



EUSALP EU STRATEGY FOR THE ALPINE REGION
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ACTION GROUP 1

Research and Innovation – “Developing an effective research and innovation ecosystem in the Alpine region”

WORK PLAN

2026-2028

Executive Summary

Action Group 1 (AG1) implements Action 1 under Policy Pillar 1 (Economic growth and innovation) of the EUSALP Action Plan 2025. It aims at “strengthening an effective research and innovation ecosystem” in the Alpine region.

The Alpine region is home to a large number of renowned research and innovation (R&I) centres. However, significant disparities in policies, access to funding, and the adoption of the information and communication technologies exist. Although there is some collaboration of R&I centres, this happens often on a rather local basis, stays limited to specific topics or stakeholders, or takes place only temporarily on the basis of projects. Innovation facilities are mainly concentrated in urban centres, with fewer hubs in rural areas.

AG1 aims at tackling those challenges by, above all, enhancing networks and collaboration, as this is seen as the basis for most further reaching activities. For the period 2026–2028, AG1 will contribute to the three main topics highlighted in the 2025 EUSALP Action Plan:

1. Alpine-wide coordination of research and/or innovation policies,
2. Fostering exchanges between research institutions, businesses and public authorities,
3. Supporting a more geographically balanced development of innovation and research.

The strategic rationale is the broad understanding of innovation within AG1, including social innovation, and to incorporate the spatial perspective of R&I in the work. As R&I is a transversal topic, synergies with basically all EUSALP Actions are possible. This fact shall be used to intensify collaboration with other AGs and beyond.

The AG1-WorkPlan 2026-2028 describes key activities for all main topics and for governance and collaboration, as well as intended communication measures.

Keywords:

Research – Innovation – Broad understanding of innovation – Social innovation – Research institution networks – Spatial perspective of R&I – Research institutions, businesses, public authorities, citizens – Multiplier institutions – Geographically balanced development – Capacity building – Sharing experiences – Decentral rural hubs – Research policies – Governance systems – Integration of available expertise – Collaboration on different levels – Mobilising youth

1. Focus and Scope of the Action Group

Action Groups (AG) are the implementing bodies of the EUSALP (EUSALP Action Plan 2025¹, p. 8). Their **main task is to coordinate policies and stakeholders involved** in the respective EUSALP Action.

Action 1 focuses on developing an effective research and innovation ecosystem in the Alpine region, particularly in the strategic sectors of energy, industry and tourism (EUSALP Action Plan 2025, p. 13). It provides guidance for R&I activities that help to adapt to climate change and facilitate systemic green and circular transition, thereby promoting economic diversification and the effective use of digital technologies (EUSALP Action Plan 2025, p. 13-14).

Action 1 contributes to pillar 1 of the EUSALP (Economic growth and innovation), which aims at a competitive, innovative, circular and climate-neutral economy in the Alpine region. In the main strategic sectors of this pillar (mountain agriculture and forestry, energy, industry and tourism), the framework of the Alpine Convention is particularly relevant in the Alpine mountain area (EUSALP Action Plan 2025, p. 13) and will thus be taken into account in the activities of AG1.

Action 1 is of strategic relevance, as a range of policies (on EU and national levels) can complement R&I (EUSALP Action Plan 2025, p. 13). This understanding can be applied also within EUSALP, where most of the Actions incorporate R&I innovation in one or the other way. Therefore, Action 1 is transversal and AG1 has manifold connecting points.

The Alpine region is home to a large number of renowned R&I centres, which form the foundation of further development in this field. However, significant disparities in policies, access to funding, and the adoption of the information and communication technologies exist (EUSALP Action Plan 2025, p. 13). Innovation facilities are mainly concentrated in urban centres, with fewer hubs in rural areas. This is why AG1 will keep the spatial and geographical perspective in mind, focusing on supporting a balanced development.

Many of the existing R&I centres are organised in clusters and create a regional economy that provides a solid basis for innovation based on smart specialisation strategies. Although this way some collaboration exists, this happens often on a rather local basis, stays limited to specific topics or stakeholders, or takes place only temporarily based on projects. AG1 therefore aims at enhancing networks and collaboration.

Action 1 is considered to play a pivotal role in driving the necessary transformations (EUSALP Action Plan 2025, p. 13). As transformation needs acceptance and support by society, a focus on technological innovation will not be sufficient, instead more attention needs to be given to social innovation. AG1 therefore follows a broad and integrated understanding of innovation. It does not limit progress to technological breakthroughs alone but combines technological, organizational, and social innovations as mutually reinforcing drivers of transformation. Technological innovation provides new solutions and tools, organizational innovation ensures adaptive structures and efficient processes, while social innovation addresses societal needs and fosters inclusive participation. This holistic approach enables AG1 to tackle complex challenges in the Alpine region, bridging sectors and disciplines to create sustainable, resilient, and people centred outcomes.

¹ The EUSALP Action Plan has been published as European Commission (2025): Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the revised action plan of the EU macro-regional strategy for the Alpine Region. SWD(2025) 403 final. It is available on the EUSALP-Website: https://alpine-region.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/2025_-Austria_and_Liechtenstein_Presidency/SWD_2025_403_1_EN_autre_document_travail_service_part1_v2.pdf

2. Key Tangible Achievements 2023-2025

This section draws attention to the spatial-led approach that has guided the group's vision throughout the past few years, aiming to set the trajectory for future projects that AG1 will undertake within the Alpine region. The valuable collaboration with the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies at the Polytechnic University of Milan (DASTU) has led to the identification of a clear path to follow within the extensive subject of R&I.

