad, in various sectors. Over a period of three to seven months, trainees benefit from valuable professional experience in another European region; with language training, professional mentorship, cultural and social activities that boost their job prospects and support personal growth.

Eurodyssey also represents a unique opportunity to boost mutual understanding and intercultural learning, to raise awareness about regional diversity in Europe, and to give a framework for regions to learn from one another and work together. The annual Eurodyssey Forum provides an excellent framework for this. The 2022 Eurodyssey Forum in Limassol (Cyprus) brought together regions around workshops and training sessions, and re-elected the Eurodyssey Steering Committee for the 2021-2023 mandate, with Esther Estany Campos (Catalonia) re-elected as Eurodyssey President.

EURODYSSEY'S KEY FIGURES AND PLAYERS

In 2021-2022, there were 18 participating regions from nine countries in the Eurodyssey programme. These were: Catalonia, Murcia and Valencia (Spain), Brussels-Capital Region and Wallonia (Belgium), Istria, Sibenik-Knin and Varaždin (Croatia), the Union of Cyprus Municipalities (Cyprus), Corsica (France), Adjara (Georgia), Sardinia, Trento and Valle d'Aosta (Italy), Azores and Madeira (Portugal), Hunedoara and Timișoara (Romania).

In 2021, a year where international mobility possibilities began to recover, 142 trainees benefited from the Eurodyssey programme (+12% compared to 2020). The pre-pandemic levels of 300+ trainees haven't been reached yet, however the programme's visibility slightly increased compared to 2020. 287 offers were published, and 276 applications were received. That said, there were still challenges when it came to matching candidates and traineeships; only 42% of applicants could be matched with a traineeship, for various reasons: lingering Covid-19 restrictions across Europe, candidates dropping out and/or not being able to travel, companies giving up on hosting trainees, etc. However, with the toughest years of the pandemic now behind us, and international mobility restrictions finally lifted, we fully expect to see the programme progressively bouncing back.

Despite the challenges, those who could avail of a traineeship had overwhelmingly positive feedback on their Eurodyssey experience when asked in our survey. In terms of the programme's impact on professional development and employment prospects, 75% of respondents to our said the programme matched their professional expectations. 67% found employment within four months of completing their traineeship—this includes those retained by their host company—and 61% said their participation in Eurodyssey was decisive in finding a job.

Eurodyssey is also a platform for strengthening partnerships between member regions. For that reason, 2022 was a special year, with the Eurodyssey Forum making a much-welcome return as a fully in-person event! Hosted by the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and the Department of Labour of the Republic of Cyprus, it took place from the 7-9 of November 2022 in Limassol. This edition focused on international youth mobility in the post-pandemic era, and the priorities set by the European Commission as part of the European Year of Youth, alongside capacity-building workshops for the regions, and joint work on the development of the programme.

WELCOME TO ÚDARÁS NA GAELTACHTA:

In 2022, following the Summer Academy, Eurodyssey welcomed their very first Irish members into the programme: Údarás na Gaeltachta, Ireland's regional authority responsible for the development of the Irish-speaking (Gaeltacht) counties. The next few months should bring unique traineeship opportunities in Ireland, while the youth of the Gaeltacht will benefit from the programme in Eurodyssey regions across Europe;

FUNDING EURODYSSSEY:

For several years now, the European Social Fund (ESF) has been allowing a few regions to finance their Eurodyssey programme. Following up from the open information session organised in 2021, and on the presentation of the ALMA / ESF+ initiative during the 2021 Forum, AER will work hand-in-hand with the regions to develop and explore further funding opportunities for Eurodyssey.



AER SUMMER ACADEMY 2022: A EUROPE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

From 29 August to 1 September 2022, we welcomed back our biennial Youth Summit, the AER Summer Academy, co-hosted by Donegal County Council and Údarás na Gaeltachta in Ireland's North-West.

The 2022 edition, titled “A Europe for the Next Generation”, brought together over 150 participants from 19 regions across Europe for a week of debate and discussion on how to tackle the major challenges for Europe's future, and share ideas for empowering young people in decision-making by connecting them with policymakers directly.

A HIGH-LEVEL, FORWARD-LOOKING EDITION, CELEBRATING THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH

As the Covid-19 pandemic had prevented AER from organising a Summer Academy since 2019, the 2022 edition aimed high and delivered an ambitious programme of in-person events. The European Commission designated 2022 the European Year of Youth, and in view of AER's long-standing commitment to bringing a youth dimension to its activities, the Summer Academy had to lead by example.

