



# Rural SMEs

## Interreg Europe

### Action Plan for County Tipperary



**Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann**  
Tipperary County Council

*Version: November 2019*



**Rural SMEs**  
Interreg Europe

*Sharing solutions for better regional policies*

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## Part I – General information

Project: Rural SMEs (Policies to develop entrepreneurship and innovative SMEs in rural areas)

Partner organisation: Tipperary County Council

Other partner organisations involved (if relevant): All Rural SMEs partners (through knowledge sharing and exchange); Tipperary Local Enterprise Office (key local stakeholder)

Country: Ireland

NUTS2 region: Southern

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## Foreword, incl. Policy Context

Tipperary County Council (TCC) is a partner in the EU INTERREG EUROPE part-funded “Rural SMEs” (Policies to develop entrepreneurship and innovative SMEs in rural areas) ([www.interregeurope.eu/ruralsmes/](http://www.interregeurope.eu/ruralsmes/)).

The key policy instruments linked to EU Investment and Growth are managed mostly from the main cities (regional and/or national capitals), often disconnected to rural areas, and have less impact in areas of lower population density, in particular, the actions towards innovation of the SMEs. The promotion of entrepreneurship spirit has also to be further developed in rural areas, and in particular the promotion of new niches of business opportunities, such as “Energy, Environment, eco-industries, ICT and Social Innovation”.

There were six (6) other organisations involved in the project from Spain, Slovenia, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Portugal. Project activities included analysis of situation in each partner region, good practice and knowledge transfer and development of Action Plans to improve respective partner policy instruments.

Rural SMEs project activity in Phase 1 (ending June 2019) will be accomplished through exchange of experiences and practices; stakeholder & institutional learning; benchmarking and analysis of challenges and needs; which will culminate with the development of an Action Plan in each participating region. Phase 2 (to June 2021), the remainder of the project, will revolve around implementation of the Action Plan.

This document constitutes the Rural SMEs Project’s Action Plan for County Tipperary.

The Action Plan aims to impact:

- Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
- European Territorial Cooperation programme
- Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument addressed: **Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2015-2020**

The purpose of the Local Economic and Development Plan (LECP) for County Tipperary is to set out, for a 6 year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic, the local and community development of the county, both by the County Council itself directly and in partnership with other relevant stakeholders in the county. There is no specific funding allocated to the policy instrument, however, it does elaborate a framework by which funding is spent by local actors.

The LECP contains a high-level economic priority and associated strategic actions of direct relevance to the Rural SMEs project as follows:

- ❖ LECP High-Level Economic Priority 1: To promote and enable appropriate economic development opportunities throughout the county
- ❖ Strategic Action E1.3: Promotion and support of smaller indigenous economic opportunities in all appropriate settlements in the county and microenterprise opportunities in all parts of the county, including rural areas

The first LECP for County Tipperary was completed in January 2016 and covers the period to 2020. Accordingly, the project will have a direct contributing influence on the implementation of the Plan and its further redevelopment and refinement. The learning from the project will be used to inform guidance in relation to improvement and achievement of High Level Economic Priority No.1 and Strategic Action E1.3 of the LECP. The LECP will be reviewed when the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs) are developed. The review will provide an opportunity to ensure consistence between the LECP and the RSES and will also provide an opportunity to review, amend and reprioritise the high level goals and specific objectives and actions where appropriate. The players involved, together with public consultation will participate in the review and development of the next LECP for County Tipperary and good practices and case studies can showcase development opportunities for rural SMEs.

### Policy Impact

It is expected that the outcomes of the actions proposed in this Action Plan will lead to an improved framework for the review the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The actions will provide a more robust evidence base (what works; what does not work) to help inform the policy direction/focus for the reviewed LECP and its implementation mechanisms. A clearer understanding of the needs and requirements of the SME community will emerge which can then be addressed through the measures inserted in the reviewed LECP. More refined monitoring/measurement and impact indicators will be available for the reviewed LECP as a result of the implementation of the actions in this Action Plan.

## Part II – Background to County Tipperary and Rural SMEs Project

### County Tipperary



Tipperary is the 6th largest county in Ireland with a land mass of 4,303 km sq. The county is centrally located, is bounded by eight counties and no part of the county touches the coast. The county adjoins three of the provinces of Ireland and has high quality linkages (i.e. road and rail) to all of the major cities, airports and ports. Tipperary sits within the Southern Regional Assembly NUTS II area.

