

RUR@L SMEs
ACTION PLAN

PP4 - REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND
OF THE REGION OF WESTERN GREECE



REGION
OF WESTERN
GREECE

Full of contrast!



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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

A. PROJECT

“Policies to develop entrepreneurship and innovative SMEs in rural areas” / RUR@L SMEs

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The key policy instruments linked to Investments and Growth are managed mostly by authorities (e.g. big urban centres or national capitals), often disconnected to rural areas. As a result, these instruments and actions to enhance the innovation of rural SMEs in particular, have less impact in areas of lower population density.

The promotion of entrepreneurship spirit in rural areas must be further developed, in particular the promotion of new niches of business opportunities, such as “Energy, Environment, Eco-industries, ICT or Social Innovation”.

In this context, Rur@L SMEs aims to improve the 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.

To achieve this goal the project envisages the identification, transfer and adoption of projects, measures and policies that would contribute to find out solutions to key challenges that face business development in less populated areas, such as:

- access to finance; communication;
- increase of extroversion;
- development of logistics infrastructure;
- access to knowledge; innovation services support.

PROJECT FOCUS

In particular, and through the organization of 7 Study visits, 4 Workshops & 2 Seminars, involving the partner’s staff and the relevant regional stakeholders, the project focuses on supporting measures linked to:

- Rural Entrepreneurship (public support, new niches, young entrepreneurs)
- Innovative Rural SMEs (Public support, circular economy, Social Innovation, etc.)

PARTNERSHIP

The project’s partners include 7 organisations:

1. Society for the Development of the Province of Burgos, Spain
2. Tipperary County Council, Ireland

3. BSC, Business Support Centre, Kranj, Slovenia
4. Regional Development Fund of the Region of Western Greece, Greece
5. Central Transdunabian Regional Innovation Agency Nonprofit Ltd, Netherlands
6. Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bistrita Nasaud, Romania
7. Ave Intermunicipal Community – CIM AVE, Portugal

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Regional and transnational SWOT Analyzes in the field of entrepreneurship and support policies - supporting small and medium-sized enterprises through exchange of experience
- Presentation of best practices and competencies
- Organisation of seminars
- Study visits
- Aid - Support services for the creation of innovative small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas
- Action Plans
- Creation of local action groups
- Online promotion of actions
- Meetings and workshops with stakeholders

PROJECT GOAL

The ultimate goal of the project is to develop a Regional Action Plan that capitalizes on specific good practices and achieves better governance through synergies between business clusters, educational / research and productive organizations with the aim of:

- Rebuilding the production base with new or different competing products, which will be exported to the international market and will contribute to the internationalization of enterprises.
- Enhancing business activity with the prospect of developing and producing high added value products and services in large production chains, as well as facilitating the use of new ideas and practices and supporting businesses (new and existing).
- Promoting youth entrepreneurship in various fields, exploiting all forms of innovation, creativity and technological skills.

B. PARTNER ORGANISATION

PP4- REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND OF THE REGION OF WESTERN GREECE

C. COUNTRY

GREECE

D. NUTS2 REGION

EL63

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2. POLICY CONTEXT

A. NATIONAL LEVEL

The PA (Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework) 2014-2020 constitutes the main strategic plan for growth in Greece with the contribution of significant resources originating from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) of the European Union. The PA, through its implementation, seeks to tackle the structural weaknesses in Greece that contributed to the economic crisis, as well as other economic and social problems caused by it. Moreover, the PA 2014-2020 is called upon to help attain the national targets within the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The PA vision of growth is to contribute to revitalising the Greek economy through the recovery and upgrade of the productive and social fabric of Greece and the creation and maintenance of the sustainable jobs, spearheaded by outward looking, innovative and competitive entrepreneurship and on the basis of reinforcing social cohesion and the principles of sustainable development.

First among the PA's funding priorities is **"Enhancing business competitiveness and extroversion, shifting to qualitative entrepreneurship spearheaded by innovation and higher domestic added value"**. Actions under this priority are related to entrepreneurship and support the transition to high added value activities, the creation of a business-friendly environment to attract investments, and capitalising on research and innovation to strengthen the competitiveness of new and existing businesses.

The objectives of the European Structural and Investment Funds of the European Union, which co-finance the PA 2014-2020, are implemented through Operational Programmes. The Operational Programmes are multiannual programs that are effective throughout the programming period 2014-2020 and are related to sectors and/or geographic regions at international, national or local level. The architecture of the PA 2014-2020 includes:

- Seven (7) Sectoral Operational Programmes (including programmes for Rural Development and Fisheries) covering one or more sectors and whose geographic scope and implementation applies across the country
- Thirteen (13) **Regional Operational Programmes (ROP)**, one for each of the 13 administrative regions of the country, including regional-scale activities.

B. REGIONAL LEVEL

The main documents outlining the policy priorities and strategic goals at a regional level are the RIS3 Smart Specialization Strategy for RWG and the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) of Western Greece.

In September 2012, the Region of Western Greece, following the requirements of the European Commission, launched a broad consultation on the development of a Regional Strategy for Smart Specialization focusing on investment in research, innovation and entrepreneurship. The resulting document outlined the priority sectors for the Region, presented in detail in the following table.

Smart Specialization – Priority Sectors in RWG

Agricultural Production, Aquaculture and Food

The primary sector of the RWG includes significant products in the sectors of plant production and animal production.

Olives and olive oil are one of the most important products of the Region of Western Greece. Citrus fruits (mainly oranges and lemons) are among the most important crops of the Region within all three Regional Units.

In the sector of wine distillery, the course of the region's enterprises operating is very positive. The areas cultivated with vines in the RWG represent 13.4% of the cultivated area at country level. In addition to traditional businesses, new dynamic start-ups are emerging, taking advantage of the region's key comparative advantages (tradition, specialization, designation of origin, access to excellent raw material in neighbouring areas) that have already been established in the market. In total, 83 related companies are active in the Region, with a turnover of 53 million € (ELSTAT, 2008). The sector is boosted by its strong export potential.