Among the activities were seminars and presentations, e.g. at the Polytechnic University of Milan, during which the initial results of the research project "The territorial regeneration for the digital and ecological transition in the Alpine area" were presented, or a contribution to the International Mountain Conference. The following findings emerged from the research behind: "EUSALP should adopt a more explicit spatial approach, ensuring that digital and ecological transitions serve as drivers of territorial cohesion and innovation."

In 2023-2025, AG1 carried out a pilot project in Valtellina Valley in which a spatial approach to transition was applied. The goals of reducing gaps to better connected areas, of increasing competitiveness and of increasing sustainability were tackled by working with local communities to enhance the relations between production activities, advanced training and research networks. The activity is described in the AG1 **Success Story**. The principles of this pilot project, in particular the spatial approach and participation of local communities, are basic elements of this Work Plan.

In 2025, AG1 developed **Policy Recommendations**, which are categorized in three groups: 1. Territorial diagnostics, planning and design, 2. EUSALP Governance, 3. Social Innovation. These Policy Recommendations do not only address politically responsible bodies and administrations but are at the same time a guideline for the future work of AG1 itself. Therefore, content of the Policy Recommendations is taken into account in this Work Plan.

A **reflection about past activities of AG1** and their effects was undertaken towards the end of the period 2023-2025. Some key findings of this reflection are:

- There seems to be wide expertise within AG1, but members cannot always easily be incorporated in activities. This might be due to the fact that members and stakeholders often are professionally attached to a specific industry or topic, while R&I are transversal. Focusing too much at one topic might include the risk of losing stakeholders that are interested in a different one.
- It seems more purposeful to focus on the ecosystem and multiplier role of AG1, rather than focusing too much on single projects.
- Sometimes, AG1 members did undertake activities in the sense of the then existing Work Plan, but not under AG1 affiliation. This makes evaluation and measurement of the overall performance of AG1 difficult, so that in the future attention of members should be drawn to this aspect.

3. Priorities 2026-2028

For the period 2026–2028, AG1 will focus on activities contributing to the three main topics highlighted in the EUSALP Action Plan 2025 (p. 14), being aware that the right level of ambition is crucial. Resources are directed to activities with expected high macro-regional added value, strong feasibility, and clear measurability. The three **main topics** for AG1 are:

1. **Alpine-wide coordination of research and/or innovation policies,**
2. **Fostering exchanges between research institutions, businesses and public authorities,**
3. **Supporting a more geographically balanced development of innovation and research.**

The strategic rationale of the first two main topics is the **broad understanding of innovation** within AG1. Beyond technological advancement, **social innovation** is essential to ensure that R&I deliver inclusive, widely shared

benefits. Social innovation introduces new approaches to societal challenges by fostering collaboration among and with citizens (including e.g. citizen science), institutions, and businesses. In line with AG1's integrated understanding of innovation, social innovation complements technological and organizational changes and helps translate promising solutions into resilient, equitable outcomes across the Alpine Region.

Main topics 1 and 3 relate to the **spatial perspective of R&I**. A more balanced development can be desirable between different Alpine countries as well as between rural and urban areas or even between different rural areas. This is why territorial diagnostics, planning and design needs to be advanced (taking into account physical hardware and scientific software and including the identification and promotion of hubs).

For all three main topics, **governance aspects** need to be reflected (in particular with regard to coalitions between stakeholders, enhancing the potential transversality of AG1, and taking into account the different spatial levels of action in the multilevel governance system).

AG1 will place **particular emphasis on producing policy-relevant outputs**, such as concise policy briefs and actionable recommendations, designed to inform decision-making at both macro-regional and national levels.

In an overall view, the AG1-strategy nurtures ideas and relationships to create value, and harvests insights and results to turn knowledge into impact.

To advance this agenda, AG1 will focus on activities that are accessible and foster collaboration without requiring extensive resources.

For the period 2026-2028, the following priorities for the respective main topics have been set.

1. Alpine-wide coordination of research and/or innovation policies

The scope of this main topic is very wide and ambitious and cannot be achieved on short term (if at all). Therefore, in 2026-2028 one focus will be on social innovation. AG1 will identify opportunities where social innovation complements technological and organizational changes in strategic sectors. The aim is to strengthen resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability across the Alpine Region by embedding social innovation into R&I cooperation.

The diverse government systems and administrations are described in the EUSALP Action Plan 2025 (p. 14) as limiting the potential for transnational exploitation of the Alpine region's strengths and opportunities. Their alignment is considered by AG1 as a sensible and difficult task. On the other hand, there are chances to convert this diversity of systems into a chance, e.g. when different perspectives and experiences contribute to finding more comprehensive or creative solutions. This aspect of governance will be observed within the framework of given projects.

Between 2026 and 2028, AG1 will identify pragmatic opportunities where social innovation accelerates sustainable transformation in the key sectors and beyond (climate adaptation, rural services, mobility, health and care, tourism, and circular economy...) by enabling community participation, cross-sector partnerships, and rapid, low-cost experimentation. In doing so, AG1 aims to demonstrate tangible benefits of social innovation. By systematically linking social innovation initiatives to broader R&I policies, AG1 will also contribute to creating a more resilient, equitable, and geographically balanced innovation ecosystem across the Alpine Region.

