



Regional Action Plan [CENTRAL MACEDONIA]

SinCE-AFC: Enhancing the Entrepreneurship of SMEs in Circular Economy of the Agri- Food Chain

General information

Project:	SinCE-AFC
Partner organisation:	Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (RDFCM) on behalf of the Region of Central Macedonia (RCM)
Partner organisations involved:	ANATOLIKI S.A.
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European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy context

- The action plan aims at:**
- Job Investment and Growth Program
 - European Territorial Cooperation Program
 - Other Regional Development Tool

Name of the policy instrument(s) addressed: Operational Program of the Region of Central Macedonia 2021-2027

In the framework of the SinCE-AFC project, the Region of Central Macedonia had initially selected as the policy instrument to be influenced, the Operational Programme (OP) of the RCM 2014-2020, and specifically Priority Axis/Thematic Objective (TO) 3 Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, Investment Priority (IP) 3d "Supporting the capacity of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes" and Priority Axis/Thematic Objective 2 "Improving access, use and quality of information technologies and communications", Investment Priority 2c "Strengthening ICT applications in e-government, e-learning, inclusion".

However, due to the end of the current programming period, the available resources of the selected policy instrument (Operational Programme of RCM 2014-2020) have been fully committed and / or have been reallocated to actions to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, regarding the Operational Programme 2014-2020, call for proposals under IP.3d will not be issued and the planned call for proposals under IP.2c has been cancelled due to the pandemic and will not be published.

Moreover, the Region acknowledges that the SinCE-AFC project has already contributed in the framework of the update of the RIS3 and the new programming period 2021-2027 strategy of the Region.

Taking into consideration all the above, RCM has proceeded in changing the policy instrument, i.e. to the new OP 2021-27, after firstly sending a relevant request and receiving an approval



by the JS of the Programme. It should be noted that the OP 2021 – 2027 and its self-defined indicators accordingly, is in the stage of approval. According to the 2nd Circular of the Ministry of Development and Investment, the main policy themes and objectives declared for the SinCE-AFC project will be also addressed under the new Policy Objective 1 «A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity» and Specific Objectives 2. «Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities» and 3. «Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments» in the new Regional OP.

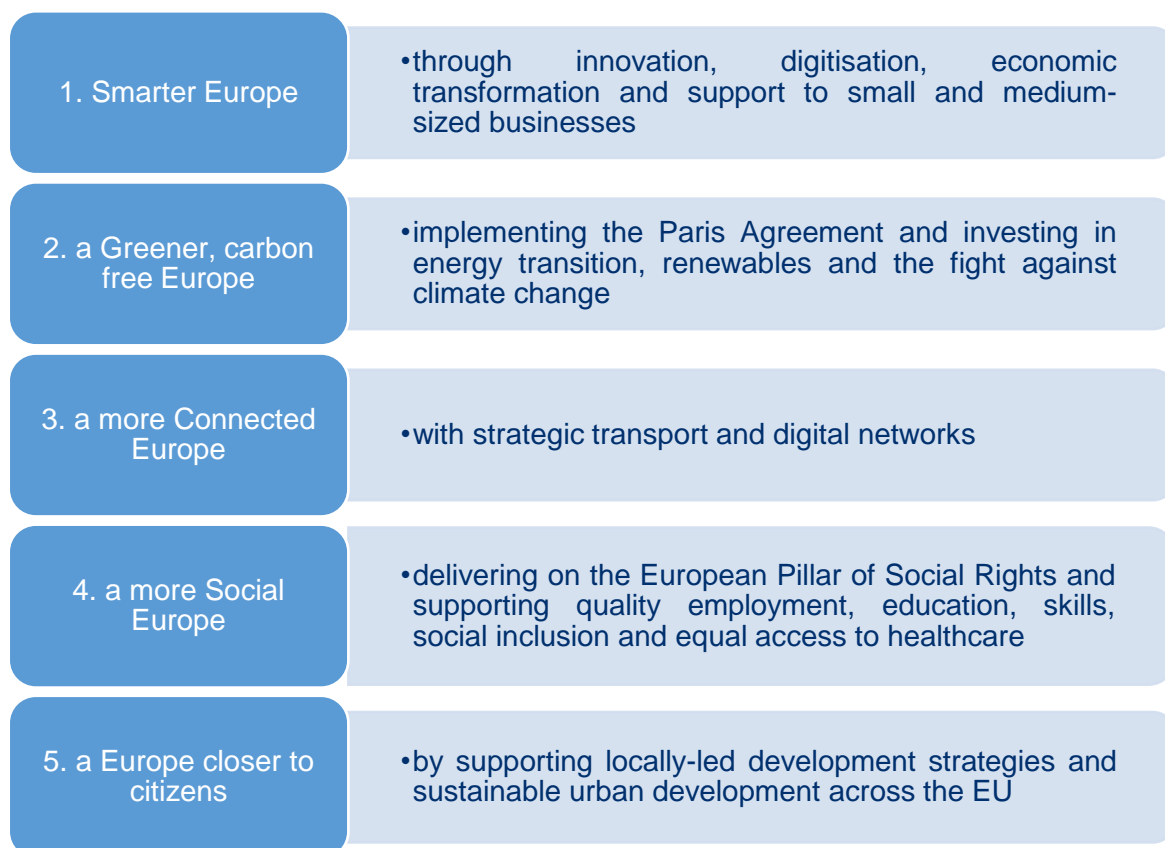
Further details on the policy context and the way the action plan should contribute to improve the policy instrument:

Operational Programme (OP) of RCM 2021-2027

The new programming period essentially concerns the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 announced by the European Commission on 02/05/2018. Respectively, the proposals for the Cohesion Policy and the Regulations of the Funds of the new Programming Period 2021-2027 were announced on 29/5/2018.

At the national level, the planning for the period 2021-2027 has as a starting point the issuance of the 1st Circular by the Ministry of Development and Investment on 6/6/2019. The 1st circular presents the new planning framework of the Operational Programs of the new NSRF, while at the same time it is the starting point of the consultation with the competent bodies, social and economic partners for the formulation of strategy proposals and priorities, which will feed the national objectives.

In relation to the current programming period, the 11 thematic objectives of the "Europe 2020" strategy are grouped into 5 policy objectives.



The second Policy Objective "a Greener Europe" includes issues related to low carbon emissions, energy transition, circular economy, climate change adaptation and risk management. This essentially includes the current Thematic Objective 6 for the environment, the current Thematic Objective 5 for climate change and a part of the current Thematic Objective 4 which focuses mainly on energy saving.

Respectively, the 60 Investment Priorities are transformed into 32 Specific Objectives. For Objective 2 the Investment Priorities are:

2. a Greener, carbon free Europe
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promoting energy efficiency measures; 2. Promotion of renewable energy sources; 3. Development of smart energy systems, networks and storage equipment at local level; 4. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience; 5. Promoting sustainable water management; 6. Promoting the transition to a circular economy 7. Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment and reducing pollution



The design of the new Operational Program of the Region of Central Macedonia has started after the issuance of the 2nd Circular of the Ministry of Development and Investment.

In the above context, it is advisable to set up Program Planning Teams for each Program of Financial Framework 2021-2027. The Managing Authorities or the structures that undertake the design of the Programs (with the assistance of the Program Planning Teams), should identify the Stakeholders per Policy Objective (PO), who should be involved in the design process of the 2021-2027 Programs.

In each PO, at least the interested parties involved in the design process of the NSRF 2021-2027 and which are mentioned in Annex X of the Circular should be taken into account.

Under the responsibility of the aforementioned bodies, meetings are organized by policy objective, in person or online, initially with the administration, the bodies and the partners, in order to specify the categories of actions that will be proposed for implementation based on the eligibility of the Funds and budget specialization specific target level.

In this context, a summary text is formed by the Managing Authorities or the structures that undertake the preparation of the Programs, which will justify the choices formulated on the basis of specific needs identified and objectives set in the discussions with the stakeholders and partners.

Background / relevance to the project

During the implementation of the SinCE-AFC project exchange actions, various good practices were recorded in the regions of the project partners related to the implementation of policies and plans to increase the participation of agri-food chain SMEs in the circular economy through the promotion of appropriate horizontal management and financing mechanisms.

Some of these good practices have characteristics that can be transferred and applied in Greece. Below are these practices from different Regions of the project, which signal the possibility of supporting similar solutions in the Region of Central Macedonia or the extension of existing ones.