On the other hand, livestock production in the Region of Western Greece includes mainly meat and dairy-dairy products. The livestock sector is of particular importance for the Region, as it exploits mountainous - less - favored areas that would be impossible to exploit otherwise. Many of the products produced are Products of Designation of Origin (PDO), mainly Feta and Kefalograviera, for which there is demand on both domestic and foreign markets.

The topography and rich biodiversity of the region are major comparative advantages that give the local livestock products their excellent quality.

In the RWG, namely in the region of Aitolokarnania, Aquaculture is now established as the most dynamic branch of the primary production of the region, and is ranked among the top positions in the value of exports of agricultural products. The region contains 48% of the country's lagoon and 25% of the lakes, while the aquaculture production activity - including that of the Echinids - covers 25% of the landings of domestic production, i.e. over 12, 5% of the European production of sea bream and sea bass aquaculture. A total of 128 companies operate in the Region, the turnover of which amounts to 30.6 million € (ELSTAT, 2008).

Tourism - Culture

Due to its important geographical position, the Region attracts a significant number of domestic and foreign tourists (645.768 tourists in 2015). According to the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, in 2015 in Western Greece there were 270 Hotels with almost 9.700 rooms and 18.850 beds. 3.106 of these beds belong to 5* hotels. Western Greece is served by 2 airports (Araxos and Aktio) and there are also plans for the development of Andravida airport. Western Greece is also served by 6 Ports: Patras, Killini, Katakolo, Amfilochia, Egio, Messolonghi. There is also an Industrial Port Zone at Astakos, Aitolokarnania. There are also in the Region 23 privately run camping sites. In 2015 archaeological sites of Western Greece received 486.744 visitors, whereas museums 174.653 visitors in total. The Archaeological site of Ancient Olympia received 439.839 visitors, while the Olympia Archaeological Museum was visited by 135.972 visitors. The Aktio airport received c. 190.106 international passengers in 2015. Patras port traffic for the same year was a reported 553.291 passengers, while Katakolo port received 242 cruise boats and 459.882 passengers.

Smart Specialization – Priority Sectors in RWG

Materials – Microelectronics

Some multinationals enterprises in the field of microelectronics are present in the region, through local business acquisitions.

The universities, technical institutions, research centres and enterprises of the region contribute to its strong technological and research potential.

Productive interest is mainly centred on:

- the production of advanced materials used in microelectronics as well as in energy (e.g. PV and hydrogen cells)
- the design of microelectronics components that find important applications in a number of industries such as electronic systems (industrial and commercial applications), ICTs, etc.

ICT and energy applications were also identified as horizontal priorities, which may provide support in further developing the priority sectors that have been outlined above.

Based on the priority sectors identified in the RIS3 document and the relevant policy recommendations, the Region elaborated its Regional Operational Programme for the period 2014 – 2020, discussed in more detail in the following section.

C. POLICY INSTRUMENT ADDRESSED BY THE REGIONAL ACTION PLAN

The Regional Action Plan of the RWG aims to impact the relevant policy instrument, i.e. the **Operational Programme of Western Greece 2014-2020**, which is the same policy instrument identified in the original proposal and the Application Form.

Based on the priority sectors identified in the RIS3 document for the region and the relevant policy recommendations, RWG elaborated its Regional Operational Programme for the period 2014 – 2020 with the main objective of ensuring the conditions for prosperity based on the competitiveness and extroversion of the Region's enterprises. A prerequisite for this is the transition to quality entrepreneurship, cutting edge innovation and increasing domestic added value. To this end, the main objective of the ROP of RWG is to prioritize investments in areas with more direct and secure returns. Investments will gradually extend to sectors that deliver longer-term added value and can increase the competitiveness of its enterprises Region.

Emphasis is placed on strengthening innovative activities in areas of smart specialization, such as the primary sector, focusing on agri-food and processing of agricultural products, tourism in direct connection with culture and advanced materials - microelectronics, without however ignoring the need to strengthen innovative activities in the fields of energy applications and information technology that feed almost all the above areas of expertise horizontally.

All of the above sectoral specialization sectors aim to contribute to the creation of attractive, green and competitive cities within the RWG ("smart cities"), which are an integral part of the regional smart specialization strategy.

In further detail, the strategy foreseen per sector of expertise is presented below:

- **Agri-food:** The strategy consists in creating a modern production sector capable of contributing to the economic well-being and quality of life of citizens through the production of competitive, quality and safe foods of a protected designation of origin with high added and nutritional value. The development of agri-food is a key priority at a national and regional level, in order to change the traditional model of agricultural production - aquaculture and of food production and processing.
- **Tourism-Culture:** Tourism's strategy consists in highlighting tourism by combining natural and cultural reserves into a comprehensive product of experience, characterized by high quality in all aspects of the services offered.
- **Materials - Microelectronics:** The Materials and Microelectronics Strategy focuses on the production of advanced materials that are used both in microelectronics and energy and in the design of microelectronics components which find important applications in a number of disciplines such as electronic systems (industrial and consumer applications) , ICTs and so on.

The strategy in the field of energy and ICT applications focuses on providing horizontal support to the above sectors, as they form an integral part of their value chains.

Within the framework of these strategic objectives, the OP of the Region of Western Greece finances actions to strengthen the identified priority areas, supporting entrepreneurship and SMEs in the Region. The Rural SMEs project seeks to further focus the actions financed by the O.P. in order to strengthen and support the competitiveness and innovation of rural SMEs.

3. ACTION PLAN VISION

A. GENERAL CONTEXT

RURALITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE REGION OF WESTERN GREECE

The Region of Western Greece (RWG) is one of the thirteen regions of Greece. It comprises the western part of continental Greece and the north-western part of the Peloponnese. The RWG was named European Entrepreneurial Region in 2017, based on a proposed regional development strategy engaging different stakeholders across society, while also maintaining social cohesion.