2. Fostering exchanges between research institutions, businesses and public authorities

AG1 aims at enhancing knowledge exchange between research, public authorities, and businesses, and strengthen the capacity of Alpine communities to co-create solutions that are both context-specific and scalable.

Basis for this is to create a shared knowledge base that makes the diversity of R&I actors in the Alpine region visible and usable. Rather than producing a purely technical dataset, the mapping will serve as a learning and networking tool, helping regions to share best practices, learn from each other, and build stronger connections across borders. The purpose of the knowledge base is to enable stakeholders to identify synergies, to reduce barriers to cooperation and to support cooperation and networks.

The first step is the identification of and outreach to existing networks and activities of innovation actors in each participating region of the AG1 (e.g. Friuli Venezia Giulia autonomous Region being active in Life Sciences/biomedical sector, quantum technologies and renewable hydrogen and related technologies).

Activities like workshops or transnational capacity building activities organised by innovation bodies will be supported. Building capacity in research institutions and networks is essential to strengthen the Alpine Region's innovation ecosystem. This involves all types of stakeholders: the R&I institutions themselves, youth, enterprises, Local Action Groups, civil society, ...). Different topics and sectors can be addressed (such as tourism, digitisation/AI, research-practice transfer etc.).

3. Supporting a more geographically balanced development of innovation and research

Taking the spatial perspective into account ensures that innovation is not concentrated in urban hubs but distributed across territories, connecting rural and mountain areas with leading research centres. This approach fosters balanced development, reduces disparities, and enables knowledge transfer across borders. Attention will be given to decentral, rural hubs.

AG1 can build on previous activities within the Action Group (such as described in the Policy Recommendations 2025 or the pilot activities in the Valtellina valley, cf. EUSALP AG1 Success story 2025), within EUSALP (e.g. the State of the Territory Report for the Alpine Region developed by the Austria-Liechtenstein Presidency 2025) and beyond EUSALP (e.g. the activities of the AlpPlan Network).

AG1 Governance and Collaboration

Effectiveness of AG1 can be increased if the networks and activities of its members are better incorporated, if tasks are shared and if contributions of the members are organised in a systematic way.

The main topics for 2026-2028 align with AG1's process-oriented approach (cooperation models and transfer formats) and support cross-AG synergies. Therefore, intensified collaboration with other EUSALP AG is envisaged. During the phase of drafting this Work Plan, there were concrete contacts in particular with AG5, and to a certain extent AG3. Collaboration with AG5 is expected to continue on topics related to the digital transformation of the Alpine Region and its impacts on professional opportunities, as well as on studying and training formats. More synergies with AG3 may arise on topics such as remote learning and rural innovation hubs. Different topics may be addressed in the future to enhance the collaboration with other AGs or to contribute to future EUSALP Missions.

Up to now there was little collaboration with the other stakeholders in the Alpine context and with the three Macroregional Strategies (MRSs). Upon possibilities, AG1 wishes to build up an exchange on relevant topics.

3.1. Key Activities 2026-2028

For 2026-2028, AG1 has foreseen **key activities in all main topics**, well knowing that it will not be possible to work on all of them with the same intensity. Most of the key activities contribute to more than one main topic. However, for reasons of better readability and clarity, only one main topic has been assigned to each key activity.

The key activities 2026-2028 presented in the table below **were selected according to the following criteria**: 1) strategic relevance; 2) expected readiness of partners and data; 3) potential to generate replicable outputs (toolkits, pilots, guidelines); 4) ability to engage Youth Council and stakeholders across regions.

We would like to point out that those **key activities are not focused on or limited to a certain theme**, they rather **follow the transversal logic of R&I which allows them to be tested and applied in different sectors**. Whenever pilots are run, this will preferably be done on the strategic sectors of AG1, but basically the aim is that results are transferable to different topics and sectors. This allows different AG-members and stakeholders to contribute as they desire: The coverage of topics depends on stakeholder engagement, and some areas may remain outside the current scope where no lead has been identified. As a change in the Co-leadership of AG1 was going on during the time of drafting this Work Plan, some of the activities may develop during the process.

Main topics	Key activities
Alpine-wide coordination of innovation policies	1.1 Showcase different perspectives of innovation AG1 will identify opportunities where social innovation complements technological and organizational changes in strategic sectors. The aim is to strengthen resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability across the Alpine Region by embedding social innovation into R&I cooperation. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Collect examples on where social innovation is taking place. • Discuss them in interactive formats such as workshops. • Develop visual materials. • Policy recommendations on innovation. 1.2 Collect information about governance systems Basis for a coordination of R&I policies is to know how those policies are currently governed and administrated. AG1 will provide a first overview on this based on data collected from projects and members, referring to suitable topics (e.g. funding options for one of the strategic sectors) and identify differences, bottlenecks and chances. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Evaluate governance aspects of existing projects or monitor projects being developed in this regard (coordination/alignment; collaboration on different spatial levels). • An option could be to use AI for a first collection. • Studies on innovation and sharing in the management of water resources (Labex ITTEM), or on the obligation to innovate to adapt human life to climate change in the mountains: the example of Oisans (France) (Labex ITTEM). • Results are documented and incorporated in suitable policy recommendation formats. 1.3 Organise a pilot activity for a programme that mobilises youth, using innovative methods To sensitise and mobilise youth to become actively involved in finding innovative solutions for Alpine challenges is seen as crucial for future development of the Alpine region. Therefore, a pilot event for students is planned. The activity aims at including the use of digital tools/AI. <u>Intended activities:</u> • The pilot event will be an EUSALP Alpine AI Hackathon for students from different regions in the Alps. It will take place at Kempten University of Applied Sciences in June 2026 and be organised by AG1 in collaboration with Youth Council, AG5, Kempten UAS; patronage EUSALP PCY.