1. ECOPartner - Public-private partnership for eco-innovation in promoting the circular economy, Romania



ECOPartner is a public-private partnership for eco-innovation in the promotion of the circular economy and was active in the period 2015-2017. As the lack of technical expertise in the field of eco-innovation or related areas (eg



PROGRAMUL DE COOPERARE ELVEȚIANO-ROMÂN
SWISS-ROMANIAN COOPERATION PROGRAMME

resource efficiency and clean production, environmental management, etc.) was felt, a Romanian-Swiss co-operation within the EcoPartner project was launched. More specifically, this model of good practice was launched by the Romanian National Center for Sustainable Production and Consumption, in collaboration with the Geneva Organization for the Development of the Circular Economy in Switzerland and the Clusters Association in Romania, under the ECOPartner.

Through this, a national eco-innovation network was established, with the following objectives:

- Support the development of specific policies, strategies and tools focused on eco-innovation.
- Training for the development of specific skills, the introduction of ecological innovation in the university curriculum. development and implementation of training programs.
- Development of support services for companies and groups (increasing competitiveness and productivity through eco-innovation, performance appraisal / audits; exchanges of good practice and promotion of new innovative and green business models) etc.
- Promoting the Reln network at national / regional, European and international level, connecting to other European and international networks, long-term development of a culture of eco-innovation.

Network members carry out networking activities, provide technical support, information and resources in the field of eco-innovation for companies and stakeholders.

The main beneficiaries of this example of good practice are companies, but also groups, technological innovation centers, relevant NGOs, etc.

This project involved more than 100 experts (project partners and stakeholders), future members of the Reln network, people trained in eco-innovation, people selected for study visits to Switzerland, clusters, academic representatives, people from NGOs etc.

Many of the results obtained due to this project are:

- Activities for analyzing the context of eco-innovation in Romania.
- Training 22 experts to support organizations in implementing eco-innovation.

- Development of the Green Club initiative, a platform for the direct support of companies in the implementation of their idea step by step in the RECP (Renewable Energy Cooperation Program), ie in the Cooperation Program for Renewable Energy Sources.
- Creating a Romanian eco-innovation network.
- Implementation of pilot ecological innovative projects in companies.
- Finally, the Romanian Eco-Innovation Network, the Green Association of Entrepreneurs, the Eco-Innovation Handbook and the eco-innovation portal - Hub, guide the implementation of the eco-innovation concept in companies, at regional, national and national level, present good practice models, success stories and other sources of information.

<http://clustero.eu/ecopartner-partenship-for-eco-innovation/>

2. The Local Food Waste Hub project– Milan, Italy

One of the priorities of the Food Policy for the city of Milan is the reduction of food waste and the innovation of their methods of utilization through their distribution to vulnerable groups.

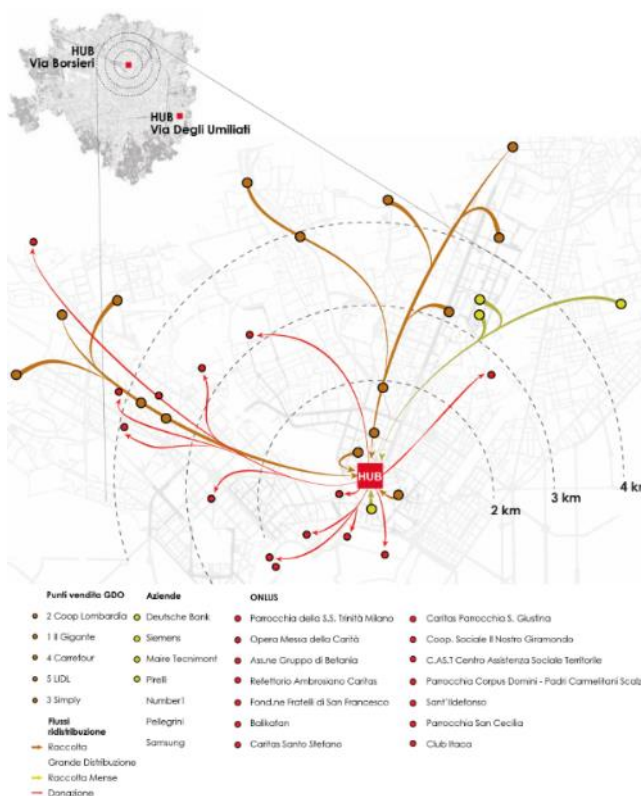


More specifically, the Municipality of Milan in 2016 created the Local Food Waste Hub program with the help of other organizations in the city, such as through the participation of various local organizations, for example research centers, institutions, private sector organizations, social organizations, etc. It is interesting to note that the design and testing of such a model for the recovery and redistribution of food surpluses is based on local neighborhood networks. The existence of a food policy has helped to build a strong network and trust for citizens.

