



# **VANGUARD INITIATIVE**

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

## Introduction from the Chair

The Welsh Government is pleased and proud that Wales has been Chair of the Vanguard Initiative during 2020. At the beginning of this year none of us could have predicted the profound challenges and changes that Covid-19 has brought to our way of life and our ways of working, across the world. It has been especially rewarding to lead the Vanguard Initiative through this period of such significant change, and to see how much this relatively new, but powerful and influential network has been able to achieve.

The adversity of the Covid-19 situation has shown the very real value of collaboration, both within and between regions. In Wales, we were able to respond early to the EU's decision to increase State Aid support levels for COVID-related interventions. To date we have been able to help over 40 SMEs work with our research organisations to re-purpose their businesses, producing the protective equipment, sanitisers and medical products the country needs: an impressive example of regional stakeholder collaborative innovation. At the same time, it has been very satisfying to see how the Vanguard Initiative made the most of its existing partnerships to be able to respond to the crisis, for example through the '3DP PAN EU' 3D Printing Project, supporting the production of PPE.

You will see from this report that the Vanguard Initiative has been able to make great strides in delivering its goals, despite the sudden shift of policy focus at regional, national and EU level. The active participation of our members and stakeholders in our regions is what makes Vanguard Initiative unique and influential. I highly commend our members – through the Pilots, Board, and Task Groups – and our Secretariat, for translating those goals into tangible progress.

Wales highly values the collaborative work that we undertake with our friends and partners in Europe, and our active and leading role in Vanguard Initiative is a clear expression of this, which directly supports the aims of the Welsh Government's International Strategy, published earlier this year. Our active involvement in the Vanguard Initiative's activities has helped to strengthen our relationship with key partner regions identified in our International Strategy and provided the opportunity to explore and develop new opportunities for collaboration, for example through our involvement in developing the Horizon 2020 EIC Mutual Learning proposal.

2021 will undoubtedly bring more changes for all of us, as well as new opportunities. 2020 has shown us that, with our collaborative, member-driven approach, the Vanguard Initiative is well-placed to navigate, successfully, whatever the future brings. Wales remains an engaged European nation and is committed to continuing effective collaboration. We look forward to contributing to the Vanguard Initiative's success story for the years to come.

**Kirsty Williams, MS - Minister for Education, Welsh Government**

## Influencing EU policy

During this year the Vanguard Initiative Policy Influencing task group has been working hard to influence the EU policy agenda, giving input on a number of policy related areas important to the network and – through publications and activities - creating the conditions that allow our pilot projects to flourish. Our policy influencing efforts – combined with the VI methodology and collaborative approach – have helped to ensure that role of regions in innovation is increasingly acknowledged by the European institutions, including in their 2021-27 programme proposals.

Building on our past achievements, a strong focus of this task group this year has been to preserve and input to design of the **Interregional Innovation Investment (I3)** instrument (previously known as “Component 5”). Ahead of the February 2020 European Council, we - in collaboration with several networks (EARTO, ERRIN, CPMR, ENOLL, AER, Eurotech Universities and several Thematic S3 Partnerships) delivered a shared message to the President of the European Council, along with our jointly agreed position statement from June 2019. We updated this statement in May 2020 to reinforce the relevance of the instrument in a recovery perspective, co-signed with other networks (EARTO, ERRIN, CPMR, ENOLL, AER, Eurotech Universities, UAS4EUROPE and European Clusters Alliance). The European Council’s agreement in July confirms the creation of the I3 under the ERDF regulation, albeit with a reduced budget. This was a strong achievement for the Vanguard Initiative and further discussions continue to be pursued with the European Parliament.

With input from the Vanguard Pilot Monitoring Task Group and Vanguard Initiative Pilots, our task group developed a [comprehensive contribution to the public consultation](#) launched by the Commission about the design of the instrument, which was again co-signed by several networks (EARTO, CPMR, AER, ENOLL, Eurotech Universities and EURADA).