	• A challenge from the tourism sector will be selected. • The solutions developed in the AI Hackathon will be communicated. • Concept and learnings will be documented to optimise the event in the future. 1.4 Intensify contacts with ASP- and other projects The Alpine Space Programme and other programmes (e.g. Interreg-A) are funding a number of projects, but not all the outputs and results are used as they could. AG1 therefore aims at improving contacts with project owners and partners in a systematic and structured way. The goal is to support in communicating and amplifying project results. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Harvesting session with ASP (and other) projects on a regular basis, addressing aspects like e.g. research-practice collaboration, funding, perspective on innovation. • Ensure communication flow between AG and project responsables, if feasible find "ambassadors" among AG1-members for relevant projects. • Support communication of project results and outputs. • Support activities like workshops or transnational capacity building organised by regional innovation agencies and other bodies.
Fostering exchange between research institutions, public and private actors	2.1 Map R&I institutions and cooperation networks This activity under guidance of Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst Baden-Württemberg and Kempten UAS aims at identifying actors already engaged in collaboration and/or social innovation and uncover potential synergies across regions and sectors. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Provide a basic collection of R&I institutions and cooperation networks. • Provide a platform where members can add supplemental information. • Collect and validate collected information through Expert Network focal points. • Publish concise profiles of institutions or networks to foster peer learning and collaboration. • Develop a simple model of collaboration focused on practical relevance. 2.2 Introduce simple, recurring formats for sharing experiences Knowledge exchange often is a first step to collaboration. To get more stakeholders engaged and to uncover potential synergies across regions, sectors, and types of stakeholders, low threshold tools and formats are developed. Those are simple, recurring formats for sharing experiences, best practices, and practical tools. Topics and organisation are based on activities of AG members and observers. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Develop and test formats such as e.g. a "Lunch Break" or offer workshops within existing formats (e.g. during EUSALP Annual Forum). • Contents could be on transversal aspects (like funding, legal aspects in setting up networks, research-practice collaboration, citizen science, ...) but also refer to specific themes AG members or others propose (e.g. tourism, water, life sciences/biomedical sector, quantum technologies, renewable hydrogen, circular economy, ...). • Depending on topic, some of the formats are likely to be carried out in collaboration with other AGs.

	2.3 Establish an expert network of R&I multiplier institutions Multiplier institutions interact with different stakeholders, which are often out of direct scope of EUSALP, but can contribute considerably to reach the goals set within EUSALP. The objective is to develop a network of public R&I agencies to foster transnational exchange and capacity building for actors in the R&I domain of the Alps. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Organise meetings between R&I agencies (BayFOR). • A first focus area will be EU policy, funding environment and the creation of synergies and monetisation actions with existing R&I projects.
Supporting a more territorial balanced development of innovation and research	3.1 Continue work on the territorial dimension of R&I The period 2023-2025 has shown the relevance of the spatial perspective of enhancing innovation. This is why AG1 intends to continue work in this field, especially with the aim of raising and increasing awareness for the role of the local level and place-based activities within in the multi-level governance system. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Build on existing work such as the AG1 policy recommendations, the EUSALP State of the Territory Report, the role of decentral hubs etc., by reviewing and communicating the respective documents systematically. • Search or intensify exchange with stakeholders or networks such as the AlpPlan Network. • Get in touch with structures that organise decentralised solutions (such as e.g. the LEADER Local Action Groups with their bottom-up-approaches). • Study on mountain municipalities faced with the departure of their inhabitants: challenges and tools to resist (Labex ITTEM) 3.2 Investigate and support decentral, rural hubs The aim of this key activity is to strengthen rural hubs in their function as multipliers, as they are often in direct contact with the different stakeholders such as SME or general public. Another aim is to mobilise or support youth to co-create solutions for EUSALP priorities related to the spatial perspective of R&I. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Depending on approval of ASP-project DEDICA (DEsired DIgital futures: digital Compass Actions for user inclusivity and just transition), measures under these key activities can take different shape and intensity. In DEDICA, digital hubs are involved and pilot activities are foreseen, among others on digital competences (AG1 is contributing through Kempten University of Applied Sciences in the field of tourism, Kempten UAS being a project partner ensures communication of the results towards the EUSALP family). • Involvement in event "Stay Local, Learn Global", proposed by the YC Thematic Group 4 on remote higher education opportunities. The event aims to include hubs offering studying opportunities in peripheral areas. • Different types of hubs and their work mode are identified (e.g. digital hubs, Co-Working-Spaces, the EUSALP AG 1 Success story in Valtellina Valley or LEADER-Local Action Groups with their close links to rural stakeholders).
Governance and Collaboration	4.1 Improve integration of available expertise in AG1 activities There is wide expertise available within AG1, but some potentials have been left unused in the past. The aim of this activity is to better distribute workloads within AG1 and to use the different competencies available to increase effectiveness.