All types of food are collected and stored in this center and various NGOs, local charities distribute them to people in need.

At present, the network consists of 21 NGOs, 11 supermarkets and 5 catering companies. So far, 77 tons of food corresponding to 154,000 meals have been stored and donated.

In conclusion, it seems that this model is very effective as it is very successful, a strong network has been built between different actors and many people belonging to vulnerable groups have the opportunity to be helped by providing food. Still, the network continues to grow and the model is applied to other areas.



3. Re-use/reduction of food waste, Ireland

In April 2020, the Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR) launched an Industrial Coexistence Innovation Pilot project between St Mel's Brewery and Panelto Food, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).



<https://imr.ie/pages/symbiobeer/>

More specifically, leftover bread from a bakery is used as a substitute for malt to produce a new beer from a brewery, while already used grains are used as an ingredient of high nutritional value in bakery products.

Finally, the specific goals that have been set for this collaboration are:

- Increasing the revenue perspective and creating new revenue streams through the development of new products and their diversification.
- Reduced environmental impact by turning waste into resources.
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions related to the transport and export of raw materials.
- Increased resilience in the supply chain due to local source of secondary raw materials.

The results that prove the success of the project so far is the alternative use of this waste, since the by-products are utilized in the two production processes, performing the creation of two innovative products.

Nevertheless, in order for the above project and in general a model of circular economy to be successful, it is necessary to develop a high level of cooperation between companies and to conduct relevant research in order to identify new by-products or waste that could be utilized properly, turning them into resources.

4. Foodsii Application - Food waste reduction in restaurants, bakeries, patisseries and supermarkets, Poznan, Poland

In order to reduce food waste, which in Poland alone reaches 5 million tons each year after more than 1/3 of the food produced goes to the trash, in April 2019 Poles created an application, Foodsii, for sale food from shops and restaurants at a lower price as an alternative to not rejecting them.

Foodsí is a tool to combat this problem through the circular economy. It is applied in various cities of Poland and essentially helps restaurants, bakeries, cafes and supermarkets to reduce the amount of food waste they produce, by disposing of it through the application.

The main beneficiaries of this application are various players from the food industry, who instead of throwing them away, put their products back on the market in the form of a "surprise". In this way, a profit is made instead of being totally rejected.

In addition, there is a service with which some people order products in a "surprise package" from the beginning for a specific time and price, because it is lower compared to the market price.

One of the disadvantages of this particular practice is that the number of establishments is insufficient, as some days the list of places offering meals for sale may be empty or located far from the center. For this reason, it is popular with the residents of each area.

One of the advantages of this model is that many companies advertise and gain regular customers both because of the lower prices but also because of the environmental culture they have. Also, people in a less favorable financial position, have the opportunity to try meals that otherwise could not (in some cases the price is 70% lower).

Finally, of course one of the goals set is to increase the number of partner restaurants, etc., to increase the availability of meals / products and to extend the application to other cities in the country.



<https://www.foodsi.pl/>

5. ICESP - Italian Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, Italy

ICESP is an Italian platform, promoted by NANT (National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development) and integrated into ECESP (European Stakeholder Platform). Created in 2018 and consists of a network that aims to create a national convergence in initiatives, experiences, crises and expectations for the circular economy that Italy should represent in Europe, promoting the "Italian way of creating a circular economy".

More specifically, the results obtained in Italy are compared with those in Europe and contribute to the European Agenda for the Circular Economy.

ICESP has set goals:

- Promoting the circular economy in Italy,
- The mapping of good practices in Italy,
- The implementation of a permanent business instrument to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue and synergies between Italian actors.

ICESP members are representatives of:

- Local and central public administration,
- The education, research and innovation system ,
- companies and professional associations and
- representatives of civil society.



In addition, all members adhere to the ICESP Charter, which sets out the platform's objectives, composition, areas of interest and operational tools.

The platform is organized in 7 working groups, each with specific experience in issues related to the circular economy.

Currently, ICESP is made up of 94 organizations as signatories and 177 organizations as experts participating in the working group, of which 60% are companies and trade associations, 20% come from research and innovation, and 11% are public bodies, 9% are citizens and part of the tertiary sector.