Table 1 – RWG General Data

Demographics and Workforce quick facts
Population: 679,796 (2011)
GDP per Capita: 12,229 euro (2013)
Gross fixed capital formation: 1,000 million euro (2013)
Unemployment rate: 28.4%

Source: europa.eu, Hellenic Statistical Authority

www.enterprisegreece.gov.gr

Within the Region of Western Greece (RWG), the tertiary sector is dominant, accounting for 76.4% of the Gross Value Added and employing 65.3% of the total labor force. The secondary sector follows with 14.5% of the GVA, providing work for 12.3 % of all employed, while the primary sector produces only 9.1% of the GVA and accounts for 22.4% of total employees (ELSTAT data, 2014). A downward trend has been noted in the secondary sector over the last decade.

Regarding entrepreneurship in the RWG, the creation of new enterprises follows the general course of the economy over the last decade. The upward trend was discontinued in 2007, settling into a new status quo of about 3,000 businesses joining the market each year in the region. However, the significant decline in business over the past years has affected business creation negatively, constraining the number of start-ups and new SMEs.

According to recent figures from the Center for Planning & Economic Research, the Region of Western Greece is in the top three regions of the country and 9th among 272 regions in the field of employment in the agricultural sector (Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Forestry). Employment in the agriculture sector from 2009 (21,80%) onward is continuously increasing, exceeding 50% in the RWG as a whole and 80% for the Regional Units of Aitolokarnania and Ilia. It should be noted, however, that the Agricultural Sector includes not only the Primary, but also the

Secondary (Manufacturing and Agricultural Producers) and the Tertiary sector (Trade, Transport, Rural sector).

During the last decade, new business ventures in the Region are involved primarily in the services sector, with trade coming in second.

99% of Western Greece's businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises.

Table 2 presents a SWOT Analysis for the RWG, as presented in the SWOT Analysis that was elaborated within the context of the Rural SMEs project.

Table 2 – SWOT Analysis of the RWG

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patras as the Western Gate of the Country. Bridge of Rio - Antirio. • Major Primary Sector • Strong research pole in: agricultural technologies, chemistry and materials, nanotechnology, environmental technologies and fuels, life sciences and biotechnology • Specialization in: Agriculture, Aquaculture, Beverage, Tourism, Transport, Construction • Significant spending on research in microelectronics • Infrastructure for housing and incubation of businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low per capita GVA • Low primary productivity • Low employment rates and high unemployment rates • Lack of funds and liquidity • Low competitiveness in energy applications • Low level of synergies • Low percentage of economically active population – deindustrialization • Moderate planning and promotion of innovation programs and policies • Low investment in business research • Low marketing mechanism • Low ability to absorb innovations by business • Weak regional management system for the research and innovation system
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the short term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing trend of divestment in Western Greece • The continuing economic recession that acts as a disincentive for the investment interest • Population weakening of the countryside • The shrinking of SMEs • Economic hardship due to the crisis • Significant obstacles to entrepreneurship (high taxes, levies and other charges) • Significant international competition in the specialization branches • Increasing the human resource leak in Science and Technology (HRST) due to the prolonged economic crisis • Postponement to the second phase of construction of Olympia road and train infrastructure.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New regional funds • New entrepreneurship (start-up, incubators, etc.) • Capacity building in the fields of innovation, management and promotion • Award of European Entrepreneurial Region (EER 2017): implementation of action plan • Enriching a tourist product by developing synergies with culture and agriculture-food-livestock • Modernization of the agricultural sector and turning into dynamic crops, with emphasis on quality and safety • Modernization of livestock and aquaculture 	
<p>In the medium - long term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in primary sector productivity • Exploitation of a regional geographical location as a freight traffic hub, of the trans-European cooperation and development networks in the SE. Europe (South Mediterranean Arc) • Restart investment interest • Development of systems for the localization and promotion of local products - Development of high-level synergies between the production sectors • Empowering people with education, training, networking 	

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY – SMES IN THE RWG

Most of the businesses active in Western Greece specialize in agro-food production, fishing, aquaculture, processing and marketing of food and beverages, demonstrating the region's dependence on the primary and food processing sector.

There are indications that the agricultural sector in the region is shrinking. This is linked to the inability to systematically promote products and the low competitiveness of the primary sector.

The RWG shows growing potential in the tourism and cultural sector, with an increase of tourist arrivals during the decade 2000-2010, reaching 5% of total arrivals country-wide. International tourist arrivals represent 40% of total arrivals in the region, though their number fluctuates from year to year. The region also appears popular among Greek tourists/visitors, with an upward trend in the number of arrivals.

One of the main issues identified is the difficulty in accessing and securing capital to support business activity in SMEs of all sectors. There is high demand for loan guarantees, and the National Fund for Entrepreneurship and Development (ETEAN) has approved 3.492 loans of 298 million € with 236 million € guarantees for the Region of Western Greece. Financial support for the establishment of SMEs and during their first years of operation is severely lacking, and accessing trade networks or creating short supply chains for the competitive promotion of their products is equally challenging.

Under the last Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2007 -2013 for the RWG, around 1.300 SMEs benefited from support, leading to significant job creation during the implementation of approved investment plans. Financed actions included support for SMEs in the tertiary sector (trade – services), in the Processing – Tourism – Trade – Services sector and support for scientists and freelancers.

During the design phase of the new ROP, a "Cultivation Plan for the Region of Western Greece" was elaborated, containing cultivation suggestions based on the particular characteristics of the region, which is directly linked to the regional strategy for Smart Specialization.

GOOD PRACTICES IN RWG

Within the framework of the Rural SMEs project, several good practices have been identified in RWG, while information relevant to each practice has been published on the Interreg Europe website, aiming to facilitate their transfer to other parts of Europe.