	<u>Intended activities:</u> • Stakeholder analysis: Consolidation of list of members, advisory members/observers and (potential) partners (together with ETS) • Encourage AG-members to more actively contribute to AG-activities. • Draw attention of members to mention AG affiliation in activities of their institutions. 4.2 Enhance collaboration with other AGs Following the transversal logic of R&I, AG1 aims at intensifying collaboration with other AGs. <u>Intended activities:</u> • Participate in EUSALP meetings and committees, in particular BAGL (activity of Co-Leaders). • Ensure communication flow with other AG. • Where possible and adequate, develop concrete activities such as common events and projects with other AG, e.g. cross-AG workshops and webinars with reference to green and digital transitions. 4.3 Build or strengthen contacts to other stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context AG1 aims at finding synergies and strengthen contacts with stakeholders and networks beyond EUSALP, such as Alpine Convention, AlpPlan Network, AlpNet, Alpine Towns etc. <u>Intended activities:</u> • In a first step, AG1 will investigate existing contacts within AG1 to other networks. • Participation of members in events of Alpine stakeholders and relevant networks. • Report about EUSALP and in particular AG1-activities in those contexts, in order to better communicate EUSALP aims and activities to stakeholders who so far are not familiar with EUSALP. • Build contact to stakeholders from other Macro Regional Strategies, when topics are suitable.
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3.2. Missions

AG 1's contribution to the EUSALP Missions will be defined based on the Missions approved by the General Assembly, starting from 2026.

4. Communication

Communication is a strategic cornerstone for AG1: it ensures visibility, fosters trust, and amplifies impact across the Alpine macro-region. AG1 will adopt a dual approach:

1. **Internal communication:** Efficient knowledge-sharing among AG1 members via collaborative tools and a secure document repository (e.g., intranet or cloud-based workspace). It would be desirable to have the latter provided by ETS. This guarantees continuity when members change and supports agile workflows.
2. **External communication:** Targeted outreach to stakeholders, policymakers, and the public to showcase achievements and foster engagement. Adequate channels and language are to be chosen dependent on who is addressed (broad public, administration, political level, experts etc.). Main channels for external communication are the EUSALP-Website with its AG1-subsite.

AG1 aims at **transparent and regular communication** and at using also the channels of AG members and advisory members/observers for amplification. A dedicated AG-member will be appointed as communication referent/contact person (Smart Specialisation Coordination Division of Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development of the Republic of Slovenia has offered to take over this task).

As part of the AG1 Work Plan 2026-2028, AG1 will also focus on the creation of a short video to present EUSALP AG1 activities. The videos will be based on the visual identities already developed and on a storyboard that has already been agreed. The EUSALP Secretariat will take care of the production of the videos. These materials will be used to share EUSALP success stories and to improve the visibility of EUSALP actions.

4.1. Dissemination and Communication Activities

EUSALP website and social media channels
Content will be provided by Co-leaders respectively AG1-communication referent and group members to ETS for upload and distribution through EUSALP channels. • Publications on AG1 dedicated page on the EUSALP website: Material developed by AG1 such as this Work Plan (1), success stories (2), infographic (1), event documentations where adequate, fact sheets etc. • Dedicated contributions to EUSALP social media (LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube) • Contributions to EUSALP calendar (in particular public events) • AG1 Video
External dissemination (Interreg ASP and/or external communication channels)
• Press releases on events or main activities • Contribution to project reports 4SupportEUSALP, DEDICA (if applicable) • Active participation in conferences etc.
Dissemination of results to policymakers
• Compose Policy briefs/Political recommendations. • Involve policymakers/political representatives in events (preferably with an active role as speaker, patronage...). • Use channels of regional agencies and multiplier institutions like BAYFOR to communicate and disseminate.
Success Stories
• Story about successful cooperation/network model(s) of research institutes • Story about successful social innovation procedure or research-practice-collaboration Potential publication of more success stories will depend on results of collected data and development of activities.
Other
• Fact sheets (e.g. of institutions active in social innovation or stakeholders in collaboration networks) • Visual materials (e.g. infographic "innovation" or "spatial aspects of innovation")

4.2. Events and Research

Events

- 2026: EUSALP Alpine AI Hackathon for students on Innovation in rural areas (Kempten University of Applied Sciences, AG1, AG5, YC; Patronage: PCY)
- 2026: Pilot "Harvesting Session" for ASP-Projects (AG1 and ASP-Projects)
- 2026: Impulse workshops series for Municipalities to inform them about funding opportunities and new developments in the new European Financial Framework (BayFOR)
- Possibly contribution to the Event "Stay Local, Learn Global" (YC, AG3)

Regular formats

- Contribution to EUSALP Annual Forum

- Format such as “Lunch talk” (or similar) to be developed, content is R&I related to a specific topic or sector (AG1 and member/partner)
- Harvesting Session” ASP-Projects (AG1 and ASP-Projects)
- Support YC activities, upon topic and capacities

Research and Projects

- 2026: Project Proposal DEDICA (Interreg ASP)
- 2026: Study on innovation and sharing in the management of water resources (Labex ITTEM)
- 2027: Study on the obligation to innovate to adapt human life to climate change in the mountains: the example of Oisans (France) (Labex ITTEM)
- 2028: Study on the mountain municipalities faced with the departure of their inhabitants: challenges and tools to resist (Labex ITTEM)

