



# Key Strengths and Challenges Across Our Hubs

Learnings from the RuralBioUp  
Regional Hubs



Funded by  
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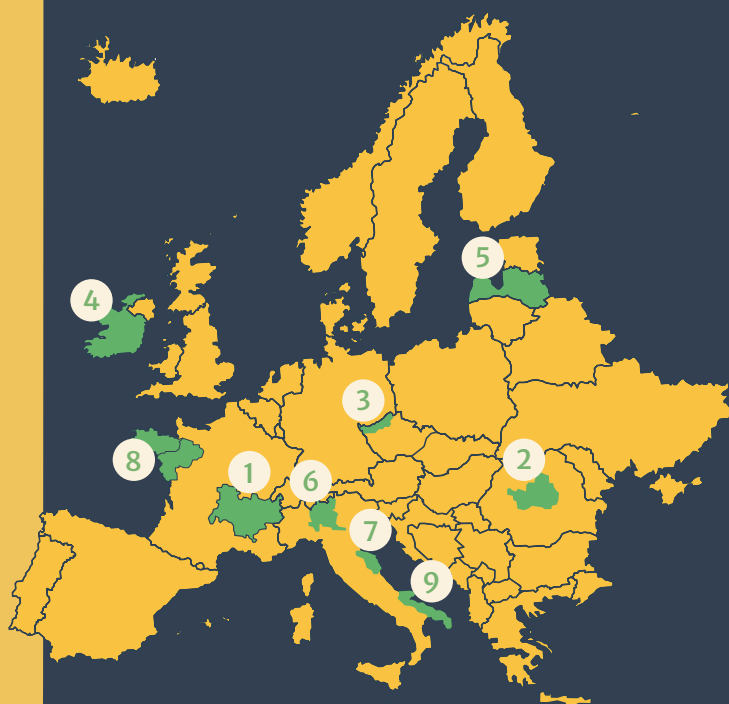
# The RuralBioUp Project

## Driving rural development through our regional hubs

RuralBioUp is a project funded by the Horizon Europe programme, running from October 2022 to September 2025.

Our mission is to scale-up local bio-based solutions for rural development by strengthening cooperation among two key groups: regional actors (like policymakers, producers, and citizens) and knowledge holders (such as industries, researchers, and EU agencies).

**We set up 9 Regional Hubs in 9 regions in 6 EU countries.**



- 1 Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region, **France**
- 2 Centru Region, **Romania**
- 3 Charles Spa Region, **Czechia**
- 4 **Ireland** (The hub operates nationally with a focus on County Tipperary)
- 5 **Latvia** (The Latvian hub is a national initiative with stakeholders from all over the country)
- 6 Lombardia, **Italy**
- 7 Marche, **Italy**
- 8 Pays de la Loire & Bretagne Region, **France**
- 9 Puglia Region, **Italy**

## What is a Bioeconomy Hub?

A bioeconomy hub is a collaborative space and facilitation tool that brings together diverse stakeholders – such as entrepreneurs, researchers, innovators, policy makers, civil society, media, and other regional actors – across the entire bioeconomy value chain.

Its purpose is to foster dialogue, knowledge exchange, and networking to identify synergies, share best practices, and co-create solutions to regional and cross-regional challenges and opportunities in the bioeconomy.

Through training, consulting, and strategic collaboration, bioeconomy hubs aim to build capacity, influence policy, and support the effective and sustainable use of renewable biological resources.

Ultimately, they contribute to the development of functioning bioeconomy systems that align with broader goals such as regional development, climate neutrality, and the European Green Deal. The implementation differs highly from the regional identified opportunities, chances, and cultural working modes.



# Key Strengths and Challenges Across Our Hubs



## Learnings from the RuralBioUp Regional Hubs

### **Suggestions and Recommendations for Long-Term Sustainability**

The core strength of the RuralBioUp Project is the creation of stakeholder networks fostering the development of the bioeconomy in the Hubs' respective regions. The analysis of these hubs was based on their Action Plans, facilitator questionnaires, and direct feedback from members. This data was used to prepare the report, *RuralBioUp Recommendations and Actionable Knowledge*.

Our analysis found that the Hubs were formed in one of two ways: either “bottom-up,” where a group of stakeholders came together to collaboratively write the Action Plan, or “top-down,” where facilitators drafted a plan first and then identified stakeholders to match it.

However, regardless of the initial approach, a crucial finding was that every Hub went through a difficult and time-consuming negotiation process. This was necessary to align the unpredictable expectations of stakeholders with the project's predefined goals. This challenging alignment process is what ultimately led to the identification of the top 10 common strengths and weaknesses across the Hubs, which are summarized below.



# Top Strengths

## 1 Strong Stakeholder Networks

The presence of representatives from public administrations (for example, regional Departments of Agriculture and productive sectors) and industry associations has been key to strengthening the Hubs.

## 2 Diverse & Complementary Skills

Diverse competencies are undoubtedly a strength, provided that initiatives are structured to foster synergy among stakeholders and prevent dominance by one area (for example, primary production, technology, governance). Stakeholder selection must be tailored for each action.

