

## TRAMI Policy Brief No. 2

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### Governing EU Missions at national and regional levels: Insights and challenges

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EU missions mark the latest step in the ‘normative turn’ in innovation policy, which we have witnessed since the early 2010s. They challenge the established division of political competencies, which can only be overcome through a new mode of governance, a widening of the range of actors and stakeholder involved in innovation policy, and an adjustment of institutional roles and arrangements for effective policy coordination towards EU mission goals.

TRAMI conducted a systematic mapping of governance arrangements for EU mission implementation in 18 members and 2 associated countries, i.e. of relevant key actors, recent changes in institutional structures and key instruments as well as the processes to build, monitor and evaluate those arrangements.<sup>1</sup> It was complemented by an online survey to gather assessments by key individuals in mission governance of the drivers, barriers and options of mission governance. This policy brief synthesises the main observations and challenges of EU mission implementation experienced in the past few years.

#### **Progress towards mission implementation is slow and uneven – More impetus needed**

While some countries embarked on a mission-oriented policy approach as early as the mid-2010s, the EU missions have given it a major boost from 2021 onwards. Progress has taken place step-wise, with (1) recognising and incorporating the objectives addressed by EU missions in national policy, (2) building new and more inclusive forms of coordination, networking and governance across ministries and departments, and (3) making first steps towards implementation of policy mixes involving a wider range of stakeholders, including citizens. As evidenced by the TRAMI mapping, progress is highly uneven with some countries having quickly established well-functioning governance structures and processes, while others remaining in the phase of observing current developments and raising awareness of the mission-oriented mode.

➔ *If EU missions are to achieve their objectives, progress towards implementation needs to be made in all member states and accession countries. This requires building governance structures at national and/or regional levels, and accelerating mission implementation in particular in those countries that have so far remained at the stage of observation and awareness-raising.*

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<sup>1</sup> These data are available via dashboard on the TRAMI Mission Data Platform (<https://mission-data-platform.eu/>).

## **Umbrella governance – Building core structures is essential**

In almost all countries, some form of central strategic coordination has been, or is in the process of being, set up, mostly by adapting already existing governance structures, and possibly amending them by specifically designed “umbrella governance” mechanisms to ensure cross-ministerial oversight and interaction on all matters of mission governance. This strategic umbrella governance is complemented by (i) operational responsibilities, often with funding agencies or national intermediaries taking on additional roles as organisers of implementation processes to consult and engage key stakeholders from the mission areas, and (ii) novel strategic intelligence functions to monitor progress, develop capabilities and adapt mission-oriented strategies as well as their operational planning and implementation.

→ *Setting up some form of centralised steering function (“umbrella governance”) seems to be vital to the success of EU missions, which in many countries adds new cross-ministerial and cross-sectorial functions to the existing governance system and requires more agile coordination processes. It needs complementing by operational capacities to support implementation and dedicated strategic intelligence functions.*

## **Building on existing structures – Potential for a head start, but with caveats**

The areas of EU missions are already addressed by a variety of pre-existing policies and programmes that are usually not (yet) synchronised and geared towards mission goals. However, being able to draw on pre-existing programmes and initiatives – several countries have had thematic funding programmes or even national missions in place well before the launch of the EU missions (e.g. in Germany, Sweden or Austria) – gives these countries a potential head start on their way towards a mission-oriented approach. At the same time, it needs to be clear that traditional thematic R&I funding programmes tend to fall short of the requirements that make up a truly mission-oriented innovation policy. Moreover, in countries where national missions have already been in place (e.g. in Germany, Sweden, or the Netherlands), EU missions tend to be closely linked to national ones and re-interpreted accordingly.

→ *Drawing on pre-existing structures and programmes can be of great help when implementing EU missions, but there is a risk of relying too much on traditional programme designs, rather than shifting to a truly mission-oriented approach based on a broad understanding of innovation, ambitious transformative goals and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Attention needs to be paid to keeping up the ambitions of EU missions in case they are tied to pre-existing national missions.*

## **Sectoral and R&I policies – The challenge of policy coordination**

The embedding of EU missions in the framework programme for research and innovation has led to their national implementation being equally spearheaded by ministries in charge of science, research and innovation (e.g. in Romania or Spain). Sometimes (e.g., in Austria or Germany), sectoral ministries are co-leading or play a significant role in the implementation processes. In other words, although the overarching mission goals are deeply rooted in sectoral rather than in R&I policies, EU missions tend to be driven from the R&I side. To

counteract this tendency, countries that have established structures of umbrella governance recur to inter-ministerial and multi-level coordination processes when developing action plans and roadmaps.