Two plenary sessions debated youth participation in regional politics, featuring high-level speakers from across Europe, which took place at the new Atlantic Technological University (ATU) campus in Letterkenny, Donegal. The latter

included Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Joe McHugh T.D., Chair of the Irish Parliamentary Committee on European Affairs, and Anne Karjalainen, Chair of the European Committee of the Regions' Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture. We were also exceptionally privileged to welcome Laurențiu-Mihai Ștefan, Romanian ambassador to Ireland, who met with youth delegates and policymakers from Maramures and Arad and our wider membership at the ATU.

Other high-level speakers and advocacy experts in the youth field were Maria Walsh, Member of the European Parliament representing Ireland's Midlands-North-West constituency, and members of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, and European Youth Card Association.

A total of eight workshops, facilitated by AER member regions, focused on regional-led initiatives, addressing challenges and opportunities for Europe's next generation. These workshops covered topics ranging from rural entrepreneurship and the bioeconomy, to the future of skills, tourism and remote working, democracy in wider Europe and regional support for Ukrainian refugees. An additional information session was dedicated to AER's regional youth mobility programme, Eurodyssey.

We would like to extend a special word of thanks to Dr. Orla Flynn, President of the new multi-campus Atlantic Technological University (ATU) for hosting the Summer Academy at ATU Letterkenny, and moderating our highly engaging high-level opening plenary debate.

SHOWCASING REGIONAL INITIATIVES AND IRISH CULTURE

Field trips and cultural activities complemented the programme, to provide the attendees with concrete ‘case studies’, following on from the workshops.

A visit to Glenveagh National Park highlighted the role of local and regional authorities in enhancing biodiversity and developing sustainable tourism; well-aligned with the Working Group workshop addressing bioeconomy and the tourism of tomorrow that had taken place earlier in the programme.

Through a guided tour of the “gteic” innovation hub in Gaith Dobhair, a unique initiative led by Údarás na Gaeltachta, delegates learned about achievements in rural innovation driven by these unique entrepreneurial ecosystems. This working model for reversing brain-drain, cultural and linguistic erosion in rural areas can serve as a blueprint for entrepreneurship in the post-pandemic working world. Indeed, the gteic model for remote working was a catalyst for the development of our new Task Force on the Future of Work.

Promoting cultural appreciation among youth delegates was another key aim. Regional diversity and richness was well-reflected and celebrated by our delegations to the Summer Academy. Our members from Romania helped us mark the international day of the Romanian language by recording a video message for our social media channels on 31 August.

Of course, the Irish language, ‘Gaeilge’—which in 2022 became a full, official language of the European Union—was featured prominently. Young delegates had the opportunity to speak ‘cúpla focal’ [a few words] with native speakers from the Irish-speaking heartland. Not only that, the Summer Academy was also delighted to welcome young speakers of Scottish-Gaelic ‘Gàidhlig’ for the first time.

However, the picture would not have been complete without a showcase of the local and regional culture of our host regions. Irish hospitality lived up to its reputation, with the delegates treated to Irish music and dance before a closing award ceremony, where Minister of State, Jack Chambers T.D. brought the 2022 Summer Academy to a close.

A SPECIAL YEAR FOR IRELAND’S EUROPEAN IDENTITY, AND A MESSAGE TO EUROPE’S NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

The fact that the Summer Academy was hosted in Ireland held a special significance. As noted by many speakers, 2022 was not only the European Year of Youth, but a year of significant historical and political milestones for Ireland and its relationship with Europe. 2022 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Ireland’s transformational vote to join the European Community, precursor to the European Union, in 1972, and the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Irish State in 1922. As noted by CoE Congress Secretary General, Andreas Kiefer in his keynote address, Ireland held the important role of the rotating Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In view of these milestones, the AER was proud to receive support from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs as part of its 2022 ‘*Communicating Europe Initiative*’ to organise the 2022 edition of the Summer Academy.

The Summer Academy was an important opportunity for young people to learn how regions can overcome a challenging past and build a brighter future. Delegates took part in a tour of Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland, a city steeped in difficult history, to learn about the region’s troubled past and the subsequent Peace Process.

