BIO2REG

Enabling transition towards circular and systemic BIOeconomy model regions by a Regions-to-Regions approach

List of selected regions for the exchange instrument

Deliverable 3.2

March 2026

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Funded by the European Union

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Document information	
Project name	BIO2REG
Project title	Enabling transition towards circular and systemic BIOeconomy model regions by a Regions-to-Regions approach
Grant agreement no.	101135420
Project duration	1 January 2024-31 December 2026
Report	Deliverable 3.2: List of selected regions for the exchange instrument
Work Package	Work Package 3: Boosting the development of circular bioeconomy model regions by an in-terregional exchange
Work Package leader	Forschungszentrum Jülich (FZJ)
Task	Task 3.2: Selection process and organizing the interregional exchange instrument
Task leader	Forschungszentrum Jülich (FZJ)
Internal peer review	BIO2REG consortium, Advisory Board
Planned delivery date	Initial 28.02.2026 Postponed to 31.03.2026
Actual delivery date	30.03.2026
Reporting period	Reporting Period 2
Dissemination level	Public

Revision history

Version	Date	Reviewer	Changes
0.1	31.01.2026	Denise Gider, Christian Klar, FZJ	Initial selected regions shared with consortium
0.2	04.02.2026	BIO2REG consortium	Consortium review and validation
0.3	19.02.2026	Denise Gider, FZJ	Revised justification on selection shared with Advisory Board
0.4	02.03.2026	Elisa Gambuzzi, Advisory Board member	Feedback
0.5	11.03.2026	Denise Gider, FZJ	Applicants informed of selection results
1.0	30.03.2026	Denise Gider, FZJ	Final version

BIO2REG in a nutshell

A circular bioeconomy is essential for achieving the EU's sustainability goals. However, the implementation of a regional bioeconomy is fraught with challenges. Bioeconomy model regions offer a systemic approach to the transition to sustainable development, based on circular economy concepts. The EU-funded BIO2REG project aims to help greenhouse gas-intensive economies unlock their circular bioeconomy potential by becoming bioeconomy model regions.

The project promotes regional networking, interregional exchange and cooperation, and provides regional stakeholders with a conceptual framework for regionalisation in bioeconomy model regions. This includes mapping best practices in a circular and sustainable bioeconomy, assessing bioeconomy potential, providing mentoring and training, forming transition alliances and making policy recommendations. The project adopts a multi-stakeholder approach, developing tools and guidelines in collaboration with regional stakeholders and engaging with regions through guided exchanges on the ground.

Find out more:

Website: https://bio2reg.eu

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1 Executive summary

This Deliverable reports on the implementation of BIO2REG's Task 3.2, which covers the launch, evaluation, selection, and organization of the BIO2REG interregional exchange instrument. The instrument enables structured region-to-region peer learning to support the transition towards circular and systemic bioeconomy model regions. This Deliverable presents the framework for the selection process and the selected regions.

Following an open call which was open between 13 October and ended on 4 December[1], 14 regional applications were evaluated by the BIO2REG internal peer group in line with the criteria defined in Deliverable 3.1 "Report on design of the interregional exchange instrument" (submitted in August 2025).

The selection process of the overall 14 applications received by December followed two phases:

Phase 1: Each regional application was evaluated independently by two BIO2REG consortium partners (December/January). Evaluation criteria are described in Deliverable 3.1 and were also published in a step-to-step application guide on the BIO2REG website.

Phase 2: Based on these evaluations, matchmaking proposals were prepared by Forschungszentrum (FZJ) Jülich using agreed assessment criteria (e.g. thematic alignment, expertise fit and learning potential). The results were presented to and validated by the full BIO2REG consortium during a workshop at the 2nd BIO2REG Annual Meeting on 4 February 2026. Furthermore, the selection of regions was shared with the Advisory Board members for collection of feedback, which one Advisory Board member provided. Matchmaking criteria are described in Deliverable 3.1 (see above)

As a result, five region pairs have been selected for exchange implementation in 2026. Following the selection of pairs, these were shared with the regions before submitting this Deliverable and publishing the pairs.

2 Launch and promotion of the interregional exchange call

The application phase was successfully launched on 13 October 2025, reaching Milestone 5 (Call documents for interregional exchange published) ahead of the end-of-October deadline. The internal Milestone 5 report confirms the successful launch of the exchange application phase and the publication of the call documents on 13 October 2025. The concept and content of the call were prepared by FZJ, while BIOCOM led the communication and dissemination activities, including the application form on the website, flyer, social media outreach and related promotional materials.

