



INTRA facilitates evidence-based policymaking on regional level by building on research findings and highlighting the importance of regional quadruple helix partnerships in research and design of new policy models for internationalisation of SMEs.

[www.interregeurope.eu/intra](http://www.interregeurope.eu/intra)

E-newsletter 6



## Introduction

The 6<sup>th</sup> E-newsletter of INTRA project is related to the project activities of the 6<sup>th</sup> semester, and the results achieved.

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## Partnership

**MRA** - Maribor Development Agency (SI)

**RAPIV** - Regional agency for entrepreneurship and innovations - Varna (BG)

**FUNDECYT-PCTEX** - Foundation FUNDECYT Scientific and Technological Park of Extremadura (ES)

**CAPITANK** - Chemical And Pharmaceutical Innovation Tank – Limited Liability Consortium (IT)

**UALG** - University of Algarve (PT)

**CUE** - Coventry University Enterprises Limited (UK)



Two and a half years after the Kick-off meeting, Maribor Development Agency hosted the INTRA project partnership again on December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of 2018. During the meeting, the project partners exchanged the experiences and evaluated the achieved results in the first two and half years: 41 interregional events, [98 collected](#) and evaluated cases of good practices, 89 selected for presentation in the [GP Handbook](#) and the drafts of Action plans, the core output of the Phase 1.



## Joint European Policy Recommendations for Internationalisation Policy

The project partners prepared the Recommendations for the improvement of their regional policies as well as joint recommendations for overcoming internal and external barriers of SMEs, gaps between the existing internationalisation policies and the needs of SMEs as well as proposed recommendations for the Joint European policy on internationalisation, which we are highlighting below:

1. EU mechanisms cannot cover specific regional needs only, but must be prepared in a way, to also allow for answering regional challenges.
2. SME need to be supported for internationalisation, at EU level, through a standard mechanism. Enterprise Europe Network should focus also on providing internationalisation support to entry level SMEs.
3. The focus of future programming period 2021-2027, should include provision after Brexit on how SMEs are able to access non EU markets.
4. On EU level it is recommended that a special attention is paid to micro enterprises and small enterprises.
5. Efforts should be directed at expanding capacity for both innovation and international business simultaneously, since the two tend to go hand in hand.
6. Digital skills and e-commerce are components worth focusing on: cross-border e-commerce provides enormous growth potential for SMEs.
7. As the public support is not equally effective it has to be targeted to areas with low level of internationalisation of SMEs. This is to guarantee that support reaches the intended recipients, obtains the required results and does not waste public resources.
8. Member States should recognize cluster, network and business organisations, including one-stop-shops, as important facilitators and to include them in business support schemes aimed at fostering SME internationalisation.
9. The availability of internationalisation services for SMEs should be aligned to their needs.
10. EEN as promotor of internationalisation should incorporate also training for SMEs and act as the entry point for internationalisation.
11. There should be a clear distinction between the measures on internal EU market (perceived by SMEs as well as by policies as internationalisation activities) and those targeting areas beyond the EU.
12. The assistance on global market should be provided directly by EC Services as well as by ERDF/ESF+ also in new programming period 2021 – 2027.
13. Export and trade measures could be adapted to the specific needs of innovative SMEs.
14. Innovation-oriented international trade missions could focus on earlier stages of product development rather than on the later commercialisation phases, target potential partners for R&D&I collaboration rather than customers, and be aimed at a certain sector or technology rather than a specific country.
15. Innovative SMEs have many different approaches to go international, depending on their business models and stage of development. The policies and instruments should address this differentiation.



During the 2nd Phase of INTRA Project (starting April 2019 - March 2021) the project partners will closely monitor the implementation of action plans, and will regularly check the extent to which the measures described in the action plan are implemented on the ground, evaluating the results of these measures and gathering evidence of success to be reported to the programme. Project partners will continue to learn from each other and will exchange and build on the success achieved or on the difficulties encountered.