## 3 Innovative Solutions

Hubs provide an ideal environment for introducing and promoting innovative technologies and methodologies for the development of regional bioeconomy value chains. This is particularly enhanced by the involvement of public and private research entities.

## 4 Good Collaboration with Hub Contact Points

Contact Points should be representative of both the territory and its bioeconomic production system. Stakeholders particularly appreciated the involvement of public authorities and local industry associations.

## 5 Effective Knowledge Transfer

Effective knowledge transfer for practical application in the productive sector benefited significantly from a shared language between researchers and enterprises, with minimal theoretical content and a focus on practical implementation.



# Top Strengths

## 6 High Bioeconomy Awareness

Preliminarily selected stakeholders demonstrated a strong awareness of the opportunities offered by bioeconomy development in their regions. This motivation was especially evident in activities involving knowledge transfer and best practice exchange. Such awareness is expected to foster enduring links between biomass-supplying agroforestry sectors and transforming industries.

## 7 Focus on By-Product Valorisation

A key aspect of the bioeconomy is the “cascading” exploitation of biomass. Beyond high-value applications (for example, food, biomolecules, fine products), it is crucial to “close the loop” by using residual fractions for soil fertility or bioenergy. The RuralBioUp Project’s residual biomass database is expected to play a vital role in matching supply and demand at a broader territorial level.

## 8 Synergies with Other Projects

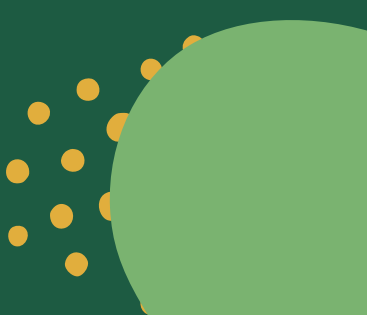
The European Commission has funded many projects aimed at building networks for bioeconomy development. RuralBioUp facilitated multiple joint meetings with similar projects, fostering knowledge exchange and significantly expanding the stakeholder base. These synergies will help preserve the project’s legacy beyond its formal conclusion.

## 9 Presence of Local Clusters

The presence of bioeconomy-active local clusters in several Hubs promoted stakeholder interaction and aggregation, offering structured platforms for dialogue and experience sharing. Strengthening ties between clusters and local public administrations will be vital for the future.

## 10 Effective Study Visits

Study visits and showcased days proved particularly effective for experience sharing and knowledge transfer. Entrepreneurs appreciated the opportunity to observe technological applications in real production settings and assess their replicability. Short video interviews recorded during these visits helped disseminate information widely beyond the events themselves.



# Top Weaknesses

## 1 Excessive Number of Activities

Most Hubs reported that the number of planned stakeholder-targeted activities, as initially outlined in the Action Plans, exceeded the actual availability of participants. Future planning should consolidate activities into fewer events, such as combining interviews, workshops, and coaching within a single study visit.

## 2 Lack of Stakeholder Time

Entrepreneurs, a key driver of bioeconomic development, often have limited time for Project-related activities. In addition to consolidating events, activities should be tailored to their specific areas of interest.

## 3 Limited Sectoral Interaction

Even among forward-looking entrepreneurs, a systemic understanding of interconnections between bioeconomic value chains is lacking. A sectorial approach persists. Promoting the concept of “industrial symbiosis” and highlighting linkages between supply chains and market niches will be essential. Support from researchers and public officials will be key here.

## 4 Uneasy Stakeholder Engagement

While stakeholder recruitment was relatively easy, sustaining active and high-quality participation proved more difficult. Extensive, detailed questionnaires to assess KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) were often seen as burdensome and “time waste”. These tools should be replaced by experience-based assessments from facilitators.

## 5 Low Willingness to Invest in the Bioeconomy

Bioeconomy is still widely perceived as a high business risk sector. Many stakeholders are interested but cautious to invest. This barrier – crucial for the success of RuralBioUp – can be addressed by informing entrepreneurs of available funding opportunities and establishing dedicated support desks within public institutions.



# Top Weaknesses

## 6 Regulatory Difficulties

Bioeconomic legislation remains fragmented and complex in many Countries. In Italy, for instance, ambiguity between “by-product” and “waste” hampers permits and discourages investment. Projects like RuralBioUp, involving many stakeholders, can help propose policy solutions to streamline this framework.

## 7 Territorial Heterogeneity

This issue is especially evident in national-scale Hubs that cover diverse regions with different agricultural systems and value chains. It can be addressed by tailoring initiatives to specific territorial characteristics.

## 8 Limited Player Availability

Despite their potential, many Hub initiatives saw lower-than-expected participation. Improved communication strategies highlighting real, short-term economic benefits are needed.

## 9 Overlap with Other Projects

While collaboration with similar initiatives is a strength, it becomes problematic when stakeholders are asked to join redundant activities. Better coordination between projects is needed to avoid duplication of activities.

## 10 Prevalence of Researchers over Entrepreneurs

Hubs should include actors from different backgrounds. Although universities and research organisations ensure access to innovative technologies, issues arise from the use of overly technical language and differing timelines for results. These gaps can be bridged through peer-level discussions aimed at co-developing solutions, rather than imposing them.





## Our Consortium



### Want to Learn More?

Visit our website for full project details or get in touch directly.

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