→ *The alignment and coordination of R&I and sectoral policies represents a major challenge of mission implementation. The development of joint action plans or roadmaps has been shown to be a powerful instrument for policy coordination, but the further mission implementation advances, the more emphasis on the role of sectoral policies will be needed to achieve mission goals.*

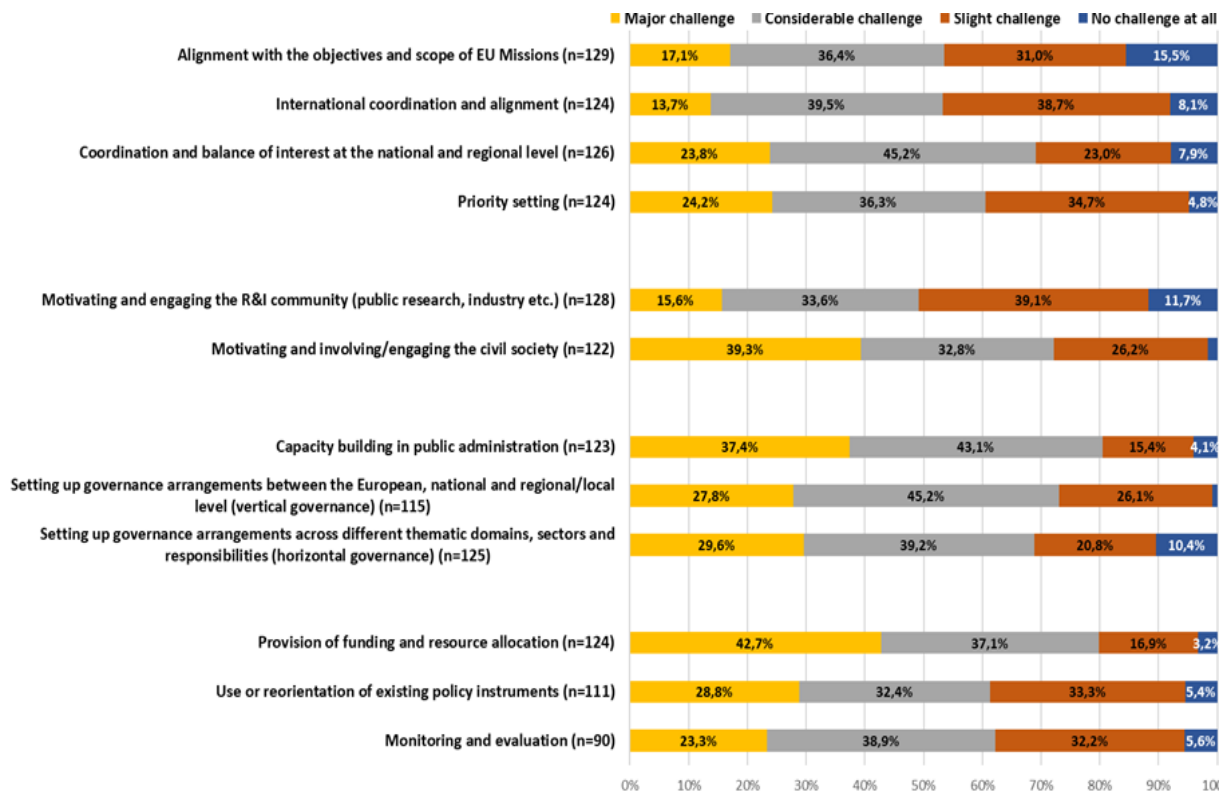


Figure 1: Perceived challenges of the implementation of EU Missions (TRAMI-Online-Survey 2023)

### Multi-level coordination – Facing constitutional caveats

The implementation of EU missions entails important multi-level coordination challenges between national, regional and local levels of government. While the national level dominates policy implementation in most countries, there are exceptions (e.g., Denmark) where the main responsibility resides with the regions. Several countries with a federalist constitution require a cautious and differentiated handling of political responsibilities in relation to missions. New instrument design (e.g., City Contracts) have been developed to better involve local and regional actors in EU mission implementation.

→ *Missions often address fields of action where the usual divisions of formal competencies and political responsibilities between national, regional and local levels of government reach their limits. Next to matters of political culture, these constitutional specificities make the transfer of good practices from one country to another difficult, and call for tailor-made approaches, to be negotiated in each individual country and mission.*

## **Beyond new instruments – towards portfolio management**

Currently no complete picture of the instruments used to implement the EU missions in the individual countries and regions can be drawn. In most countries, the focus is primarily on "economic and financial" and "regulatory and guidance" instruments. Existing instruments need to be adjusted to the needs of EU missions and additional instruments are needed that are specifically designed for EU mission implementation. In the case of missions, non-financial and soft instruments that support the development and implementation processes of new mission governance play a particularly important role to help mobilise and engage a broad range of actors and stakeholders.

➔ *Missions need to draw a broad range of policy instruments to be effective, but they need to be deployed in a coordinated and synergetic way along the mission implementation pathway („mission implementation portfolio“). Missions differ in terms of their requirements over the course of their implementation, and instrument portfolios need to be adapted accordingly. The various instruments need to address both early movers and followers in innovation, as well as all the other types of mission actors.*

## **Strategic intelligence – A new approach to monitoring and learning**

The implementation of missions cannot be entirely planned on the drawing board. Stepwise and iterative coordination and planning procedures are needed, considering alternative options for action, and taking into account progress made and changes in systemic framework conditions. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, anticipation and policy learning help adjust the policy portfolios over longer periods of time, until mission goals are achieved.

➔ *Given the ambitious and often transformative nature of EU missions, a new approach to monitoring and policy learning is needed. The emphasis must be on learning rather than ex-post legitimation. The definition of roadmaps, long-term impact pathways, formats of policy reflection and gap analyses but also elements of foresight building on the community of mission actors can provide significant assistance here.*

### **About**

TRAMI, the TRAnsnational cooperation on the MIssions approach, is an EU-funded project focussed on Making Missions Work by creating Communities of Practice, exchanging knowledge and offering mutual learning.