The Policy Influencing Task Group has also prepared a non-paper on **industrial policy**, calling notably for a stronger regional dimension in response to the new European Industrial Policy Strategy in March 2020. This was followed by a fully-fledged [position paper](#) adopted in May 2020 in reaction to the communication published by the European Commission, which also took in account the current covid-19 situation. This paper emphasised the use of regional ecosystems and collaboration as drivers in the recovery process post pandemic. This was done in collaboration with our member region East Netherlands. The regional minister Van Hijum presented a rapport with similar recommendations for the Committee of the Regions on the European SME strategy.

In a joint effort with other networks, VI and EARTO adopted a [second joint contribution](#) to the 2nd round of public consultation on the revision of **the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)** in July, asking the European Commission to go further in enabling effective synergies and combined funding through appropriate State aid rules.

## Defining, Communicating, and Creating Solutions to our Funding Needs

Following the decision to anchor the analysis of the regional funding and financing opportunities to the concrete needs of VI Pilots, a process was launched to collect the relevant information.

For the selected VI Pilots - 3DP, ESM and Bio-economy – a first level of analysis was conducted starting from the available information in the DG Region pilot actions business cases reports. The ADMA pilot was not selected because its funding was already secured and regarding the Nano-technology pilot there was still no available information at this level.

The results showed a quite heterogeneous set of information, resulting from both the maturity and the scope of the different initiatives, and also the lack of relevant details for an adequate funding analysis, like, for example, regarding cost categories or funding types. To overcome these difficulties, a template was developed to structure and collect the necessary information from the pilots, namely:

- Activities (creation, project development, industrial uptake, dissemination, etc.)
- Costs categories (investments, running costs, project execution costs, etc.)
- Funding and financing needs (grants/ loans; public/private)
- Distribution per region

A meeting was organized with representatives from the 3 pilots to present and discuss the process and the template, followed by interactions during the data collection phase. By the end of July, the 3DP and ESM pilots provided the requested information that is being processed and analyzed to produce a funding and financing roadmap for each one of them, with the necessary information to assess the existing and future opportunities.

This roadmap will be provided to the regions participating in each of the pilots and a workshop will be organized, to identify the opportunities and gaps. The first workshop will target the 3DP pilot and is planned for November. The ESM workshop is planned for December or January, depending also on the lessons learned from the first one. The other pilots will follow, accordingly to their readiness level.

## Pilot activities

### Efficient and Sustainable Manufacturing

The Efficient and Sustainable Manufacturing Pilot aims to develop a networked infrastructure of pilot plants in key areas of manufacturing, supporting company innovation in breakthrough technologies and applications that require manufacturing efficiency and sustainability. In particular, current priority areas are:

- De- and remanufacturing (Circular Economy)
- Polymer-based functional products
- Digital Transformation
- Energy and Environmentally-efficient Manufacturing Processes

During 2020, activities of the pilot are managed in continuity with the previous years, focusing on the development of demo-case projects and on the consolidation of use-cases enlarging the industrial participation and commitment. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has slightly slowed down activities planned by ESM pilot in terms of pilot project development, we implemented several actions to keep the network involved, raise awareness on the pilot contents and reinforce strategic cooperation with relevant initiative in Europe.

Our activities were mainly focussed on ensuring an efficient and effective governance and outreach of the pilot, consolidating ESM demo-case and use-cases and rationalising the participation to S3Platform initiative. The achievements of 2020 can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Orchestration of the interaction among Vanguard and DGRTD to establish a collaboration with Made in Europe partnership
- 2) Interaction among ESM and SPIRE to establish a collaboration between Vanguard and "Process4Planet" partnership, in alignment with the approach implemented with MiE.
- 3) Submission of two proposals under INNOSUP-01 call, one targeting the topic of circular economy and the other focussed on smart plastics
- 4) De-and Remanufacturing demo-case finalised a new business plan thanks to the support of DGREGIO Pilot Action and it applied to TAF service
- 5) Approval of AIREGIO proposal (H2020 DT-ICT-03-2020) submitted by Digital Transformation demo-case
- 6) Organisation of Digital Transformation workshop to boost the identification of use-cases
- 7) Establishment of a dialogue between Digital Transformation demo-case and AI&HMI partnership to rationalise the participation to S3Platform
- 8) Dissemination of ESM pilot through EU Cluster Alliance initiative focused on actions to face COVID-19 emergencies thanks to the support of existing EU networks.
- 9) Interactions with North and West Finland interested in joining ESM Pilot
- 10) Set-up and elaboration of strategic roadmap documents including priorities for the development and implementation of demo-case projects in terms of Areas of applications, Facilities Networks