Promotion and outreach were carried out by FZJ through presentations and targeted contributions at the ERIAFF Forested Regions Working Group meeting (26 November), RIBES Capacity Building activities, the SDG Lab Kassel (18 November), the BIO2REG webinar "Regional Bioeconomy in Practice" (13 November), the Bioeconomy Austria Summit (12 November), the Bioeconomy Regions Summit 2025 of Bioregions Facility (23 October), as well as through on-site participation and bilateral exchanges during the EU Week of Regions and Cities (13 to 15 October). These activities were complemented by newsletter dissemination, network channels and targeted invitations to more than 300 individual contacts, mainly coordinated by FZJ and BIOCOM and supported by all partners.

[1] The initial deadline was extended from initially 13 November to 4 December 2025 due to a lower-than-expected number of applications and mitigation measures were executed to broaden the personal and individual outreach. To preserve the timeline, evaluation started immediately thereafter and the originally planned online dialogue was not implemented. Applicants were informed and the step-by-step application materials were updated.

3 Evaluation process

The evaluation criteria are in-depth described in Deliverable 3.1 "Report on design of the interregional exchange instrument" (submitted in August 2025). The evaluation was coordinated by FZJ and supported by internal peer group of following partners: BIOCOM, Kveloce, RISE, Matís, Homo Silvestris Europae, BIOEAST Hub CZ and Bio-based Industries Consortium. All applications were evaluated by two different consortium members in December 2025 and January 2026.

Evaluation criteria

Each application was assessed on a scale from 0 to 1 (1.0 = fully meets the criterion, 0.5 = partially meets the criterion, 0= not clearly demonstrated or missing information)

- **Regional challenge:** How clearly the region describes its main transformation challenge, e.g. reducing dependence on GHG-intensive sectors such as coal, agriculture or forestry-based industries.
- **Institutional capacity and continuity:** Whether the application involves permanent organizations (e.g. regional authorities, development agencies) that can ensure long-term implementation capacity.
- **Motivation and expected regional impact:** The strength of the region's motivation and the potential benefits for regional development.
- **Stakeholder collaboration:** How actively different actors (authorities, research, business, civil society) already cooperate on bioeconomy topics.
- **Bioeconomy enabling conditions:** Existing programs, hubs or initiatives that support your regional bioeconomy transition.
- **Contribution to the exchange:** What expertise or experience your delegation brings, for example, in sustainable farming, innovation support, regional policy, or education.

Additional aspects, such as willingness to host or visit another region and potential conflicts of interest, were noted for transparency but were not scored.

All evaluation results were systematically captured in a consolidated scoring table maintained in an Excel file (see Figure 1).

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
rtner	ID	Username	Region and country	What is the main transformation challenge your region faces related to carbon-intensive sectors, e.g. coal mining, intensive agriculture such as livestock or crop production, forestry-based industries, fisheries?	Regional challenge FZJ scoring, 1.0 = clear, specific, well-explained challenge 0.5 = general or partially specified 0.0 = vague or missing	Regional challenge other partner scoring, 1.0 = clear, specific, well-explained challenge 0.5 = general or partially specified 0.0 = vague or missing

Figure 1: Extract of the application evaluation and scoring matrix

4 Matchmaking process

In line with the regional pairing and matchmaking approach defined in Deliverable 3.1 (see above), the matchmaking and region selection followed a structured and transparent two-phase process.

4.1 Initial screening

Prior to applying the matchmaking matrix, an initial eligibility and comparability screening was conducted by FZJ to ensure alignment with the objectives and format of the exchange instrument. This screening assessed whether applications met the minimum requirements in terms of stakeholder composition, practical implementation focus, and overall compatibility within the available applicant pool.

Two applications were not taken forward to the matchmaking phase. In one case, the application was predominantly research-oriented and involved a limited range of stakeholder types, which limited the potential for practice-based, region-to-region exchange as foreseen in the instrument

concept. In another case, no sufficiently compatible partner region addressing comparable bioeconomy sectors and transition challenges could be identified within the applicant pool.

The outcome of the initial screening was validated by the entire BIO2REG consortium during the 2nd BIO2REG Annual Meeting on 4 February 2026. Following this step, twelve applications remained eligible for the structured matchmaking process.

4.2 Host identification and pairing procedure

As 12 out of 14 applicant regions indicated willingness to act as host regions, the matchmaking was conducted in two sequential steps:

Step 1: Identification of potential host regions

Host regions were identified based on their expressed role preference and application profiles. In cases where two applications were submitted from the same region and both indicated willingness to host, both entities were requested for their willingness to co-hosting a visiting region, which both regions agreed to.

Step 2: Structured compatibility assessment

For each identified host region, two to three potential visiting regions were assessed using a structured matchmaking matrix by FZJ.