These practices are summarized below.

- **PATRAS INNOVATION QUEST – Patras IQ**

Patras Innovation Quest - Patras IQ, is a research know-how transfer event, which has been organized in the RWG for the last five years, aiming at developing and strengthening the cooperation between the research community and the productive sector. During the event, researchers present to the productive sector as well as to investors mature research results that can potentially be exploited entrepreneurially and commercially. Furthermore, problems that the productive sector is facing are discussed in order for researchers to offer feasible solutions.

The event brings into contact various sectors of the economy (academia/researchers, productive sector, investors, entrepreneurs, public authorities, etc.). As such, Patras IQ encourages discussion and interaction between actors, serving as a breeding ground for innovation, orienting research capacity towards bankable projects and facilitating access to funding (e.g. from ROPs, angel investors, crowdfunding, etc.).

The practice is easily transferable to regions with a strong academic/research background. It aims to foster innovation at a regional and national level, cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit among students/researchers and provide opportunity for the creation and funding of innovative SMEs, start-ups, etc.

- **Composting of organic materials by red worms (Vermicomposting)**

Management of solid residues in order to produce products of high nutritional and agronomic value for agronomic use. The whole procedure is based on the composting of organic materials by red worms. The process of composting with earthworms (vermicomposting), is a natural process where organic waste (leaves, clippings, vegetables etc.) are converted to a rich organic mixture which functions as both a conditioner and as fertilizer. The value of vermicomposting is taught at local schools and many biological school orchards are created in order to impart the value of recycling and cultivating to students and teachers.

The practice is easily transferable to other regions, it offers clear advantages over other techniques and is a promising biotechnology for sustainable waste treatment.

- **Entrepreneurship Networking Platform of Achaia**

The Good practice concerns a networking platform for regional businesses that supports interfacing with greater Public Administration, Chambers, Academic - Research community and productive actors.

The GP is currently being implemented in RWG, based on the collaboration of the stakeholders which was already taking place within the framework of another RWG initiative, i.e. "Alliance of Entrepreneurship & Development in Western Greece".

The networking platform creates the appropriate framework for the development of tools that will provide services to businesses and to all stakeholders.

The interconnection of micro-SMEs/SMEs and professionals with each other and the use of innovative tools and methods (crowdsourcing, tele-education, teleconferencing, data sharing, etc.) creates momentum in the entrepreneurial profile of the region, enhancing its competitiveness and extroversion.

Similarly, both academic and research organisations participate to the system, ensuring technological transfer in the business world, while public administration organisations, business actors, and producers are creating better conditions for growth of the business community.

- **Production of electricity from biogas derived from biomass (fodder organic waste and residues)**

The good practice concerns the establishment of a biogas power plant that was funded by the investment incentives law 3908/2011. Biomass production starts and ends in the primary sector, providing significant benefits to producers, meeting energy needs, and delivering high quality fertilizer and even water, which are directed to agriculture and, as a result, to local communities.

In this innovative GP, which directly contributes to the transition to a circular economy, the plant uses the waste of an adjacent pig farms belonging to the same operator for the production of biogas used as a fuel in an electricity generator. Electricity is then sold to the PPC network.

- **Promoting in the labor market people with mental health problems**

"Café Gefyres" aims at integrating people belonging to vulnerable groups, such as people with mental health problems, into the local economic and social life. Through its operation, the social cooperative enterprise aims to provide education and employment opportunities, thus contributing to the psychosocial restoration and reduction of stigma associated with mental illness.

The practice is already being implemented in the RWG, while a more widespread implementation, with the proliferation of similar businesses, would be beneficial to vulnerable population groups targeted. The GP is easily transferable to any region, and can be tailored to address the needs of various marginalised groups.

- **ELAIA: A Scientific, Cultural and Promotional Event in Agrinio Relating to Olive Oil and Table Olives**

Since 2014 the Municipality of Agrinio organizes a cultural and scientific event called 'Elaia', which aims to promote olive oil and olives pairing with its local products and increasing consumer awareness of their quality and health benefits.

During the events Agrinio is a common meeting place for scientists, traders, olive growers, farmers, standardizers, citizens, from the wider region of the prefecture and the rest of Greece, with the participation of the International Olive Council and the Ministry of Agriculture. Stakeholders of the Region, ELGO 'Dimitra', the Academy of Athens, Universities, Chambers, Cultural Associations, olive producers, agricultural cooperatives, hoteliers' associations, catering stores, chefs, cooks, nutritionists.

The children are taught the way olive oil and olive quality are directly linked to each and every stage of life of the olive tree and the maturation of olives. Through this activity, children and citizens are able to observe and experience all the steps of the olive products route, from production, to packaging and distribution. This also provided opportunities for health specialists, representatives from the gourmet sector, opinion leaders, media professionals, bloggers and other actors related to olive sector to participate in workshops.

Technical meetings of researchers with local stakeholders and decision makers are organized to develop a 'local strategic plan for sustainable olive growing' aiming at prolonging post-project lifetime impact.

Within Greece several other regions have already started initiating a similar promotion strategy in their region, using Elaia as a blueprint

OVERVIEW

The Region of Western Greece (PP4) aims to become an innovation pole for scientists, researchers and SMEs. SMEs have been identified as a key factor not only for the improvement of competitiveness of the Region but also as a necessary condition for the recovery of regional economy and labour market. Additionally, the implementation of the region's RIS3 strategy has highlighted the importance of supporting rural SMEs in a more holistic approach, establishing links with research institutes and commerce organizations.

In that framework and in accordance with the targeted policy instrument, support is given to entrepreneurs and SMEs, especially in cases where innovation is embedded in the value chains.