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### The Good Practice Handbook

During INTRA project combined workshops and study visits, the INTRA partners exchanged good practices supporting SME internationalisation, which resulted in drawing up a Good Practice Guide. The aim of this guide is to give policymakers, managing authorities and regional stakeholders access to international programmes, projects and other regional initiatives that have been successfully implemented in other European regions and support internationalisation of SMEs..

The INTRA good practice guide, will provide a starting point with further information provided by contacting the practice holder or corresponding project partner.

Each good practice includes information to assist in a possible transfer, highlighting key points and basic information about the initiative.

A full version of the guide, with 89 good practices, and each good practice description can be found on the <http://www.interregeurope.eu/intra> website.

Further Good practices from INTRA and other projects are also available on the INTERREG Europe website.



### Preparation of the Action Plans

The main output of each participating region in INTRA Project – East Slovenia (SI), NE Bulgaria (BG), Extremadura (ES), Algarve (PT), West-Midlands (UK) and Abruzzo (IT) is the Action plan in which the Operational Programmes of Cohesion Policy 2014 – 2020 were targeted with the aim to overcome SMEs barriers and fulfil their needs in their internationalisation activities. The nature and scope of the changes differs among regions: in Slovenia a new measure will be introduced (Internationalisation Vouchers), in Bulgaria the internationalisation as topic was included in the 3 calls for SMEs, Abruzzo region allocated additional funds for research & development & innovation & internationalisation call, digitalisation is additionally targeted in UK and ES, whereas in Portugal two new projects were already submitted to be approved in the first half of 2019.

All measures and projects were result of interregional cooperation, foremost Study visits with observation of good practices collected in INTRA, Interregional Task Force Meetings, Interregional Workshops with renown experts in internationalisation as well as the Regional Stakeholder Groups Meetings, who validated INTRA`s achievements.



Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, ETC programmes, supporting SMEs in all stages of their life cycle to develop and achieve growth and engage in innovation.

Phase 1: April 1st, 2016 – March 31st, 2019

Phase 2: April 1st, 2019 – March 31st, 2021

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### It's a huge step for INTRA and of great support to SMEs wanting to expand to international markets

The first phase of the Interreg Europe project is dedicated to identification, collection, validation and transference of knowledge, aiming at improving existing regional strategies that support the internationalization of SMEs within the six project partner regions.

The partnership is strong in terms of regional development, business support organisations including cluster, science and technology parks, business incubators as well as the universities.

The project partners were focused on identification of good practices within their region and sharing the most interesting to the whole partnership during the Study visits. And as it turns out, there were many such cases, as the project identified almost one hundred study cases, of which 83 were validated by the partnership (including regional stakeholders of each partner) and included in the Good Practice Handbook.

The practices observed during the study visits have presented the different aspects of supporting SMEs and the various instruments used. The pro and contra of each instruments was not only the topic of Interregional thematic workshops in which renowned experts in the field of internationalisation took part but also in the Interregional Task Force, which evaluated all observed good practices.

By preparing an elaborated research – the Regional State of Affairs, constantly discussing the issues of internationalization with the regional stakeholders and the International Task Force consisting of project partners and their external experts in the field, each of the partners gained a far better understanding to the needs of their regional SMEs and the obstacles they are facing, while trying to access the currently offered support tools and mechanisms. Attending the study visits allowed the partners to identify the best suited practices abroad, which could bridge the gap between regional SME needs and support offered to them; and again discuss these cases with the regional stakeholders. The 2<sup>nd</sup> round of study visits was included, where the stakeholders, who are able to implement changes to existing policies and mechanisms for SME support were visiting the identified cases, from which the region would benefit the most, to gain better insight into the workings of the good practice case.

This structure enabled the project partners to best present the Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies in charge of policies for supporting the internationalisation within Regional Operational Programmes of Cohesion Policy, how a certain support mechanism could be improved and how the region would benefit from this.

Changed policies, benefiting SMEs in overcoming their internationalisation challenges and barriers as well as increased cooperation among the stakeholders in internationalisation environment was the focus of all INTRA activities that led to the development of Action plans to be implemented in the Phase 2 of the INTRA project.

The role of the project partners will change: from implementing activities to monitoring the actions, which managing authorities will implement in the following two years.