### ADMA Energy

Led by Scotland and the Basque Country, the VI ADMA Energy Pilot brings together 8 European regions, including Asturias, Dalarna, Emilia-Romagna, Flanders, Lombardy and Norte. These regions host a number of stakeholders with particular expertise in this field, including cluster organisations, business networks, enterprise and investment agencies, research and technology organisations, universities, and above all a large, established industrial and advanced manufacturing base in marine renewable energy technologies and wider offshore energy and subsea applications.

In 2019, the ADMA Energy Pilot commissioned a study to report on current insights into technology and innovation needs. Building on this exercise, five specific feasibility studies were carried out to deepen the knowledge and understanding of the current challenges and outlook toward potential focal points therein. The feasibility studies cover the following priority areas: power in transfer in the sea, next generation materials for the manufacturing of offshore wind turbines, joining large-scale components, anchoring and mooring and offshore decommissioning. The ADMA Energy pilot is currently advancing the first three of these priority project areas as demonstration cases within the pilot.

These proposed project areas are pursuing the development of project proposals for targeted funding in the second half of 2020 and early 2021 with the support of the ADMA Energy Pilot partners. The European Green Deal call within Horizon 2020 will be important, as the scope of several expected calls are well-aligned with the scope of the proposed project areas. The search to further identify relevant funding streams and expand, consolidate and strengthen the work of ADMA Energy will form a key part of the 2020-2021 activities.

During the ADMA Energy Partners meeting in October 2020 the specific progress of the demonstration cases, and their next steps were discussed with targeted actions towards 2021. This work has been continuously supported through external administrative support for Pilot meetings and activities from IDEA Consult (after a competitive tendering process through Public Contracts Scotland).

The ADMA Energy partnership also works in close cooperation with the [Marine Renewable Energy Partnership](#) of the Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform on Energy. In late December 2019 – following intensive work throughout the year - the partnership submitted a final version of the business case within the Pilot Actions on Interregional Innovation Projects launched by the European Commission.

Developed for the demo-case “Sensing & Remote Monitoring in Marine Renewable Energy facilities” (S&RM in MRE), this outlined a digital platform and marketplace for data generators and data users along the wind energy value chain (including wind farm owners, OEMs, component suppliers, ICT companies, researchers, etc.).

Three of the ADMA Energy Pilot regions were involved in the EIC mutual learning bid 'VI-ability'. VI-ability is a consortium of the Vanguard Initiative and ten VI regions that have applied for funding, to support a two-year project through European Innovation Council.

### 3D Printing

The year 2020 was marked by substantial progress being made both in terms of 1) reinforcing and expanding key 3DP Pilot's fundamentals (i.e. implementation of impactful actions in the 'Learn-Connect-Demonstrate-Commercialized' 's path) and of 2) revising and launching new processes and activities in order to better address industry needs and deliver more added value to the Pilot's members.