Tipperary with a population of 159,553 is one of the most populated rural counties nationally. The settlement pattern is based on a strong network of vibrant and robust towns and villages with service centres provided at strategic locations throughout the county. The towns of Thurles (7,940) and Cashel (4,422) in the centre of the County provide a strong urban link between the major centres of Nenagh (8,968) and the largest town in the county, Clonmel (17,140). The towns of Roscrea, Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Templemore, and Cahir function as District Towns for their local hinterlands and combined, provide a good basis for ensuring strong social, economic and community linkages within the county.

Tipperary is a predominantly rural county. The following table presents the rural/urban split in County Tipperary. Data is drawn from the Central Statistics Office analysis of the 2016 census:

	Population	% of Population
Total Rural Population	93,309	58.5%
Total Urban Population	66,244	41.5%
<b>County TOTAL</b>	<b>159,553</b>	<b>100%</b>

The county is part of the central plain of Ireland, but the diversified terrain contains several mountain ranges. The economy of Tipperary is based primarily on agriculture, manufacturing, services and tourism. Like Ireland as a whole, a high proportion of the county's manufacturing industry is foreign-owned. Over 90% of enterprises in the county are micro in size, with less than 10 persons employed. Disposable Household Income in the county is below the state average.

The top 5 industrial sectors by numbers employed in County Tipperary as reported in the 2016 census are as follows:

County Tipperary % Enterprises	Sector
13.8%	Wholesale and Retail Trade
13.7%	Manufacturing
11.1%	Human health & Social work
10.6%	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery
9.2%	Education

County Tipperary's economic profile is that of a rural economy with foreign direct investment enterprises and indigenous enterprises comprising SMEs and microenterprises which operate across a range of sectors. The county's diverse economy includes:

- ❖ A Life Sciences/Bio Pharma Hub around Clonmel that includes Abbott Vascular, Boston Scientific, Suir Pharma, MSD, and Pinewood Laboratories.
- ❖ Enterprises such as Bulmers, Medite Ireland, Procter and Gamble, Carey's Glass, Lisheen Mine, and Tipperary Natural Mineral Water.
- ❖ Rural towns which play a significant role in providing retail and financial services, recreation and employment.
- ❖ Superb fertile land which provides an ideal environment for agriculture and food production, which includes artisan foods.

- ❖ A horse breeding industry which includes the world renowned Coolmore Stud Farm and Ballydoyle Racing Stable.
- ❖ Tourism which offers significant potential for the rural economy. Key tourism attributes are the built and natural heritage of the county and the opportunities the landscape offers for outdoor recreation. Attractions include Lough Derg, mountain ranges such as the Knockmealdowns, Galtees, Slieve Felim, and the Devil's Bit; the Rock of Cashel, Holycross Abbey, Cahir Castle and Roscrea Castle.
- ❖ A third level education facility, Limerick Institute of Technology, which has campuses in Clonmel and Thurles; and linkages with other third level colleges in adjacent counties. Mary Immaculate College (a college of the University of Limerick) has also established a campus in Thurles.

### **Rural SMEs Project**

The project "Policies to develop entrepreneurship and innovative SMEs in rural areas" (Rural SMEs) was approved under the second call of INTERREG Europe Programme; Priority Axis 2 - Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs; Specific objective 2.1. Improving SMES competitiveness policies.

The Rural SMEs project aimed to improve policies on regional support systems for entrepreneurs through exchange of experiences and identification of good practices, implementing the lessons learnt in regional action plans to increase the creation of innovative SMEs in rural areas, but also supporting those which are already established to introduce innovation in their daily activity. Through the organisation of Study Visits, Workshops and Seminars, involving the partner's staff and relevant regional stakeholders, the project focused on supporting measures linked to SMEs in all stages of their life cycle to achieve growth and engage in innovation:

- a) Rural Entrepreneurship (public support, new niches and opportunities in sector such as: energy, environment, eco-industries and ICT, young entrepreneurs, young entrepreneurs);
- b) Innovative rural SMEs (public support, circular economy, ecommerce, social innovation, etc).

INTERREG Europe's overall objective is to improve the implementation of policies and programmes for regional development. Principally programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal and, where relevant, programmes under the European Territorial Cooperation goal, by promoting exchange of experience and policy learning among actors of regional relevance.

Thus, Rural SMEs brought together seven regions that aimed to improve the policies at regional/local support systems for entrepreneurs to increase the creation of innovative SMEs in rural areas, but also supporting those which are already established to introduce innovation in their daily activity.

As a result of all knowledge generated during Phase 1 of the project ("the interregional learning process"), this Action Plan provides details on how the lessons learnt from the RURAL SMES project (good practices identified, regional SWOT analysis, study visits, seminars, workshops, local stakeholders meetings in every territory) will be exploited in order to improve the policy instrument identified for the county of Tipperary. It outlines the nature of the action to be implemented, timeframe, players involved, costs and results.

