Kanton St.Gallen

Vorarlberg
unser Land

# ANNEX II

# Establishing the Alpine regions as key players in textile circular economy

## Mission note

## Decision paper

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**Title of the Mission:** Establishing the Alpine regions as key players in textile circular economy

**Submitter of the Mission:** Canton of St. Gallen and State of Vorarlberg

**Mission Coordinators:** State Chancellery of the Canton of St. Gallen, Office of the State Government of Vorarlberg

**Mission rapporteur:** Marc Mächler, Member of the Cantonal Government of St. Gallen

**Time frame:** 2026–2028


**Executive summary with main aspects**

- Many Alpine regions possess a strong textile expertise that has developed historically and remains robust to this day.
- The Alpine regions are to be established as key players in the field of the circular textile economy.
- To achieve this objective, the first step is to analyse how existing regional systems are structured in relation to textiles and to what extent they comply with European guidelines.
- Building on this, a regional phased plan is to be developed which identifies ways of extending the useful life of textiles and keeping the materials within regional cycles for as long as possible.
- Cross-border exchange is intended to create a platform fort knowledge transfer.
- Further priorities include linking regional textile expertise with future technologies and other industrial sectors, as well as the development of textiles of the future.
- In addition to various workshops, an Alpine Declaration on Circular Textile Economies and an event in Brussels are planned.


## Introduction

Economic and environmental conditions are currently undergoing rapid changes, bringing into sharp focus how businesses manage resources and, consequently, the implementation of circular business models. For example, the EU's Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) is bringing into force provisions designed to

encourage businesses to adopt more sustainable practices. This also presents companies based in the Alpine region with challenging tasks. As past experiences show, the implementing innovative solutions in line with the ESPR and a sustainable circular economy requires teamwork. To this end, the individual areas of expertise available in the Alpine regions should be brought together on a cross-regional basis.

## Objective of the Mission

The Alpine regions are to be established as key players in the field of the circular textile economy.

- To achieve this objective, the first step will be to analyse how existing regional systems for managing textiles are structured and to what extent they comply with European guidelines on the circular economy. The ESPR will serve as a guideline to ensure that the EU's existing requirements are taken into account.
- Building on the analysis and best practices, a regional phased plan is to be developed which, starting with product design, identifies opportunities to extend the service life of textiles, promote reuse, prevent textile waste and keep materials within regional cycles for as long as possible (short to medium term), until a sustainable circular system is established in which reuse and recycling are effectively interlinked (medium to long term). In particular, insights from already ongoing initiatives in the field of circular economy and best practices from existing national producer responsibility schemes in the textile sector are to be taken into account and assessed for their applicability to regional structures. The short-, medium- and long-term measures are intended to be complementary and to form a holistic, sustainable development plan for the (supra)regional textile circular economy.
- Through cross-border exchange between regions and relevant stakeholders, a platform for knowledge transfer and collaborative learning is to be established. Successful approaches are to be highlighted and presented in such a way that they can be adopted and further developed by other regions in the Alpine region.
- A further focus lies on linking regional textile expertise with future technologies and other industrial sectors. As part of the baseline analysis, therefore, not only will the existing circular economy for textiles be examined, but the potential for cross-sectoral links in areas such as smart textiles, sensor development, biotechnology, etc. will also be assessed. The aim is to identify existing networks, companies, research institutions and clusters and to highlight their contribution to a resource-efficient and circular textile economy. Building on this analysis, measures will be developed that combine traditional circular economy principles with technological innovation.
- In addition to the circular economy approach, there will also be a focus on the development of textiles of the future: the mission partners have extensive experience in the development of sustainable and innovative textiles and materials and have already carried out preliminary work with the relevant stakeholders and companies. The key question here is how the region can position itself to harness and link up

the existing expertise of businesses and research institutions in order to develop sustainable, smart and high-quality textile products, thereby realising the region's potential.

## Why this mission in the EUSALP? Relevance for the Alpine regions

Many Alpine regions possess a strong textile expertise that has developed historically and remains robust to this day, for example regions such as St. Gallen, Vorarlberg, Lombardy, Slovenia and regions in France. Fibres and raw materials of Alpine origin, such as wool, hemp and natural agricultural fibres, have been and remain the foundation for sustainable and regional value chains. It is therefore possible to build on regional expertise in textile production, drawing on innovative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as internationally renowned brands.

Furthermore, the Alpine regions are characterised by technological innovations and research into new smart textiles. Through the close integration of textile research and practical application – for example, in the fields of mountaineering and medicine – the Alpine regions are pioneers in the development of durable textiles that are designed from the outset for subsequent reuse or high-quality recycling.

Finally, most Alpine countries (Austria, Switzerland, southern Germany, northern Italy and parts of France) have historically developed, very dense collection networks and occupy a pioneering position in the European used clothing collection and reuse chain.