4.3 Matchmaking criteria

Each potential pairing was assessed by FZJ on a scale from 0 to 1 (1 = strong fit, 0.5 = partial fit, 0 = no fit) across the following aspects:

- **Similar challenges**: Overlap in transition needs and regional priorities
- **Thematic interests**: Shared focus areas (e.g. value chains, governance, skills)
- **Complementary expertise**: Ability to learn from one another's experience
- **Different maturity levels**: Ensuring clear learning opportunities
- **Stakeholder type fit**: Involvement of comparable actor groups
- **Stakeholder readiness and diversity**: Strength and openness of the stakeholder ecosystem
- **Bioeconomy enabling conditions**: Existence of relevant hubs, programs, or support structures
- **Geographic or cultural fit**: Manageable distance or collaboration history

All matchmaking results were systematically captured in a consolidated scoring table (see). Each score was accompanied by a qualitative justification in dedicated comment fields to ensure transparency and support informed decision-making

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
Host region	Visiting region	Further comments which could influence the matchmaking results	Similar challenges 1.0 = Strong overlap in challenges 0.5 = Partial overlap in challenges 0 = No visible overlap in challenges	Open comment	Thematic interests 1.0 = Strong matches in thematic interest, 0.5 = Partial overlaps in thematic interests, 0 = No shared thematic interests identified	Open comment	Expertise contributi 1.0 = Com sustainabl education 0.5 = Parti 0 = No cor

Figure 2: Extract of the matchmaking evaluation and scoring matrix

4.4 Validation

The resulting matchmaking proposals of FZJ were presented to and validated by the full BIO2REG consortium during a workshop at the 2nd Annual Meeting on 4 February 2026. The final proposed pairs were subsequently submitted to the Advisory Board for confirmation, together with the complete evaluation and matchmaking results and a summary report outlining the process and its outcomes.

5 Selected regions

The following regions have been selected to participate in the BIO2REG interregional exchange instrument. The selection is based on the evaluation and matchmaking process described in the previous chapters, aiming to ensure strong thematic alignment, complementary expertise and clear mutual learning potential between the paired regions.

FZJ informed all applicants about the outcome of the selection process on 11 March 2026. At the time of reporting this Deliverable, one proposed exchange pair (involving Basilicata) is subject to ongoing clarification regarding the region's participation and role within the exchange. This pair is therefore marked with an asterisk (*) in the table below. Table 1 presents the selected host-visiting region pairs, including a short justification for each pairing.

Table 1: Selected host-visiting region pairs for the BIO2REG exchange

Host region	Visiting region	Reasons for proposal for selection:	Proposed topics
Grand Est, France (ID14)	Centru Region, Romania (ID10)	Strong thematic alignment on bioeconomy governance and policy integration combined with a clear learning potential for Centru from this very far developed model region. Grand Est offers lots to showcase, advanced industrial-scale bioeconomy implementation, while Centru seeks to strengthen operationalization of RIS3/RDP priorities. Centru requirements: To maximize the exchange with Grand Est, we encourage Centru to broaden the delegation beyond the regional development agency to include innovation or cluster expertise (e.g. research or industry), strengthening engagement and knowledge transfer for RIS3 implementation.	Bioeconomy governance, RIS3 operationalization, industrial bioeconomy ecosystems
Ostrobothnia, Finland (ID7), Kristinestad, Finland (ID1)	Wallonia, Belgium (ID6)	Wallonia is the strongest overall match based on shared challenges, high thematic overlap (circular bioeconomy, biomethanization, agri-food systems) and complementary expertise. Ostrobothnia contributes living-lab-based innovation ecosystems, while Wallonia brings sectoral bioeconomy expertise and policy coordination.	Circular bioeconomy, agri-food systems, biomethanization, living-lab ecosystems
Central Germany (ID3)	Akmenė, Lithuania (ID4) Germany mentioned explicitly as preferred host	Strong Just Transition alignment combined with complementary transition stages and a clearly expressed interest in Germany as a host region.	Just Transition, industrial decarbonization and bio-based industrial transformation
Carinthia, Austria I (ID13), Carinthia, Austria II (ID12)	Basque Country, Spain (ID2)	Strongest thematic overlap on forest-based bioeconomy, wood construction and SME-dominated value chains. Carinthia's R&D and cluster-based implementation complement the Basque Country's governance and ecosystem-building needs.	Forest-based bioeconomy, wood construction and SME value chains

Basilicata, Italy (ID8)*	Sisak-Moslavina County, Croatia (ID11)	Match selection based on shared rural, agricultural and post-industrial transition challenges, fragmented value chains and capacity-building needs.	Rural bioeconomy development, regional governance and biomass valorization, citizen engagement/participatory innovation or multi-actor collaboration

*Proposed exchange pair is subject to ongoing clarification regarding the region's participation and role within the exchange.