The development of this Action Plan is the result of the work of Tipperary County Council in close collaboration with its local stakeholders, in particular the Tipperary Local Enterprise Office.

## Part III – Action Plan

The actions contained in this Action Plan have been developed to be consistent with Ireland's National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship, 2014 and the "Ecosystem for Entrepreneurship" approach it articulated (see diagram).

The themes addressed by the actions include the following:

- **Build:** on Existing Successes, Sectors & Initiatives;
- **Nurture:** Entrepreneurship via Access, Education, Engage citizens, Celebrate Successes & Innovate;
- **Drive:** Create Drivers of Entrepreneurship (Policy – Infrastructure – People);
- **Collaborate:** Partnership approaches, Clusters;
- **Communicate:** Getting the message out.



## Priority Actions for County Tipperary

**ACTION AREA 1:** Promote greater awareness and knowledge of rural SME supports

**ACTION AREA 2:** Increase uptake of enterprise development supports by new and existing rural SMEs, particularly in Action Area 1 emerging sectors

**ACTION AREA 3:** Support Innovation by rural SMEs through more intensive collaboration at the local level

### Detail of Actions

<b>ACTION AREA 1: Promote greater awareness and knowledge of rural SME supports</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>The main objective of this action area is to generate greater awareness and knowledge of supports for rural based SMEs in County Tipperary.</p> <p>Learnings from the Rural SMEs project that have contributed to this action include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good practice “Patras Innovation Quest” from Greek partner;</li> <li>• Romanian partner good practice, “Social Economy: Social responsibility from north to south”;</li> <li>• “El Hueo Verde”, good practice from Spain on green entrepreneurship.</li> <li>• The key learning from these is that it is important to engage with target audiences to increase their awareness of supports available</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand locally in County Tipperary the programme of events during National Enterprise Week (generally takes place annually in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter), particularly in emerging/nascent sectors, such as social economy, green entrepreneurship, artisan food, circular economy;</li> <li>• Organise “Who to talk to” events/clinics in order to broaden the awareness of the range of supports available for rural SMEs;</li> <li>• Hold specific business support clinics in areas of high unemployment;</li> <li>• Facilitate the collation, documentation and showcasing of Tipperary good practice examples of rural SMEs.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Economic and Community Plan for County Tipperary</li> <li>• Local Development Strategy for County Tipperary</li> </ul>
<b>Players involved</b>	<p>Tipperary Local Enterprise Office will lead with support from Tipperary County Council, the two Local Development Companies and business support networks in the county.</p> <p>Tipperary Local Enterprise Office: Facilitate mentoring, training, company networking and good practice dissemination. Identify and invite companies to participate in seminars and workshops.</p> <p>Tipperary County Council’s Community, Enterprise &amp; Economic Development Directorate: Responsible for economic development, enterprise development and community development. The Council is committed to attracting and supporting dynamic companies and vibrant individuals to develop sustainable jobs and businesses in the county.</p>

	South Tipperary Development Company and North Tipperary Development Company: The two Development Companies are responsible for the delivery of a range of rural enterprise, social inclusion, and community development initiatives in the county.
<b>Timeframe</b>	National Enterprise Week – Q1, 2020 Other actions – Q4, 2019 onwards.
<b>Costs</b>	Direct costs are not considered to be significant for these actions
<b>Funding Sources</b>	Funded from within the existing budget and resources of Tipperary Local Enterprise Office and Tipperary County Council. Funding support from the Rural Development Programme (Leader) in County Tipperary may be available for training elements for non-local authority led projects.

<b>ACTION AREA 2: Increase uptake of enterprise development supports by new and existing rural SMEs, particularly in Action Area 1 emerging sectors</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>Having generated greater awareness, the objective of this action area is to increase the uptake of available enterprise development supports by rural based SMEs and entrepreneurs in County Tipperary.</p> <p>Learnings from the Rural SMEs project that have contributed to this action include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good practice from Spanish partner, “Micro Loans financing for Entrepreneurs”;</li> <li>• Vimasol Renewable Energy, good practice on Energy and ITC niches in rural entrepreneurship from Portugese partner;</li> <li>• Experience of Romanian partner “NewBIZ - Developing entrepreneurship and managerial skills”.</li> <li>• The main learning from these is that to increase uptake of supports it must be targeted and focused at particular cohorts or business sectors, e.g. Green Energy, ICT, Technology etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the framework of the workshops in Action Area 1 provide networking opportunities for companies operating in emerging/nascent sectors and facilitate such companies meeting other like-minded companies;</li> <li>• Hold workshops to provide information on rural enterprise supports available and have relevant support agencies to attend these.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Economic and Community Plan for County Tipperary</li> <li>• Local Development Strategy for County Tipperary</li> </ul>
<b>Players involved</b>	Tipperary Local Enterprise Office will lead with support from Tipperary County Council, the two Local Development Companies and business support networks in the county.
<b>Timeframe</b>	Q4, 2019 onwards
<b>Costs</b>	Direct costs are not considered to be significant for these actions. Workshops – circa €1,000 each.
<b>Funding Sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funded from within the existing budgets and resources of Tipperary Local Enterprise Office and Tipperary County Council.</li> <li>• Funding support from the Rural Development Programme (Leader) in County Tipperary may be available for entrepreneurs and promoters seeking to establish rural-based enterprises/SMEs.</li> </ul>