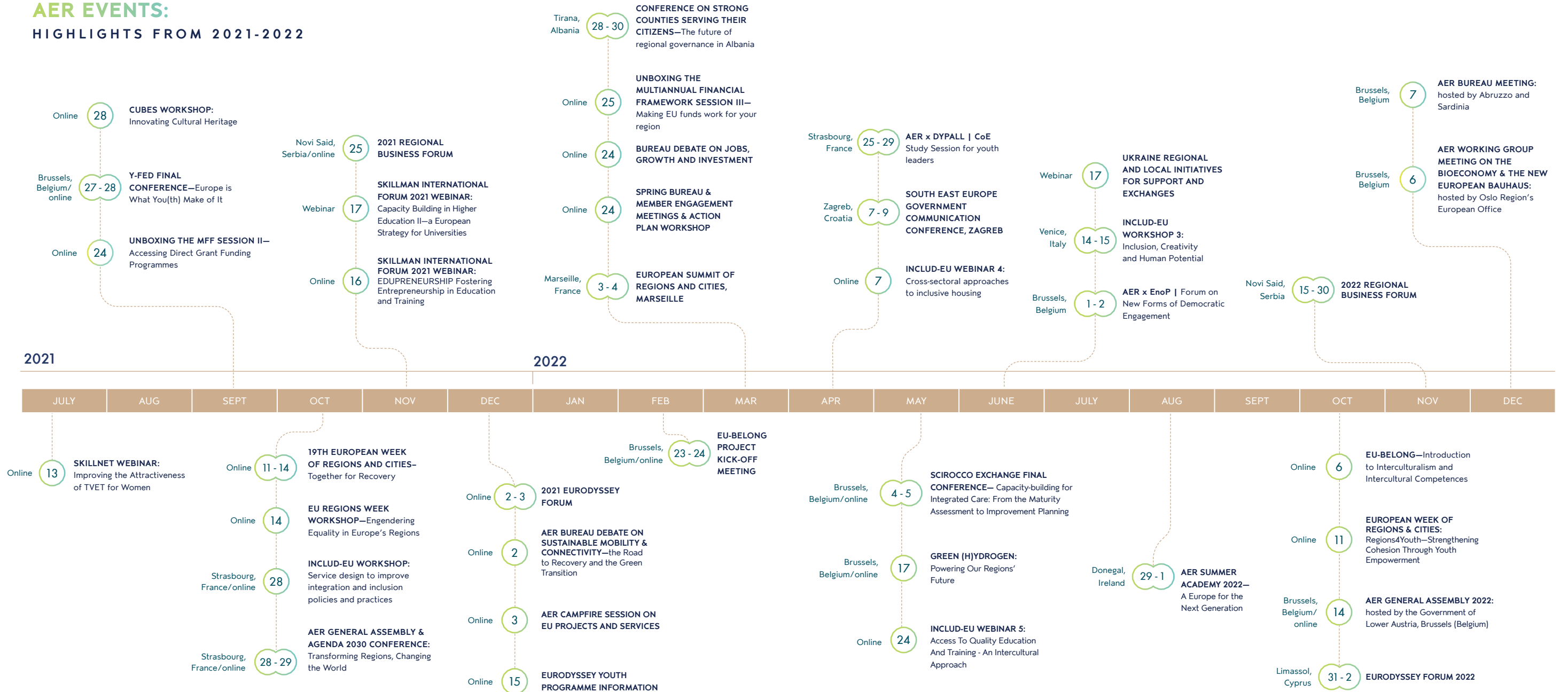
With visits to the Guildhall, the city walls and the Peace Bridge over the River Foyle built with European funding, this tour underlined how vital local and regional initiatives have been to building a better future for successive generations of young people in Northern Ireland.