Taking into account the regional context and in compliance with the regional innovation strategy for smart specialization (RIS3), the Action Plan will propose measures adapted from the good practices identified during phase I of the Rur@I SMEs project, with a view to maximize the impact of European structural funds and the regional funding available for businesses in rural areas, as well as improve the strategic focus of the policy instrument in question.

B. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

Towards the improvement of the targeted policy instrument (Regional Operational Programme of Western Greece), the RWG envisages a structural change based on a fundamental shift for the utilization of structural funds and regional funding in a more participatory and efficient approach.

The specific aim is the creation, development and growth of rural SMEs, focusing on common problems such as access to finance, knowledge and to international markets. There is a need to strengthen cooperation between stakeholders of the Region with a view to develop, promote and commercialize innovation. The

challenge is to empower SMEs to become less dependent on public funding and improve their contribution to the regional economy, while also creating new jobs.

The Action Plan will focus on measures aiming to professionalise rural businesses and improve the knowledge base of entrepreneurs while enhancing critical skills, which will boost innovation in the long-term, fully in line with the overall objectives of the Rur@I SMEs project.

C. ACTION PLAN METHODOLOGY

RWG is the competent regional authority, in charge of both elaborating and implementing policy within its territory. This allows for the implementation of a wide spectrum of actions under its purview, as RWG can allocate human and financial resources in accordance with its strategic priorities.

The goal is for the proposed action to be implemented in the following months, with the evaluation of its results taking place before the end of the project's duration.

D. MONITORING OF THE REGIONAL ACTION PLAN

The project team for PP4 will be in charge of the monitoring of critical deadlines for the implementation of the proposed measures and will make sure to identify and overcome potential delays early on while keeping the LP apprised of the overall implementation progress of the Action Plan.

Indicators have been selected for each action, along with target values, in order to facilitate the monitoring of results.

Day-to-day monitoring of the proposed actions' implementation and progress will be handled by the competent Intermediary Agency in accordance with usual practices in monitoring the implementation of calls / actions published under the O.P. of Western Greece 2014-2020. The Intermediary Agency will remain in close contact with the Managing Authority of the O.P. of WG and the Region of Western Greece throughout the period required for the implementation of the Regional Action Plan.

E. ENDORSEMENT OF THE REGIONAL ACTION PLAN

As previously stated, RWG is the competent regional authority, in charge of both elaborating and implementing policy within its territory. As such, no further endorsement is needed, seeing as the proposed Action Plan reflects the will of the Region's decision makers.

4. DETAILS OF THE ACTIONS

ACTION NUMBER	ACTION NAME
1	<p>Publication of Call for Proposals "Innovation and Entrepreneurship Vouchers for Rural SMEs"</p>
<p>Background</p>	<p>Based on the identified Good Practice "NEWBIZ – Developing entrepreneurial / managerial skills of young entrepreneurs" which was initially implemented in Romania and the conclusions of consultations with stakeholders that took place during the Stakeholder Group Meetings, the need for a mechanism to provide support for start-ups and young entrepreneurs in Western Greece became readily apparent.</p> <p>NewBiz promoted entrepreneurship and self-employment as key for achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and offered various resources for the development and innovation of startups, while at the same time improving the quality of their services. The project supported knowledge-building and learning on entrepreneurship. Similar practices have been implemented in the RWG, both in the past and more recently. As such, the GP is suitable for implementation within the region, it is easily transferable to other regions and can be adapted- tailored to address specific needs / weaknesses.</p> <p>The proposed measure of a call for proposals "Innovation Vouchers for Rural SMEs" hopes to directly address the overall underdevelopment of entrepreneurial culture in the Region of Western Greece, and help new entrepreneurs overcome obstacles related the design and elaboration of innovative products, thus boosting their skills and ability to apply for and secure funding of their entrepreneurial ideas, as well as their technical capacities in the successful implementation of these ideas. The key is boosting entrepreneurial culture among residents of the remote and rural areas of the RGW.</p> <p>Such structures have proved effective in other regions, as they enhance local entrepreneurial culture and ensure the transfer of essential know-how, by providing services tailored to the local economy and the needs of young / aspiring entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Similar schemes have been successfully implemented in the past, both at national and regional level. Specifically, the "Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship" programme 2007-2013 provided over 400 SMEs in Greece with innovation vouchers, with a total budget of 7,8 million €. In the current programming period, the Region of Peloponnese provided innovation vouchers to businesses from key economic sectors, with a total budget of 500.000,00€, under its Operational Programme 2014-2020.</p>
<p>Description</p>	<p>The proposed action involves the publication of a call for proposals from Development Agencies, that will then publish proposals aiming to provide Innovation Vouchers to small and medium-sized businesses in the region, both new and existing.</p> <p>SMEs will then be able to use the "Innovation and Entrepreneurship Voucher" to procure business support services, such as mentoring, networking and/or services for the elaboration of business/investment plans (e.g. for the elaboration of new innovative services/products) or the transfer of knowledge from industry experts (i.e. from an Innovation Actor, such as a research centre or university). The focus will be in transferring know-how on building a business and elaborating a business plan or more specific training depending on the business sector. Specifications on eligible services per area will be provided, based on a mapping of local needs to be conducted in the upcoming period. The</p>

