

POLICY BRIEF 13

EXTRA-SMES
Interreg Europe



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



Increasing resilience in aquaculture and regional economies

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THE EXTRA-SMES PROJECT

The EXTRA-SMES is an Interreg Europe project that aims to foster the competitiveness, extraversion, and internationalization of rural and coastal SMEs participating in aquaculture value chains.

To that end, the project assists 8 relevant public authorities and businesses in the aquaculture value chain from 7 countries to join forces and exchange experiences on how aquaculture SMEs could:

- Simplify administrative procedures.
- Expand their access to new markets.
- Innovate by producing value-added products and solutions.
- Up-skill their personnel.
- Resolve conflicts of interest together with stakeholders.





POLICY BRIEF OVERVIEW

This policy brief reports on the main points raised during the “5th EXTRA-SMEs Regional Stakeholders Meeting”, held in the Region of Western Greece by the University of Patras.

Based on the five presentations, which took place during the meeting, this policy brief focuses on resilience and its key role in SMEs’ survival and growth. After a brief reference on the benefits of resilience, the report puts forward recommendations for SMEs and public authorities.

The conclusions of this policy brief can be consulted by SMEs and relevant actors operating in the aquaculture sector as well as regional public authorities, in order to boost resilience.

BENEFITS OF BUILDING RESILIENCE



Similar to other primary sectors, aquaculture was severely impacted by the **pandemic**, as the confinement measures hit the sector throughout the seafood value chain. **Indirect impacts** of the pandemic due to changing consumer demands, market access, or logistical problems related to **transportation and border restrictions have been recorded**, negatively impacting fishers and fish farmers' livelihoods as well as on food security.

Enhancing **resilience** in aquaculture has **direct and indirect benefits on SMEs and blue economy**. From SMEs' point of view, resilience leads to **cost reduction with a concurrent increase of sales** and ensures food, employment, and livelihood security. At a broader level, resilience is key for the transition to **sustainable food systems**, the development of bio-economy as well as circular economy,

A **key conclusion** that emerged from the final report of this meeting was the **urgent need for resilient and sustainable businesses in the aquaculture sector**, which could address and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 as well as set the path for the recovery of the EU aquaculture sector **in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis**.

VALUE CHAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

During the workshop, several recommendations for building resilient SMEs were discussed, the most important of which are listed below.

Financial resilience

- **Contingency planning:** The need for contingency planning was among the most popular issues raised during the pandemic and has become essential for businesses in all sectors. **Businesses should develop emergency planning** in order to maintain operations when market shifts occur, even under the most adverse conditions.
- **Improve balance:** Introducing more **efficient technologies** scales up production, while maintaining – or even reducing – the overall production costs. Innovative and suitable equipment also ensures overall good fish health as it increases the effectiveness of prevention, clinical and diagnostic testing, disease surveillance, and reporting.

Operational resilience

- **Remedy value chain fragility:** The current pandemic revealed the fragility of supply chains, underlying the need to discover new potentials, such as **exploitation of emerging market channels** and promotion of domestic products.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Regional governments and municipalities have been playing a vital role in supporting aquaculture SMEs during the COVID-19 outbreak and managing the health crisis and its socio-economic consequences on rural economies. However, several challenges hindered their smooth functioning and SMEs could not receive the required support. To counter those, regional and municipal public authorities could:

- **Facilitate SMEs' access to financing:** SMEs often face administrative burdens in their attempt to access financing. The pandemic has made it more difficult for SMEs to receive financial support from regional authorities.
- **Raise awareness of available funding schemes:** For effectively implementing new measures, it is essential that public authorities will keep SMEs informed by ensuring their smooth access to relevant information.
- **Increase internal capacity:** To effectively implement regional programmes, authorities should increase their internal capacity and upskill their personnel.

PROJECT PARTNERS



**Region of Peloponnese
(EL)**



Liguria Region (IT)



**Northern Chamber of
Commerce in Szczecin
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**Bucharest-Ilfov Regional
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(RO)**



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