5. Work Plan Outputs and Results

5.1. Monitoring Indicators

Project/Activities

Name	Pillar	Action	Topic	Goal	Activities	Start Date	End Date	Funding source
1.1 Showcase different perspectives of innovation	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Alpine-wide coordination of innovation policies	Highlight how social innovation interacts with technological and organizational approaches	Collect examples of social innovation, discuss them and develop an infographic	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	4SupportEUSALP ; Co-Lead Budget Kempten UAS for infographic
1.2 Collect information about governance systems	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Alpine-wide coordination of innovation policies	Display governance systems for suitable topics	Collect information about different governance systems and document them	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	Does not apply
1.3 Organise a pilot activity for a programme that mobilises youth, using innovative methods	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Alpine-wide coordination of innovation policies	Mobilise youth from different Alpine countries to co-create future oriented solutions for EUSALP priorities	Organise EUSALP Alpine AI Hackathon for students at Kempten University of Applied Sciences and document learnings	01.01.2026	30.06.2026	4SupportEUSALP , Kempten UAS, AG5, PCY
1.4 Intensify contacts with ASP- and other projects	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Alpine-wide coordination of innovation policies	Capitalize results from ASP- and other projects	Organise "Harvesting sessions"	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	4SupportEUSALP
2.1 Map R&I institutions and cooperation networks	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Fostering exchange between research institutions, public and private actors	Uncover potential synergies across regions and sectors	Elaborate a collection of R&I institutions and cooperation networks including profiles	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	4SupportEUSALP , Co-Lead Budget Kempten UAS, Partners

2.2 Introduce simple, recurring formats for sharing experiences	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Fostering exchange between research institutions, public and private actors	Facilitate connections and knowledge exchange between the identified actors	Establish new formats for sharing experiences	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	Online without Budget, Budgets of Partners for Catering etc.
2.3 Establish an expert network of R&I multiplier institutions	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Fostering exchange between research institutions, public and private actors	Create exchange of expertise between the multiplier institutions	Offer formats for an exchange between public innovation and research agencies	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	Participating AG-members
3.1 Continue work on the territorial dimension of R&I	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Supporting a more territorial balanced development of innovation and research	Raise or increase awareness for the role of the local level/place-based activities	Systematically review and communicate existing documents	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	t.b.a.
3.2 Investigate and support decentral, rural hubs	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Supporting a more territorial balanced development of innovation and research	Strengthen decentral, rural hubs	Project application for ASP-project DEDICA	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	ASP-Project (Proposal)
4.1 Improve integration of available expertise in AG1 activities	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Governance and Collaboration	Distribute workloads, increase effectiveness	Stakeholder analysis	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	Does not apply
4.2 Enhance collaboration with other AGs	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Governance and Collaboration	Exploit synergies arising from the transversal nature of R&I	Actively communicate with other AG and contribute to BAGL-activities	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	4SupportEUSALP
4.3 Build or strengthen contacts to other stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context	Pillar 1: Economic Growth and Innovation	AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	Governance and Collaboration	Improve synergies with stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context	Participate in events of Alpine stakeholders and relevant networks	01.01.2026	31.12.2028	Does not apply; travel costs to be covered by institutions

Indicators

Action	Object	Name	Indicators Category	Type of Unit	Unit	Target
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	1.1 Showcase different perspectives of innovation	Infographic Innovation	a) Studies, surveys, mapping, data collection b) Good practices/Case studies c) Knowledge networks/ Think tanks / d) Observatories e) Thematic workshops/conferences"	N° of studies/surveys/map ping	Number of infographics	1,00
		Policy recommendation on social innovation	a) Policy recommendations b) Policy guidelines	N° of recommendations and/or guidelines provided to policy makers and political authorities	Number of recommendations	1,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	1.2 Collect information about governance systems	Examples governance systems (including bottlenecks)	a) Studies, surveys, mapping, data collection b) Good practices/Case studies c) Knowledge networks/ Think tanks / d) Observatories e) Thematic workshops/conferences"	N° of studies/surveys/map ping	Good practice/Case studies	1,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	1.3 Organise a pilot activity for a programme that mobilises youth, using innovative methods	Event AI Hackathon	a) Training programmes & activities b) Mentoring/peer exchanges c) Skills workshops/Labs d) Mobility, exchanges, Study tours e) Application of new business models and methodologies f) Innovation transfers g) Toolkits/tools	N° of activities, workshops, exchanges, labs	Number of events for students	1,00
		Event AI Hackathon Participants	a) Training programmes & activities b) Mentoring/peer exchanges c) Skills workshops/Labs d) Mobility, exchanges, Study tours e) Application of new business models and methodologies f) Innovation transfers g) Toolkits/tools	N° of participants	Number of participants	30,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	1.4 Intensify contacts with ASP- and other projects	Harvesting Sessions	a) Events, Forums; b) Newsletters, Social Media campaigns, Storytelling; c) Dedicated Website	N° of events and activities	Number of events	3,00
AG1: To develop an effective research	2.1 Map R&I institutions and cooperation networks	Mapping of institutions	a) Studies, surveys, mapping, data collection b) Good practices/Case studies c) Knowledge	N° of studies/surveys/map ping	Number of mappings	1,00