	<p>SMEs will be provided with a registry-list of mentors and consultants from all over Greece, to whom they can apply for the vouchers to be redeemed.</p> <p>Each voucher will correspond to services of a value between 5.500,00€ to 7.500,00€. Services eligible in the context of the Innovation Vouchers will be determined in detail in the call, and may be focused on Rural Entrepreneurship themes, with an emphasis on priority sectors as defined in the Region's RIS3 policy documents, i.e. ICT, materials and micro-electronics, tourism & culture, agro-food, etc.</p> <p>Area of Implementation of the Measure will be the LEADER+ eligible areas</p> <p>The "innovation" of the proposed action is ensured by providing all beneficiaries with the opportunity to pick and choose the innovation support service that best meets their particular needs, among the list of eligible services. This allows for a bottom-up approach, with flexible and tailored measures that will enhance the performance of each SME, maximising their impact.</p> <p>Among the eligible services, the call will include funding for services offered under the NEWBIZ good practice identified in Romania. This practice financed entrepreneurship, leadership, as well as project management trainings, and the elaboration of business plans, as part of the sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development in the last programming period (2007-2013) in Romania.</p> <p>The practice serves as inspiration and a starting point for the adaptation of several of the most fitting aspects to the regional context of Western Greece. The goal is to develop a favorable business environment and make the region more attractive to innovative businesses, boosting the local economy and employment in the long term.</p>		
Policy endorsement	The action will be implemented within the framework of the O.P. of Western Greece, which constitutes the targeted policy instrument as identified in the project AF.		
Responsible organisation	The implementation of this action will be coordinated by the RWG along with the Managing Authority of the O.P. of Western Greece.		
Actors involved	<p>The RWG will be responsible for publishing the relevant call, selecting the final beneficiaries, and monitoring the implementation of the voucher programme.</p> <p>Beneficiaries are the Region's Development Agencies, which will be funded for the publication and award of innovation vouchers, which they will provide to applicant businesses, new and existing.</p> <p>The private sector is the main beneficiary of this action, which will provide consulting and business support services to rural SMEs.</p>		
Beginning date	Month/year In the upcoming months	Ending date	Month/year
Expected costs	Between 200.000,00 – 300.000,00 €	Funding sources	O.P. of Western Greece 2014-2020

Expected impacts	30-40 SMEs are expected to benefit from the Voucher programme, which will then serve as the basis for the earmarking of funds for a similar call in the next programming period.	Indicators	Number of SMEs benefiting from the Vouchers: 30-40 (target value)
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ACTION NUMBER	ACTION NAME
2	RURAL INCUBATORS

In recent years, there has been a strong need to create new innovative businesses with a view to contributing to economic growth, especially in rural areas that have been particularly affected by the negative economic crisis, which has contributed to shrinking and disrupting the local productive and socio-economic fabric.

An important tool that can help prevent or reverse this path is (in addition to any national and community investment incentives) to harness the practice of Incubators.

This practice can help rural areas in the process of setting up new innovative businesses that will have the opportunity to enter and develop their activities in appropriately designed and equipped spaces, i.e. Incubators. At the same time, these companies are provided with the necessary facilities and advisory services to enter and stabilize in the market during their first critical years of operation.

The basic needs and problems that the incubators are trying to tackle on behalf of the businesses they host are:

- the high initial investment cost of innovation,
- lack of access to capital resources,
- insufficient market information and technical information (know-how)
- inability to manage and organize,
- the inability to exploit all or part of the surplus value resulting from innovation,
- the inability to maintain and expand any competitive advantages,
- lack of programming horizon,
- the lack of risk assessment,
- difficulty in accessing new technology.

It should be noted that, based on the international experience, wherever incubators functioned well and with the appropriate managerial staff, they had very positive results

Background

both for themselves and mainly in terms of creating viable and competitive enterprises in the field of innovative products and services.

Funding for the creation and in support of incubators was foreseen in the O.P. of Western Greece 2014-2020, however, no relevant actions have been planned and no relevant calls have been published so far.

An example of the successful application of the incubator methodology was provided through the interregional exchange during Phase I of the implementation of the Rural SMEs project, where partners were informed of the good practice "El Hueco Verde" in Spain (Castilla y Leon). El Hueco Verde allows professionals, independent entrepreneurs and start ups from different sectors and profiles, to share a co-working space, where collaboration between them and collaborating companies is encouraged, promoting economic recovery and employment creation.

El Hueco Verde encourages social and business life, supporting and encouraging initiatives and businesses based on transformative ideas especially linked to social and sustainable entrepreneurship. Promoting entrepreneurship, networking, and supporting self-employment and entrepreneurship, are the axis catalyzing the ideas and business projects of participants - beneficiaries, who are supported, especially in the initial phases of the business idea following the "accelerator" methodology.

El Hueco Verde offers a physical place (bioclimatic building of new construction) where working with the necessary basic services (WiFi, telephone, meeting and training rooms, reference person and administrative staff) with professionals and entrepreneurs from different sectors. Focus is placed on the interaction of businesses, and advice is provided on management issues, as well as a series of activities, workshops, exhibitions, markets, etc. that are regularly scheduled.

Nowadays, there are around 70 entrepreneurs using El Hueco Verde's services and 50 new entrepreneurs who have created their own businesses with the support of the space's professionals.

Based on the above, the RWG decided to adapt the good practice for implementation within its regional units in accordance with the local - regional needs of rural SMEs, using as a basis the example of the Patras Science Park that operates in Patras and incorporating in its planning (through community programs) the development of three additional incubators at the seats of the regional units.

This measure proposes the creation of regional "antennae" pre-incubators or incubators (1-2 per county) specialized in sectors corresponding to local needs.

Description

Under this action, a call will be published to local authorities, Development Agencies, and private companies for the submission of proposals, providing funding for the creation - support of pre-incubators or incubators in rural areas and networking between them and with existing or new incubators within the RWG.

LEADER + areas will be eligible under this measure.

The incubators are standardized spaces that are created to offer an environment that provides shared infrastructure and dedicated services over a period of years, facilitating the start-up and development of new innovative businesses that are then moved to their own business premises, with other newer businesses moving to take up their position in the incubator.

The main goal of incubators is to promote innovations that lead to investment, through the assistance provided to the start-ups they host. As a rule, these businesses face a number of problems at the beginning of their activities, which vary according to the exact sector of each unit and the environment (the market) in which they operate.