In terms of the success stories of this platform, stakeholders have managed to develop 80 good practices and have been made available to the Circular Economy Good Practices database, which is powered and updated thanks to the effective cooperation of all participants.

<https://www.icesp.it/>

Details of the actions envisaged

ACTION 1: Horizontal support mechanism for entrepreneurship in the circular economy

Difficulties in linking Action Plan to Policy Instrument due to ending of the OP of RCM period 2014-2020



The available resources of the Operational Programme of RCM 2014-2020, have been fully committed and / or have been reallocated to actions addressing the effects of the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

Given the above information, we have requested and finally approved by the JS the replacing of the current policy instrument, with the new Operational Programme 2021-2027, which is under configuration with similar self-defined indicators.

- Policy Objective 1 "A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity" and
 - Specific Objective 2. "Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities" and
 - Specific Objective 3. "Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments".

For the above Regional Specific Objective 3, the so far under formulation ROP 2021-2027 includes 4 categories of interventions and the 4th one is for "Strengthening of horizontal character of structures of support of innovation and entrepreneurship in the Region".

In this context, indicative types of actions are proposed, such as the Creation - utilization of structures to support innovative business activity in the Region of Central Macedonia.

This incorporates the plans for the creation of a structure (either independent or through "One Stop Liaison Office") for the promotion of circular economy actions.

Taking into consideration the fact that the ROP 2021-2027 is still under formulation with no official approval of EU, the above types of interventions for supporting structures of innovation and entrepreneurship in the Region in terms of promoting circular economy actions will be specified the following period.

1. Relevance to the project

The present action resulted from the exchange of experiences between the Regions participating in the project in combination with the needs highlighted by the active participation of the local stakeholder group in the working meetings that took place. Furthermore, the initial findings and inputs of the learning process of the SinCE-AFC project were communicated to the relevant services of the Region (Independent Directorate of Innovation & Entrepreneurship Support), which confirmed the great interest of local media for the circular economy, which was already evident in from the Business Discovery workshops organized under the RIS3 Strategy. Based on the above, the Region organized a separate business discovery workshop



on the topic of the circular economy on 11/2/2021, in the context of the planning and specialization of actions and innovation axes for the next Programming period (ROP NSRF 2021-2027). Proposals submitted for submission to the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme of RCM include actions related to the creation of a SME support mechanism for circular economy actions, in combination with the use of digital support tools aimed at enhancing the innovative capacity of the circular economy ecosystem.

2. Nature of the action

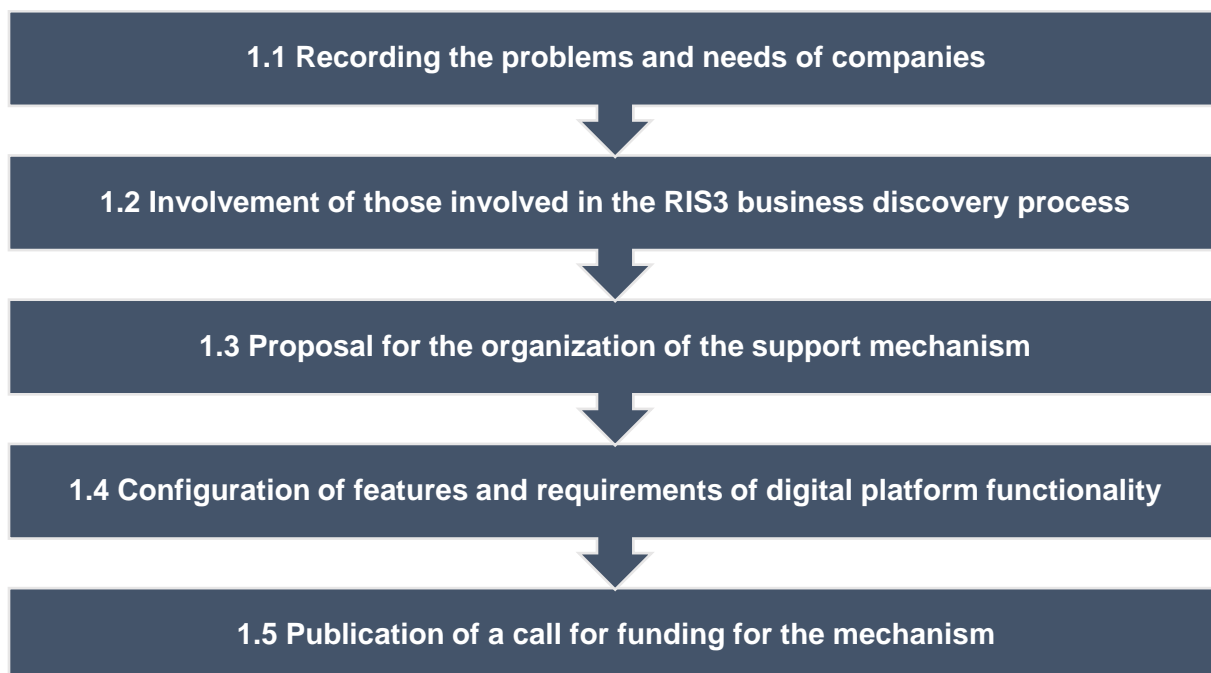
The action concerns the development of an entrepreneurship support mechanism in the circular economy, which will empower the businesses of the region in order for them to adopt circular economy practices and to create business collaborations and / or cooperative formations of closed supply chain.