and innovation ecosystem			networks/ Think tanks / d) Observatories e) Thematic workshops/conferences"			
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	2.2 Introduce simple, recurring formats for sharing experiences	Events for stakeholders	a) Events, Forums; b) Newsletters, Social Media campaigns, Storytelling; c) Dedicated Website	N° of events and activities	Number of events/forums	3,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	2.3 Establish an expert network of R&I multiplier institutions	Knowledge Network of Multiplier Institutions	a) Studies, surveys, mapping, data collection b) Good practices/Case studies c) Knowledge networks/ Think tanks / d) Observatories e) Thematic workshops/conferences"	N° / type of participants in network/workshops/c onference	Number of participants in network	4,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	3.1 Continue work on the territorial dimension of R&I	Study on depopulating areas	a) Studies, surveys, mapping, data collection b) Good practices/Case studies c) Knowledge networks/ Think tanks / d) Observatories e) Thematic workshops/conferences"	N° of studies/surveys/map ping	Number of studies	1,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	3.2 Investigate and support decentral, rural hubs	Project Proposals	a) Cooperation between different Ags Joint proposal & project development b) Common methodologies adopted c) Alignment & coordination measures applied d) Trans-sectoral network or cooperation initiative	N° of Joint Applications to EU Funding Programmes across thematic areas	Joint Project Applications	1,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	4.1 Improve integration of available expertise in AG1 activities	Stakeholder analysis	a) Strategic Agenda/Roadmap b) Thematic guidelines c) Master plan	Strategic framework/planning document available	Stakeholder analysis available	1,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	4.2 Enhance collaboration with other AGs	Project Proposal with other AG	a) Cooperation between different Ags Joint proposal & project development b) Common methodologies adopted c) Alignment & coordination measures applied d) Trans-sectoral network or cooperation initiative	N° of Joint Applications to EU Funding Programmes across thematic areas	Number of Joint Applications	1,00
AG1: To develop an effective research and innovation ecosystem	4.3 Build or strengthen contacts to other stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context	Active Exchange with Alpine stakeholders/relevant networks	a) Discussion forums/dialogue events; b) Brainstorming; c) Active exchanges; d) Joint formulation of concepts	Types of participants/stakeholders (inclusiveness, relevance...)	Types of stakeholders	3,00

5.2. Work Plan Outputs

Project/Activity	Expected Output
1.1 Showcase different perspectives of innovation	Infographic about innovation, which will be communicated through the EUSALP AG1-website and other means, and Policy Recommendation.
1.2 Collect information about governance systems	Report describing examples of different governance systems, including bottlenecks and best practice.
1.3 Organise a pilot activity for a programme that mobilises youth, using innovative methods	Event Alpine AI-Hackathon for students from different Alpine regions, solutions developed by the participating students. Testing the concept. Report describing concept and learnings.
1.4 Intensify contacts with ASP- and other projects	Three events "harvesting session" with project responsables (one per year).
2.1 Map R&I institutions and cooperation networks	Spreadsheet as a first collection of institutions. Fact sheets with examples of stakeholders working with social innovation or description how collaboration is organised, toolkits where adequate. Success stories collaboration of R&I institutions and of research-practice collaboration.
2.2 Introduce simple, recurring formats for sharing experiences	Three events for sharing experiences offered (one per year).
2.3 Establish an expert network of R&I multiplier institutions	At least four R&I multiplier institutions from different regions start an exchange.
3.1 Continue work on the territorial dimension of R&I	Study on depopulating areas (report or publication).
3.2 Investigate and support decentral, rural hubs	ASP project proposal. Pilot actions upon project approval.
4.1 Improve integration of available expertise in AG1 activities	Stakeholder analysis, allowing to consolidate composition of AG1.
4.2 Enhance collaboration with other AGs	Joint projects and jointly organised events (1 ASP project proposal with AG1 as project partner; 1 collaboratively organised event under guidance of AG1; contributions to other joint actions).
4.3 Build or strengthen contacts to other stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context	Active exchange with at least 3 other stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context (e.g. cross-participation in events).

5.3. Action Group Results

Project/Activity	Expected Result
1.1 Showcase different perspectives of innovation	The infographic on innovation is expected to foster the integration of social innovation principles into regional strategies and R&I projects, contributing to more inclusive and resilient outcomes.
1.2 Collect information about governance systems	The description of concrete examples of different governance systems including bottlenecks and good practice will serve as a basis to develop coordinated policies.

1.3 Organise a pilot activity for a programme that mobilises youth, using innovative methods	Students participating in the AI-Hackathon have gained knowledge. Solutions are developed. A concept for the AI-Hackathon-Format is developed and tested, and the experiences made allow to improve the approach for future events.
1.4 Intensify contacts with ASP and other projects	The knowledge gained and exchanged in the “harvesting sessions” will be the basis to contribute to the dissemination of projects results and optimally to increase the use of developed tools and concepts.
2.1 Map R&I institutions and cooperation networks	To know actors as well as topics and models of collaboration enables the enlargement of existing networks and facilitates the creation of new collaborations, e.g. when it comes to future common project proposals.
2.2 Introduce simple, recurring formats for sharing experiences	Events that are easily accessible such as an Online-Lunch Break are expected to attract new potential partners to get involved in EUSALP activities.
2.3 Establish an expert network of R&I multiplier institutions	Participating multiplier institutions profit directly from the exchange by getting inspiration and new ideas for their own work. The value of the knowledge exchange will be known and workflows in the network are tested. This is the basis for this network to grow bigger in the future.
3.1 Continue work on the territorial dimension of R&I	The study on depopulating areas will provide examples on measures to be taken.
3.2 Investigate and support decentral, rural hubs	A project proposal is developed by partners from all Alpine Countries, and it includes different types of hubs. If the project is approved, pilot actions in several Alpine regions will take place.
4.1 Improve integration of available expertise in AG1 activities	With the stakeholder analysis, the list of members, advisory members/observers and potential partners is consolidated. Available expertise is known, workloads can better be distributed and effectiveness of AG1 be increased
4.2 Enhance collaboration with other AGs	Regular participation in EUSALP formats will allow to identify options for collaboration. Cooperating in a common project or event allows to unfold synergies.
4.3 Build or strengthen contacts to other stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context	Active exchange with other stakeholders and networks in the Alpine context avoids double work and creates synergies. Tasks can be shared, with common positions outreach is increased.