Indicative incubator services that can be funded under the action include:

- Housing in facilities that promote entrepreneurship and synergies between hosted bodies,
- Specialized consulting services across a wide range of thematic fields (such as market analysis, legal and accounting issues, business plan development, human resources issues, etc.)
- Specialized education / training services,
- Networking actions to support business groups.

Pre-incubators are simplified forms of incubators that focus mainly on the provision of 3 of the above four categories of services (apart from hospitality / housing) and relate mainly to the early stages of setting up a business, from conception to the creation of an operational plan, ensuring basic funding as seed capital.

Following the publication of the call and approval of the proposals submitted by the Local Authorities and / or Development Agencies, the beneficiaries will be co-funded to establish a new (pre-)incubator or to support the operation of an existing (pre-)incubator or networking with each other or with existing (pre-)incubators. Each (pre-)incubator may focus on the themes or topics of interest at local level, e.g. agrifood, aquaculture, CCIs, etc.

Policy endorsement

The action will be implemented within the framework of the O.P. of Western Greece, which constitutes the targeted policy instrument as identified in the project AF.

Responsible organisation

The implementation of this action will be coordinated by the RWG along with the Managing Authority of the O.P. of Western Greece.

Actors involved

The RWG will be responsible for the publication of the relevant call, the evaluation of proposals, the selection of beneficiaries (local authorities, Development agencies) and the monitoring of the measure's implementation.

The private sector is the final beneficiary of this action, as incubators enhance the competitiveness and innovative character of rural SMEs.

Beginning date

Month/Year
To be determined

Ending date

Month/Year
07/2021

Expected costs	100.000€/ year/ pre-incubator for 2 years, for up to 5 incubators. In total 600.000€ – 1.000.000€.	Funding sources	O.P. of Western Greece 2014-2020
Expected impacts	Enhancing innovative character of local businesses	Indicators	Number of pre-incubators created/supported: 4-5 (target value)

ACTION NUMBER	ACTION NAME
3	Funding Branding Actions for Local Products & Product Certification through the Call for Clusters & Networks
Background	<p>Drawing on inspiration from Hungary's "Rural Quality - Cooperating Balaton Uplands Brand" and Slovenia's "Collective Brand" Bohinjsko / From Bohinj", and taking into account the similarities of challenges faced by rural SMEs in the region, the RWG has decided to include in its Action Plan a measure to finance branding actions as well as actions for the certification and / or development of new products.</p> <p>Rural Quality – Cooperating Balaton Uplands Brand</p> <p>The Rural Quality Brand was elaborated in order to help rural SMEs establish themselves in the market under an umbrella brand. The aim was to help visitors get to know the values of the region, help them find remote places, good quality products and services easier in today's information-overloaded environment.</p> <p>The practice aims to provide solutions in the overall difficulty rural SMEs encounter when trying to establish themselves in the market, since they often do not have the time or the knowledge to carry out efficient communication and marketing activities. The common brand aims to draw attention to cooperating enterprises and business owners, and to human, natural, and other local values.</p> <p>The central aim of the brand is, to draw attention to those local producers and service-providers with quality products/services, so that on the long run the customers instantly associate these branded products with high quality. At the same time, brand members contribute to their mutual development, for example through information sharing, common product development and expansion of the offered services. Strong community marketing is carried out in order to promote the brand.</p> <p>The tasks associated with the brand including the evaluation process and the daily management of the brand are carried out by the three permanent employees and by 10-12 volunteers from members. The process of brand qualification costs approximately 480-650 EUR/business. At present, 95 brand members are under the brand umbrella and there are 15 shops – selling points, where you can buy the products of the brand members. New</p>

aspiring members are applying for the brand qualification continuously, with 15 new members having been added in the past year.

Collective brand "Bohinjsko/From Bohinj"

The "Bohinjsko" brand relates to development of local traditional and innovative products. It guarantees geographic origin and high quality of products. In recent years, providers and coordinators of tourist activities in Bohinj, Slovenia became aware of the importance of the destination's international competitiveness, which can be enhanced through the promotion of a common brand that represents the essential and lasting characteristics of the destination, such as landscape, people, culture and history.

The Bohinj collective brand "Bohinjsko/From Bohinj" is a local network of local providers of produce and culinary products, culinary offers of local specialties, and crafted products with the aim of coordinated cooperation and greater visibility of the Bohinj destination.

This good practice provides certification, rewarding of quality, promotion and sale of local produce and products with a higher added value of the Alpine region, which through the brand ensures a higher quality and thus competitiveness of the offer and the destination as a whole.

This good practice implemented with the involvement of all relevant local stakeholders. The owner of the brand is the Municipality of Bohinj, who transferred the brand management to Turizem Bohinj, the local tourism organisation.

Currently there are 44 providers with certified products under the brand. Certification takes place twice a year, and once every two years there is a check of already issued certificates to verify that products still meet high quality standards. Certification and examination of new applicants for the "Bohinjsko/From Bohinj" certificate is undertaken by the Centre for Quality, which runs under the auspices of the local tourism organisation, participants are satisfied and their sales are rising.

The aim of the above good practices is to overcome the challenges faced by rural SMEs, such as contacting the right customers, difficulties in establishing themselves in the marketplace, lack of time or knowledge to carry out effective marketing activities. In addition, practices help combat the biggest social problem of rural areas - i.e. unemployment - by stimulating local business activity. In this context, the RWG intends to publish a call for funding of actions related to branding, local product certification and the creation of new products.

Under the action, funding will be provided for branding, certification of products and creation of new local products, though the planned call for proposals "Support to added value chains for the internationalisation of products from Western Greece. Support for clusters and networks".