## Strategic orientation and political added value of the mission

The textile sector is the third-largest contributor to water pollution and land use; the fashion industry is responsible for approximately 10 per cent of global $CO_2$ emissions and for around 20 per cent of global pollution of clean water. To make this sector more sustainable, the EU has adopted the EU Textiles Strategy. Among other things, extended producer responsibility for textiles must be implemented from April 2028.

The mission aims to support participating regions in EU Member States in implementing the EU Textile Strategy, to bring together existing initiatives on circular textiles in the Alpine regions, and to create a platform for dialogue between SMEs, innovators, social enterprises and decision-makers at both regional and supra-regional levels, in order to strengthen cross-border cooperation and the exchange of knowledge in this field. It aims to provide all Alpine regions with expertise on the circular textile economy, including its challenges and opportunities.

The mission therefore also has the potential to initiate best practices and can thus raise the profile of both the Alpine states and the Alpine regions in both a national and an EU context.

## Activities / Implementation

- Incubator Workshop (3rd quarter of 2026 or 1st quarter of 2027)
  At a workshop to be held in St. Gallen, the coordinating regions of St. Gallen and Vorarlberg will set out the mission's objectives in detail and, building on these, define the work packages and steps.
- Expansion of the network of Alpine regions and countries and involvement of EUSALP stakeholders (3rd quarter of 2026 and 1st/2nd quarters of 2027)
  Building on the definition of objectives, or in parallel with this, the network of EUSALP partners participating in the mission will be expanded. For this purpose, the EUSALP national coordinators will serve as an important relay to determine potentially interested national and regional stakeholders in regard to the mission. In addition, the relevant EUSALP action groups will be informed about the mission and given the opportunity to contribute to identify the challenges and opportunities of the circular textile economy for the Alpine regions to the mission, and hence are invited to participate in the implementation.
- Network workshops (from the third quarter of 2027)
  One or more workshops will be held involving the regions and countries participating in the mission, as well as other Alpine regions and countries where appropriate, and the relevant EUSALP action groups. These workshops will serve to exchange best practices regarding regional textile management systems and to define the challenges and the necessary framework conditions for overcoming them, so that sustainable regional circular systems can be established.
- Alpine Declaration on Circular Textile Economies (2028)
  As part of the workshops or as a result of them, the participating EUSALP partners will prepare a political declaration defining the challenges, opportunities and necessary framework conditions for implementing the circular textile economy. This declaration is addressed to the relevant political levels and will be coordinated with the relevant EUSALP bodies.
- EUSALP event in Brussels (4th quarter of 2028)
  An event will take place in Brussels to present this declaration and, more generally, to showcase Alpine expertise in the field of sustainable textiles at European level

## Territorial relevance / Mission area

The starting point for the mission is the Lake Constance region, comprising the Canton of St. Gallen and the State of Vorarlberg – both regions with a long history in the textile industry, but also currently at the forefront of developments in the form of a strong presence of smart textiles and sustainability research. Other Alpine regions that are particularly characterised by the textile industry – whether through historical tradition, current production or innovations towards the circular economy and smart textiles – are to be encouraged to participate.

## Who will be involved in implementing the mission?

In St. Gallen and Vorarlberg, and where applicable in the other participating Alpine regions, a dialogue platform will be established to involve the partners relevant to the circular textile economy (at national, regional and local levels, social enterprises, industry and researchers).

The workshops are aimed at all EUSALP partners, with EUSALP Action Groups 1, 2 and 6 – which are particularly affected – being specifically involved and mobilised as a valuable source of knowledge and best practice. Relevant Interreg and other cross-border projects are also to be involved in this context.

The mission itself remains an initiative supported by governments and regions, aimed at strengthening the political relevance of EUSALP.

## Expected results

- Stocktake of the regional textile circular economy: The current situation in the participating Alpine regions (including collection and sorting structures, the role of social enterprises, etc.) will be documented and assessed in terms of its compliance with European guidelines on the circular economy. Strengths, weaknesses, gaps and potential for development will be identified.
- Regional phased plan for transformation: Examples of practice-oriented development plans will be provided, containing recommendations for action to extend the service life of textiles, promote reuse, prevent textile waste and foster regional material cycles.
- Transferable strategies for extended producer responsibility: Successful national models of extended producer responsibility (EPR) are analysed – including with regard to cost structures – and assessed for their transferability to regional structures. This leads to recommendations for the implementation of suitable regional governance and financing models.
- Improved knowledge transfer and stronger cooperation: A permanent network for cross-border exchange is being established between the participating regions, companies, research institutions and other stakeholders. Examples of good practice are documented, processed and made available for use by other regions.
- Identified potential for innovation and cooperation: Existing expertise, networks and clusters at the interface between textiles and future technologies (e.g. smart textiles, sensor technology or biotechnology) are mapped. Potential for cross-sector cooperation is identified and tapped into for future innovation projects.