#### 1) A substantial reinforcement of key 3DP Pilot's fundamentals and a duplication of progress previously made

The 3DP Pilot's ability to generate and support strategic cross regional projects improved substantially and effectively over the year 2020. The following evolution, from 2019 to 2020, can, among others, be pointed out, highlighting the progress made towards effective support and funding of ambitious cross regional projects:

- **5 new demo cases** were developed in 2020, in addition to the 5 demo cases that were implemented over the last years.
- **13 new SMEs-led product/application-specific projects** were generated (in 6 distinct demo cases) and fully designed (see below). Various sectors (Automotive, Shipbuilding, Sporting Goods, Machinery and Tooling, Healthcare, etc.) and countries/regions are covered.
  - o For all these 13 projects, objectives, actors, requested demonstration activities (incl. associated costs) and impacts have been thoroughly described. In addition, in-depth business plans were finalised for two other projects, which were initiated in 2019 (with the support of the DG REGIO Pilot Action);
  - o Securing funding solutions for these projects remains the key challenge but the Pilot was able to generate (and seeks to exploit) various punctual solutions and opportunities. First, the 3DP PAN EU<sup>1</sup> Open Call to fund 10 cross regional demo projects has been finalised and launched (April 2020), making available possible funding means for 3DP Pilot projects. In addition, two demo cases have joined forces to submit a proposal for the H2020 call ICT 47 (April 2020). Finally, the 3DP Pilot (in the context of a Cross Pilots Action) is working on the further investigation of possible combinations of regional funding for calculated cases.
- 2020 was marked with a **growing number of active members (incl. a growing number of members with a 'demo case' leading role), activities' participants and effective cooperation/strategic partnerships established with key other initiatives** (incl. progress made in terms of the formalisation of cooperation with EFFRA/PPP 'Made in Europe', AM Platform and Sports S3 Partnership in particular).

<sup>1</sup> 3DP Pan EU (<https://3dppan.eu/>) is a DG GROW supported project that has been generated based on the activities and needs of the 3DP Pilot. A 3DP Pilot supported consortium is currently implementing the project.

2) Structural changes in the 3DP Pilot's positioning and service offer, towards addressing more effectively the industry needs and deliver more added value to its members

The overall objective was to strengthen further the position of the 3DP Pilot as the cross regional and agile platform able to rapidly generate and support cross regional demonstration projects in any of AM-related fields (i.e. also beyond the demo cases' scope).

- The Pilot enabled the design and launch of an online structural tool **aimed at facilitating the matching of demand and supply** of 3DP demonstration services. Such action, which took place in the context and with the support of the 3DP Pan EU project, is a major outcome of the 3DP Pilot (i.e. a formalized and automatic Pan-EU tool facilitating access to relevant demonstration services across regions) and directly serves its primary objectives to serve the industry. More than 300 facility centres made visible their equipment and services to SMEs across Europe
- The Pilot designed and implemented a revised **governance, structure and assessment framework for projects generation, support and monitoring**. Among others, as mentioned above, this enabled 5 new project ideas (proposed in 2019) to be further developed in 2020 towards new demo cases being implemented. This will also enable members to timely and continuously complement their regional expertise in order to enable implementation of ambitious and industry-led projects. This will allow to continuously finetune activities and keep relevance high.

### Bioeconomy

The Bioeconomy Pilot – led by the Randstad and Lombardy regions - sets up trans-regional value chains in the area of the innovative and sustainable use of renewable resources by promoting connections between chemistry, agro-food, bioenergy and biofuels sectors.

The Pilot involves **18 VI member regions** across **4 demo-cases** and **12 use-cases** (TRL 7-8), focused on the replacement of high-value materials from fossil base with new bio-based chemicals, biofuels and biopolymers for a wide range of downstream applications.

The **bio-aromatics demo case** focuses on the bio-aromatics value chain to specify a concrete and realistic business case towards commercial level for several applications in the building and construction sector (e.g. in adhesives, insulation materials, coatings, plastic composites, flame retardants, etc.). In 2020 the demo case has focused on industrial upscaling of pilot facilities, **Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform business plan** and increasing the VI regions participation.

The **lignocellulosic biorefinery demo case** focuses on the valorization of forestry, pulp&paper streams to produce high-value products such as fine and chemicals. In 2020, the demo case has focused on increasing the partnership participation for the use of (natural) fibers for various industrial applications. This includes the launch of the Chaplin Programme, aimed at replacing bitumen in the asphalt formulation by lignin in a special biobased formulation. It



involves lignin producers, bitumen and asphalt formulators, road construction companies, municipalities, provinces and national infrastructure board across the VI member regions.