6. Action Group's Organisation and Targets

6.1. Composition and Organisation

Action Group Leader/Co-Leaders	
AG1 is led by two Co-Leaders: • Kempten University of Applied Sciences (Bavaria) • Labex ITTEM (University Grenoble Alpes) (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes)	
Number of Appointed Members	
According to the EUSALP Secretariat Database, as of January 2026, in AG1 there are 24 members (including the two Co-leaders) and 6 observers (advisory members).	
Represented Countries	Represented Institutions
☒ Austria ☒ France ☒ Germany ☒ Italy ☐ Liechtenstein ☒ Slovenia ☒ Switzerland	Austria: Land Kärnten; Wirtschaftsagentur Burgenland GmbH France: ANCT; Labex ITTEM (Université Grenoble Alpes) Germany: Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Wirtschaft, Landesentwicklung und Energie; Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften Kempten; Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst Baden-Württemberg Italy: AREA; HUB Innovazione Trentino; Ministero dell'Agricoltura, della Sovranità alimentare e delle Foreste; Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia; Regione Lombardia; Università di Trento; Veneto Innovazione Slovenia: Smart Specialisation Coordination Division, Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development of the Republic of Slovenia; Ministrstvo za Visoko šolstvo, Znanost in Inovacije Switzerland: HEIA-FR; Università della Svizzera Italiana
Observers	
ANCI Liguria (Italy); BayFOR - Bavarian Research Alliance (Germany); EGTC Wissenschaftsverbund Vierländerregion Bodensee (Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland); European Commission; Interreg Alpine Space	

With the exception of Liechtenstein, all Alpine countries are represented in AG1. A diverse range of institutions is involved, including public administrations, research institution networks, and universities.

Organisation of Work

AG1 is led by two Co-leaders that share the tasks at eye level. Their task is the overall coordinating the Action Group, in particular: coordinating strategic development of AG, organising AG meetings, monitoring of implementation of the Work Plan, ensure information flow between the AG members and other EUSALP institutions.

AG meetings shall take place 2-4 times p.a., one of those as personal meetings, favourable back-to-back to major EUSALP events.

There are no sub-groups in AG1. Nevertheless, it would be desirable that, for specific activities, interested members and advisory members build a core group/task force (e.g. development of project proposal, organisation of an event). A member is appointed as a communication referent/contact person. Another idea is to identify "project ambassadors" who ensure communication flow with relevant ASP-Projects.

In order to better integrate the expertise of AG1-members, to deepen collaboration with other AG and to strengthen contacts with other Alpine stakeholders and networks, “Governance and Collaboration” has been defined as a separate main topic and corresponding key activities have been elaborated.

One finding of the past period was, that sometimes AG1 members did activities in the sense of the then existing Work Plan, but not under AG1 affiliation. In order to increase outreach of EUSALP, attention of members is drawn to this aspect.

6.2. Involvement of the Stakeholders

AG1 plans to strengthen the connection with key stakeholders in the field of R&I. Those are in the first place research institutions and networks (such as transboundary Wissenschaftsverbund Vierländerregion Bodensee or French Labex ITTEM), multiplier institutions and innovation hubs (such as digital hubs, Coworking spaces, LEADER Local Action Groups). The intention is to organise events with easy accessibility in shorter formats, such as lunch talks addressing specific topics of interest.

A suitable format between AG1 and the responsables of funded projects (in particular Alpine Space Programme projects, but also Interreg-A-Programme projects) will be developed to ensure systematic and regular exchange. Within the BAGL, the idea of a capacity building workshop or similar to establish coordinated procedures on how to integrate project outputs in the work of AG arose. For ASP projects that are relevant for AG1, the installation of “project ambassadors” can support and guide such a coordinated approach. This activity will be undertaken in consultation with the respective Programme Secretariats. On a more local base structures such as e.g. EUREGIOs may be involved.

AG1 intends to serve as a connecting platform, fostering links among actors and networks to encourage the development of new collaborations and following project proposals.

6.3. The Role of the Youth Council

AG1 will strengthen its partnership with the YC by:

- Inviting Youth Councillors to all AG1 meetings and events to ensure their direct contribution.
- Co-Organising the event “EUSALP Alpine AI-Hackathon” for students in June 2026 at Kempten UAS (Kempten UAS, AG1, AG5, YC; Patronage: PCY).
- Possibly contribution to the Event “Stay Local, Learn Global” (YC, AG3).
- The Youth Council will also be invited to contribute to other upcoming AG1 activities.

AG1 is open for ideas and suggestions by Youth Council members.

Some abbreviations:

AG	Action Group
ASP	Alpine Space Programme
BAGL	Board of Action Group Leaders
ETS	EUSALP Technical Secretariat
PCY	Presidency
R&I	Research and Innovation
UAS	University of Applied Sciences
YC	Youth Council