Beneficiaries of the action will be existing clusters or companies from the RWG in charge of a cluster, who intend to develop a local brand to better promote local products. Indicative actions that can be funded are:

Packaging - Labelling - Branding Services

Description

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Packaging, label and brand consulting services, which may concern: Packaging design or redesign services, Design or redesign of labels, Design or redesign services (brand, logo). <p>Certification and compliance of products according to national, harmonized and optional standards of EU countries and / or non-EU countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consulting services for company preparation (e.g. technical translation, foreign legislation, special purchase requirements for product entry in the destination country). - Testing and product quality checks to comply with national, harmonized and optional standards of EU and / or non-EU countries by accredited domestic and / or foreign bodies. - Testing and quality control for CE marking / specialized European and / or international brands (e.g. ecolabel). - Industrial controls. - Product compliance according to national, harmonized and optional European and international standards. <p>Certification of services & procedures according to national, harmonized and other European and international standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consulting services for company preparation, development, installation and operation of a management system. - Inspection and certification of management systems according to national, harmonized and other European and international standards by accredited domestic or foreign bodies. <p>Digital Projection Costs.</p>
Policy endorsement	The action will be implemented within the framework of the O.P. of Western Greece, which constitutes the targeted policy instrument as identified in the project AF.
Responsible organisation	The implementation of this action will be coordinated by the RWG along with the Managing Authority of the O.P. of Western Greece.
Actors involved	<p>The Management Authority of the O.P. of Western Greece, in coordination with the RWG, will be responsible for the publication of the call for proposals.</p> <p>The Intermediary Agency for Operational Programmes of Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship (EFEPAE) will be responsible for the evaluation of proposals, the selection of beneficiaries and the monitoring of the measure's implementation.</p> <p>Beneficiaries are companies or clusters based in Western Greece, while members of the clusters (without a right to vote) may include universities of Western Greece, research organisations and institutes, non-for-profit development organisations, local public authorities, chambers of commerce.</p>

	The private sector is the final beneficiary of this action, through the financing of branding, certification and product development activities which enhance the competitiveness of local products and services, and the profile - competitiveness of local businesses.		
Beginning date	Month/Year October 2019 (planned publication of Call)	Ending date	Month/Year To be determined
Expected costs	400.000,00 € - 600.000,00€	Funding sources	O.P. of Western Greece 2014-2020
Expected impacts	Enhancing competitiveness of local businesses	Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of products/services certified: 10 (target value) - Number of new brands: 3-4 (target value)

ACTION NUMBER	ACTION NAME
4	Local development plans for the training of rural entrepreneurs
Background	<p>According to recent Eurostat figures for 2016, fewer than one in ten (9,1%) farm managers in the EU have completed a full-time agricultural training cycle, almost one in four (22,6%) has received elementary training, while the vast majority (68.3%) acts solely on the basis of their practical experience.</p> <p>Only 10% of young farmers participated in a vocational training program during the previous year, while the numbers are worse for older age groups, as for farmers aged 55-64 this percentage is down to 6%. By comparison, 43% of the total active population</p>

between the ages of 25 and 64 had taken part in a program of education and training in the last 12 months, according to the EU survey on adult education.

With a view to addressing this critical knowledge gap, the RWG intends to publish a call to the Region's Development Agencies, in order to fund local development projects for the training of rural entrepreneurs (in the agricultural and other sectors).

The action attempts to adapt the good practice of "**Training in forest work for rural unemployed**" identified in Spain in the Region's area of reference, given the deficiencies in targeted training for farmers and entrepreneurs in rural areas of Greece.

As part of the Good Practice "Training in forest work for rural unemployed", workshops were organized as a tool to deal with the growing depopulation of small provincial municipalities due to a lack of employment for young people. In addition, a training tool was developed to promote the biodiversity of these rural areas on the one hand and to support rural entrepreneurship on the other. The main objective of the project was reducing unemployment in depopulated rural areas.

The training focused on 4 sectors:

- Personal development: personal skills and emotional intelligence.
- Skills in job search: English for job interviews, new technologies, development of a personal brand.
- Information technology: ending the technology gap in rural areas through training in this field.
- Training in forestry work for the promotion of biodiversity

In total, 319 young unemployed from rural areas benefited from the workshops.

<p>Description</p>	<p>The action concerns the publication of a call addressed to the region's Development agencies and Local Public Authorities, to fund local development projects for the training of rural entrepreneurs.</p> <p>As part of this action, the RWG will compile a registry of trainers and the certification of trainers, and create an integrated plan to enhance employment and entrepreneurship in the area.</p> <p>The Development Agencies and/or Local Public Authorities will be called to submit proposals for the elaboration of local development plans (one per each LEADER+ area). Through the local plan, training seminars will be funded on topics crucial for the professionalisation of participants, i.e. new, existing and aspiring rural entrepreneurs. The goal is to overcome the weaknesses (e.g. lack of ICT training) that are continuously impeding the development of rural entrepreneurship, and to create an environment favourable to the introduction of new investors – entrepreneurs in the market.</p>
<p>Policy endorsement</p>	<p>The action will be implemented within the framework of the O.P. of Western Greece, which constitutes the targeted policy instrument as identified in the project AF.</p>
<p>Responsible organisation</p>	<p>The implementation of this action will be coordinated by the RWG along with the Managing Authority of the O.P. of Western Greece.</p>

Actors involved	<p>The RWG will be responsible for the publication of the relevant call, the evaluation of proposals, the selection of beneficiaries and the monitoring of the measure's implementation.</p> <p>Beneficiaries of the action will be Local Public Authorities or Development Agencies, and new/existing business owners from the RWG private sector will also benefit from its implementation.</p>		
Beginning date	Month/Year To be determined	Ending date	Month/Year To be determined
Expected costs	400.000,00 €	Funding sources	O.P. of Western Greece 2014-2020
Expected impacts	Decreasing youth unemployment in the region	Indicators	- Number of local development plans to be elaborated: 4 (target value)

Date: 15/11/2019

Signature: 

Stamp:



ΝΕΚΤΑΡΙΟΣ ΑΘ. ΦΑΡΜΑΚΗΣ
ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΡΧΗΣ ΔΥΤΙΚΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