The Region and the local stakeholders are already working in this direction based on the “One Stop Liaison Office” operation included in the ROP CM, and during the second phase of the SinCE-AFC project they will complete the formation of the entrepreneurship support mechanism in the circular economy, delivering a comprehensive study for its inclusion and financing by the ROP CM 2021-2027.

The key services provided by the entrepreneurship support mechanism in the circular economy will include:

- informing and raising awareness of companies and entrepreneurs about the dimensions of circularity and business benefits
- consulting support and good practices for the utilization of the by-products of their production process
- digital tools for interconnecting and capturing productive inputs and outputs in individual sectors, such as agri-food

The content and specifications of the services provided are expected to emerge during the 2nd implementation phase of SinCE-AFC, through the following clear action plan.



3. Stakeholders involved

Stakeholders in the implementation of the Action are part of the Local Stakeholder Group. In the context of the stakeholder meetings and utilizing the experience from corresponding good practices that emerged in the interregional meetings of the project, the initial roles of each stakeholder in the implementation are distributed according to the table below.

Stakeholders	Role
Region of Central Macedonia	It is the implementing body of the action, and given its role as a policy planning and implementation body, it undertakes the coordination of the action.
Managing Authority of the Operational Programme of RCM	The MA is the funding and planning body of the policy tool.
ANATOLIKI SA	Project Leader Since-AFC Support in recording business needs by transferring good practices and experiences
OSLO	It is the support mechanism of the business discovery and review process of RIS3
Companies in the agri-food value chain / Links - institutions / Cluster agrotech export	They are the beneficiaries of the action and the source of recording the main needs in the field.

4. Timeframe

Activities	Semester			
	A2022	B2022	A2023	B2023
1.1 Recording the problems and needs of companies				
1.2 Involvement of those involved in the RIS3 business discovery process				
1.3 Proposal for the organization of the support mechanism				
1.4 Configuration of features and requirements of digital platform functionality				
1.5 Publication of a call for funding for the mechanism				

5. Indicative costs

The total cost for the implementation of the action is estimated at € 10,000 and includes costs for third party services.

S/N	Expenses	Cost
1	Expertise / research in agri-food companies	5.000€
2	Presenters for workshop / business discovery	2.000€
3	Digital platform functionality analysis services	3.000€
	TOTAL	10.000€

6. Indicative funding sources

The financing for the above expenses will come from own resources of RDFCM and / or OP of RCM.

7. Monitoring of Action Plan

The monitoring period of the Action Plan of the SinCE-AFC project for RCM is from 01/08/2022 – 31/07/2023. During the monitoring period, the implementation of the proposed action and the achievement of the objectives are expected to be evaluated every six months. At the same time, the achievement of the objectives will be recorded in the reports to the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Europe Program.

Following the change of the Policy Instrument, i.e. in the new Regional OP 2021-27, the SinCE-AFC project sets as a self-assessment indicator "number of public bodies supported to improve capacity building in the circular economy of Agri-food chain", with a target value of 1 supported public body.



Index	Delivery date	Type	Sub action	Goal
number of public bodies supported to improve capacity building in the circular economy of Agri-food chain	July 2022	outcome	1.1	1 supported public body

Date: 27.07.2022

Name of the organization(s): Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia (RDFCM)
on behalf of the Region of Central Macedonia (RCM)

Signature of representative of the relevant organisation(s):

Apostolos Tzitzikostas

Stamp of the organisation (if available):