In 2020, the **Liquefied Bio-methane (LNG Blue Corridor) demo-case** has devoted its efforts to improve the business plan of the SMBio-LNG use-case thanks the support of the **Technical Assistance Facility (TAF)** service with the general aim to empowering the partnership in attracting private capitals and validate a model able to be replicated across VI regions. The SMBio-LNG use-case aims at validating a sustainable supply chain of liquefied biomethane from renewable sources, such as animal manure and agricultural production waste and promote the increasing the number of bio-LNG refuelling stations across Europe.

In 2020 the Bioeconomy pilot created a new demo-case for **biopolymers production** formally launched during the Biopolymers stakeholder webinar (June 18th, 2020) which has involved 80 attendees from 13 countries and has stimulated active industrial participation. The Bioplastics sector is a booming market that has high potentiality to substitute fossil-based materials making the economy more sustainable and reducing dependence on non-renewable resources. The bioplastics sector is expected to create up to 300,000 high-skilled jobs in Europe.

Triggering new cross-regional circular economy alliances to maximise the impact of the biobased business models has been primarily carried out based on a Memorandum of Understanding with the **Bio-Based Industry Consortium**. Cooperation activity has resulted in the development of a **Biobased platform of regions** focused on stimulating bio-based investments by connecting regions and industries.

### New Nano-enabled Products

The pilot is led by the regions of Skåne region and Emilia Romagna. In 2020, the pilot has put emphasis on progressing its three active demo cases, from the Learn and Connect phase into the Demonstrate and Commercialisation phase. To facilitate this transition, several workshops have been organised.

The **NeMs4Bio demo case** (led by Flanders & East Netherlands) aims to develop integrated and packaged functional modules that fit into devices, and not isolated pieces of technology. In August, the demo-case organized an explorative workshop for partners in East Netherlands and Flanders to discuss various concepts for R&D activities, in order to develop the NeMs4Bio platform using standardized solutions. Several advantages of the NeMs4Bio platform, such as access to standardized building blocks, cost-efficient and rapid customizations, improved scalability, etc. were discussed. In October, a follow-up workshop was organised for other participating regions in the pilot, in order to complement the missing capabilities in the NeMs4Bio platform. Following this workshop, a targeted follow-up with several industrial players active in the area of microfluidics will take place.

The demo case has also been screening possible funding sources, including regional opportunities like OnePlanet and European opportunities related to EIT Health.

In order to identify concrete opportunities for business collaboration, the **nanowires demo-case** (led by Skåne) has identified several challenges they are facing related to substrate, lithography, etching and characterization in the area of III-V (GaN) Nanowire-enhanced materials for high power electronics. These challenges are associated with establishing a new European Innovation Infrastructure (ProNano) as a pan-European pilot manufacturing facility for nano-enabled products. In October, the demo case organised an online workshop to discuss each challenge with actors from various regions. This resulted in several opportunities for collaboration which will be further explored.

The **SHAPETRONICS demo-case** (led by Wallonia) is working on the development of technologies to integrate functionally printed structures directly onto 3D objects. The project aims to develop a technology platform dedicated to benchmarking and exploring new printed fabrication process (subtractive and additive methods) to integrate electronics on large area curved objects. Interested partners with complementary technological capabilities have been identified in various regions, allowing further expansion of the technology platform and demonstrate its applicability for various industries like automotive, aerospace, oil & gas.

In September, the Nano Pilot launched a call for new demo-case ideas. The Nano Pilot will select a few ideas and assign a budget to these new demo cases for providing specific support, such as feasibility studies, to set-up those new demo-cases. So far, three promising proposals were submitted by organisations from three different regions: Emilia-Romagna, Navarra and East Netherlands. These proposals will be presented during the next Annual Plenary Meeting that will take place on the 25th of November in virtual mode.