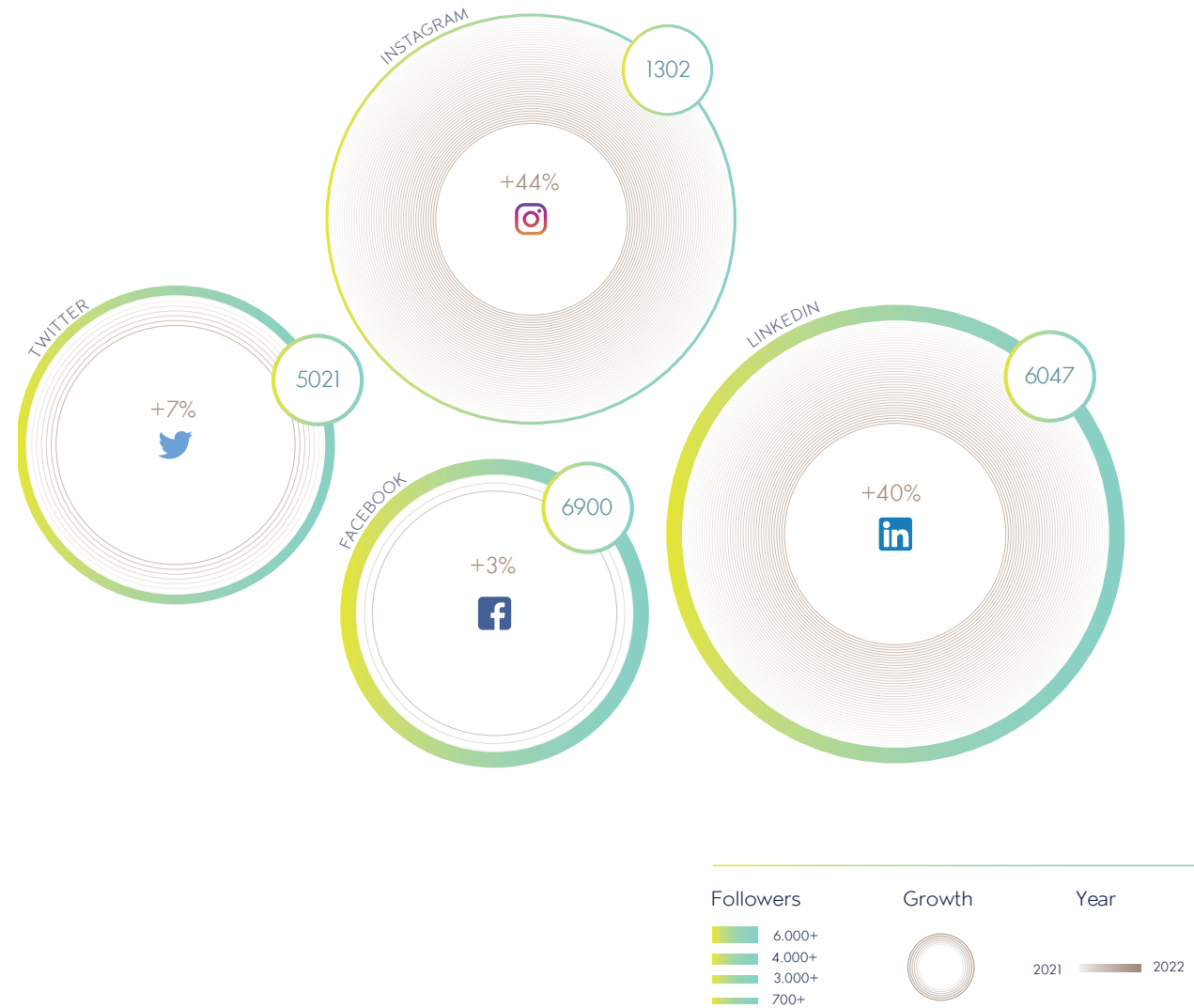
One such initiative is the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), which supports programmes to help at-risk youth in post-conflict communities. In his keynote address at the Guildhall, Paddy Harte, Chairman of the IFI, underlined how crucial collaboration between regional partners is to empower young people and “to create positive pathways towards a shared future and an inclusive society”.

There was a time when Northern Ireland’s challenges seemed insurmountable; the differences between communities entrenched and irreconcilable. It is the AER’s hope that by sharing the empowering message of Northern Ireland’s Peace Process—and the North-West region—against all odds and expectations, that the 150 delegates from across Europe will be inspired to transform their own regions for the better by working together, no matter how daunting the challenges may seem.

AER EVENTS: HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021-2022



SOCIAL STATS



WHO WE ARE

The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe, providing political representation to 140 public authorities at European and international level. With members across 30 EU and non-EU countries, the AER promotes regions as key players in the European project, as well as in strengthening democracy and good governance.

Diversity is our strength, and the AER strives to build bridges between all our regions – urban and rural, EU and non-EU. Through our dedicated Task Forces and thematic Working Groups, we facilitate best practice sharing and enhance capacities across our membership; working together to overcome the common challenges facing European regions. Reflecting the diversity of our membership, these Working Groups cover a broad range of policy areas: encompassing economic and regional development, social policy and

public health, culture, education and youth. We further act as an interlocutor between regions looking to take part in European projects; helping them to find partners and secure EU funding, as well as providing guidance in all aspects of project implementation and management.

The AER is the leading political voice for European regions; acting as a channel through which regional governments can have a direct impact on decisions taken at EU level. Since 1985, the AER has lobbied to ensure that regional perspectives are meaningfully embedded in decision-making processes and that the principle of subsidiarity is respected.

Our political priorities are defined by our members through our Bureau, whose current priorities include Cohesion Policy, migration, digitalisation, climate, democracy and migration.