<b>ACTION AREA 3: Support Innovation by rural SMEs through more intensive collaboration at the local level</b>	
<b>Background</b>	<p>The main objective of this action area is to strengthen innovation through increased industry-research collaboration initiatives in County Tipperary.</p> <p>Learnings from the Rural SMEs project that have contributed to this action include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slovenian good practice example “Collective Brand Bohinj/From Bohinj”;</li> <li>• Good practice “Entrepreneurship Networking Platform of Achia” from Greek partner;</li> <li>• From Hungary, good practice “Rural Quality – Cooperating Balaton Uplands Brand System”.</li> <li>• These have demonstrated that a focus on strengthening innovation is required for local regional economies to prosper.</li> </ul>
<b>Actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look to establish a Tipperary Entrepreneurial Forum, to bring together all stakeholders with the shared objective of building a vibrant and cohesive entrepreneurial ecosystem in the county;</li> <li>• Partner/join with 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions to strategically address rural SME innovation area in the county. Build links and connections between the 4 helix - research expertise, local companies/SMEs, public sector and social actors;</li> <li>• Maximise opportunity of the EU’s H2020 and Ireland’s Project 2040 funding programmes; encourage and support companies and research centres to access H2020 funding and to engage with the Project 2040 planning framework in the context of local development and rural regeneration.</li> <li>• The Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 for South East Strategic Objective is to enhance the existing environment for enterprise activity and company growth, and build greater resilience into the regional economy. The establishment of the Tipperary Forum will compliment this action in our partner regional counties in the South East</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Economic and Community Plan for County Tipperary</li> <li>• Local Development Strategy for County Tipperary</li> </ul>
<b>Players involved</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tipperary County Council will lead with support from Limerick Institute of Technology, Thurles Campus to further enhance quadruple helix model in the county and on maximising access to H2020 funding.</li> <li>• Tipperary County Council to lead on maximising access to Ireland Project 2040 funding.</li> </ul> <p><b>Limerick Institute of Technology:</b> Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) is an institution of higher education in Limerick, Ireland and is one of fourteen member institutions of the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA). The Institute has campuses in Limerick city, one in both Thurles and Clonmel in County Tipperary and a regional learning</p>

	centre in Ennis, County Clare. LIT seeks to ensure that the region's economy continues has the requisite array of leading-edge skills demanded by key industries.
<b>Timeframe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tipperary Entrepreneurial Forum, Q1 2020;</li> <li>• Other actions, Q3 2019 onwards.</li> </ul>
<b>Costs</b>	Direct costs are not considered to be significant for these actions.
<b>Funding Sources</b>	Tipperary County Council will draw on its own budgets and resources to achieve this.

## Monitoring of Action Plan

Successful delivery of the Rural SMEs Action Plan will require a programmatic approach, resourcing and funding to ensure effective delivery and implementation.

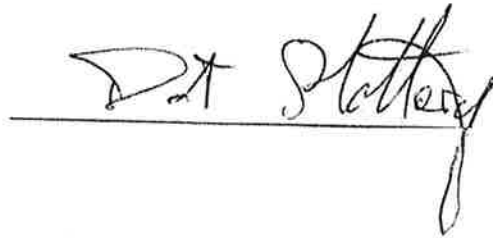
The actions put forward are supported by the identification of organisations/bodies that will oversee the implementation of the actions, as a key component to its successful delivery.

Increasing and maintaining stakeholder cooperation over the long term is also a key factor in the successful implementation of the actions. Stakeholder engagement and cooperation will be promoted and supported through these targeted actions, which includes the designation of responsibility for the delivery of each of the actions

## Signing Page

On Behalf of Tipperary County Council

Signature:



Name:

Pat Slattery

Title:

Director of Services

Organisation Stamp