The Nano Pilot collaborated to organize the [NanoInnovation 2020](#) conference in September and became official partner of the event. In this framework, all demo case leaders were invited as speakers in the conference and gave a presentation on the technology behind their democases. In addition, the Vanguard Initiative was presented during a plenary session of the conference on the topic “Research and innovation strategies and opportunities for the industry and research world”.

## Progressing new opportunities

### Made in Europe partnership

In 2020 the VI has been exploring the opportunity for a potential collaboration within the Made in Europe Partnership, in line with a suggestion by the European Commission DG Research (RTD).

The “Made in Europe” (MiE) Partnership, which will be developed under Horizon Europe 2021-2027, will be the leading European driver for the twin ecological and digital transition, bringing together the actors from manufacturing and relevant European industrial ecosystems, coming from academia, industry, non-governmental organizations and the public sector.

The MiE Partnership will in particular:

- provide strategic orientations for the whole European manufacturing community, through EU-wide definition of priorities and roadmaps
- Align and coordinate R&I efforts across Europe
- lead to Calls for Proposals that are relevant to the manufacturing sector
- create trust between actors, which will lead to better cooperation and more impact
- foster cross-fertilisation among national programs and projects

Made in Europe intends to develop strategic collaboration with key actors at national and regional level in order to ensure take-up of research results while also promoting their participation in the governance of the partnership within the advisory “Council of national and regional initiatives”. In this context, Made in Europe is interested in developing a strategic partnership with Vanguard Initiative considering that our network of manufacturing-intensive regions would be the perfect way to disseminate project results stemming from Made in Europe work and bringing them one step closer to commercialization.

Representatives from the VI Board have been exploring potential models for strategic collaboration between VI and MiE, in discussion with the VI network members, representatives of EFFRA and the European Commission. This could include the signing of an MoU with EFFRA / MiE and / or becoming a member of EFFRA, where VI would be able to participate in the Council of National and Regional Initiatives. VI regional members could also align regional R&I strategies with the activities of MiE.

At time of writing, a taskforce of representatives from VI and EFFRA are working together to develop a proposal for collaboration, with a view to reaching agreement ideally before the European Commission’s approval of the MiE Partnership (foreseen in late 2020 or early 2021).

### VI-Ability – Horizon 2020 Project Application

In September, Vanguard Initiative put forward an application under the Horizon 2020 EIC Mutual Learning call, launched in June 2020. Led by East Netherlands, the consortium comprised the regions of Basque Country, Baden-Württemberg, Norte, South Netherlands, Scotland, Wales, Asturias and Piemonte, and Vanguard Initiative ASBL. If successful in its application, the “VI-Ability” consortium will engage in a programme of work to identify best practices for SME innovation support and demonstrate these within a showcase project example. The consortium partners outlined above will lead the work, but the outcomes of the project will benefit all Vanguard Initiative member regions through the project’s dissemination. In addition it aims to strengthen the members and network’s ties with national innovation agencies.

This is an important development for the network. The call – focused on enhancing the support to high growth innovative SMEs – is aligned closely with the goals of the Vanguard Initiative and an opportunity to stimulate collaborative working outside of the pilot activities. Whether or not the consortium is successful in securing the Horizon 2020 funding, the work to develop the project bid lays the foundation for other forms of co-operation. It is also the first time that Vanguard Initiative – as a network and legal entity - would potentially deliver project activity in this way. This demonstrates the appetite and possibility for growth in the network’s activities, and a clear added value of membership.

### External Communication

In 2020, the focus of the Communications Task Group has been to initiate the process of developing a new website for the Vanguard Initiative, a line of work that is conducted together with the Network Manager. The website is a very important communication tool and developing a new website is a strategically important process. Therefore, the Communications Task Group and the Network Manager are working with an experienced web developer in this process.

During spring 2020, a survey was disseminated to the membership to gather feedback on the current website and after the summer the work with the web developer has intensified. During this process, we are engaging with the Task Groups, Pilots and wider network to ensure that we deliver the best website possible. We hope to launch a new and improved Vanguard Initiative website in early 2021.