OUR MEMBERS

- Berat - AL
- Dibër - AL
- Durrës - AL
- Elbasan - AL
- Fier - AL
- Gjirokaster - AL
- Korçë - AL
- Kukës - AL
- Lezhë - AL
- Shkodër - AL
- Vlorë - AL
- Tiranë - AL
- Lori - AM
- Tavush - AM
- Burgenland - AT
- Lower Austria - AT
- Upper Austria - AT
- Tirol - AT
- Vienna - AT
- Brussels-Capital Region - BE
- German Speaking Community - BE
- Wallonia - BE
- Bosnian-Podrinje Canton - BA
- Brcko Distrikt - BA
- Republika Srpska - BA
- Sarajevo - BA
- Zenica-Doboj - BA
- Brod-Posavina - HR
- Istria - HR
- Krapina-Zagorje - HR
- Osijek-Baranja - HR
- Primorje-Gorski Kotar - HR
- Šibenik-Knin - HR
- Split-Dalmatia - HR
- Varaždin - HR
- Zagreb County - HR
- Union of Cyprus Municipalities - CY
- Bourgogne-Franche-Comté - FR
- Corsica - FR
- Grand Est - FR
- Guadeloupe - FR
- French Guiana - FR
- Martinique - FR
- Adjara - GE
- Imereti - GE
- Údarás na Gaeltachta - IE
- County Donegal - IE
- County Mayo - IE
- Abruzzo - IT
- Sardinia - IT
- Molise - IT
- Trentino-Alto Adige - IT
- Umbria - IT
- Valle d'Aosta - IT
- Budva Municipality - ME
- Flevoland - NL
- Gelderland - NL
- Nordland - NO
- Innlandet - NO
- Viken - NO
- Azores - PT
- Madeira - PT
- Alba - RO
- Arad County - RO
- Argeş - RO
- Bihor - RO
- Bistriţa-Năsăud - RO
- Braşov County - RO
- Buzău County - RO
- Călăraşi County - RO
- Caraş-Severin - RO
- Cluj - RO
- Covasna County - RO
- Dâmboviţa - RO
- Dolj - RO
- Galaţi - RO
- Gorj - RO
- Harghita - RO
- Hunedoara - RO
- Iaşi County - RO
- Ifov - RO
- Maramureş - RO
- Mehedinţi - RO
- Mureş - RO
- Neamţ - RO
- Olt - RO
- Prahova - RO
- Sălaj - RO
- Satu Mare County - RO
- Sibiu County - RO
- Timiş - RO
- Tulcea County - RO
- Vaslui County - RO
- Vrancea - RO
- Şumadija and Pomoravlje - RS
- Vojvodina - RS
- Košice Self-Governing Region - SK
- Eastern Slovenia Cohesion Region - SI
- Western Slovenia Cohesion Region - SI
- Catalonia - ES
- Valencia - ES
- Murcia - ES
- Gävleborg - SE
- Jönköping - SE
- Norrbottnen - SE
- Örebro - SE
- Östergötland - SE
- Värmland - SE
- Västerbotten - SE
- Västernorrland - SE
- Västra Götaland - SE
- Basel-Stadt - CH
- Fribourg - CH
- Jura - CH
- Zürich - CH
- Adana - TR
- Antalya - TR
- Denizli - TR
- Edirne - TR
- Erzurum - TR
- Gaziantep - TR
- Izmir - TR
- Kirsehir - TR
- Mus - TR
- Sakarya - TR
- Euroregion Carpathians Ukraine - UA
- Chernivtsi Oblast - UA
- Kharkiv Oblast - UA
- Kirovohrad - UA
- Kryvyi Rih - UA
- Lviv Oblast - UA
- Odesa Oblast - UA
- Odesa Raion - UA
- Pavlohrad - UA
- Poltava Oblast - UA
- Zaporizhzhia Oblast - UA
- Hampshire - GB
- NHS NSS - GB

OUR TEAM: THE AER SECRETARIAT

SECRETARY GENERAL

- ⊙ Christian Spahr

MEMBER RELATIONS

- ⊙ Justin Sammon (current)
- ⊙ Anne Henk Bloemhoff

INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS & ADVOCACY

- ⊙ Vania Freitas
- ⊙ Gisela Guari Cañada
- ⊙ Niccolo Giusti

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AER OFFICES

Brussels

Rue d'Arlon 63, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgique

Strasbourg

6 Rue Jean-Frédéric Oberlin, 67000 Strasbourg, France

Alba Iulia

Piata Ion I.C. Bratianu, 1, 510118 Alba Iulia, Romania



www.aer.eu

info@er.eu

@europeanregions

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