As always, the Communications Task Group has continued to disseminate news within the network using the current website and newsletters. The newsletter brings together a summary of network news from the Pilot projects, Task Groups, Board and a range of other items of interest to the network. Two newsletters have already been disseminated and a third edition is planned for early December 2020.

## Improving Regional Engagement

The question on how the network can increase the presences in the member regions and support the development of the core activities, the pilot projects, has been the subject of lengthy discussions within the Board and the wider network. The unique selling point of the Vanguard Initiative is the work that we are doing in the pilot projects. We can deliver in-depth analysis and sharing of experience of challenges and opportunities for interregional innovation partnerships based on our joint investments and active participation in the pilot projects developed in our regions.

To better support the development of the pilot project, and increase the networks presence in the member regions, a programme of Vanguard Initiative Regional Conferences was planned to take place during 2020. The concept: by hosting a Vanguard Initiative event within a member region, this would stimulate stronger connections between a wide range of regional stakeholders as well as Brussels-based representatives from the VI.

The planned programme for 2020 – Cardiff in March (co-organised by Wales and Randstad), Turin (Piemonte) in September, and Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg) in November – was postponed for one year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. All these regions are still committed to delivering conferences in future, but timings and format will depend on any future Covid-19 related restrictions.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Regional Conference task group has discussed the possibility of arranging virtual events which – until physical events are possible again - could support the objective of the regional conferences: to increase the network's presence in the member regions and support the development of the core activities the pilot projects. It is clear that the VI network has very successfully managed to adapt its core activities to the new normal which the pandemic has forced upon us, and these examples could serve to inspire a series of additional and complementary events to help strengthen regional engagement. For example:

- All five pilot projects are now organising fully digital meetings, enabling the inclusion of many more actors from the member regions interested in the work of the pilot projects to be updated on latest developments and to participate actively in the pilots.
- The High-level Directors Meeting in June was fully digital, ensuring that member region Directors had an opportunity to exchange on the priorities for the network, and also enabling member regions representatives to participate in the discussion on the development of the network.
- Several Vanguard member regions have been able to invite other VI member regions to online policy seminars they have been organising, for example discussing regional strategies for recovery after Covid-19, strengthening the possibility for collaborations.



The Regional Conference task group will continue to explore opportunities to create and coordinate events that are in line with the objective of the regional conferences – to increase the VI's presence in the member regions and supporting the development of our core activities in a way that complements and enhances the regional conference series.

## Organising ourselves to deliver

The Shared Funding Model, approved by the General Assembly in November 2019, provided a new financial framework for the network to expand and develop. With leadership from Vanguard Pilot Monitoring (VPM) and Future of Vanguard Task Groups (FVTG), the network has used 2020 to put that framework into action, and to strengthen its governance procedures accordingly.

### New pilots

VI launched the first call for new pilots in November 2020. The Board, Future of Vanguard Task Group and Vanguard Pilot Monitoring have worked hard to develop the call process, including criteria for eligibility and assessment. The General Assembly will be invited to approve any new pilot, following a recommendation from the selection panel, at the end of this year.

### Enhanced governance

To support the network in delivering its activities, new governance processes have been put in place. In 2020:

- We launched a new call process to stimulate more visibility and strategic use of the Cross-cutting fund.
- Pilot reporting process has been streamlined to enhance transparency and focus more clearly on recent achievements.
- The Board has been focusing on financial governance overall, in particular where there are surpluses, and looking at ways to keep these at a reasonable level – affording flexibility but minimising the build up of surplus in our accounts.

### Strengthening our Secretariat

The Shared Funding Model provides scope for two members of staff in the Secretariat in order to support delivery of Vanguard Initiative's ambitions for growth and development. With our Network Manager in place since February 2019, we are also currently recruiting an Information Officer. The Information Officer will support the Network Manager and enable the Secretariat to support an increasingly ambitious programme of work.