HOW TO DELIVER SME SUPPORT THAT MAKES A VISIBLE STRUCTURAL CHANGE

SESSION 1: SETTING THE SCENE – WELCOME SESSION AND CURRENT CONTEXT OF SME POLICIES

ERWIN SIWERIS
Programme Director, Interreg Europe

According to Erwin Siweris’ speech, the Interreg Europe Programme is showing great results in terms of achievements and managing through the pandemic. Interreg Europe has been able to motivate, finance and implement the lessons learnt and include the implementation of good practices in the Policy Learning Platform database. The Platform is made available to all regions in the EU. Erwin Siweris underlined that the activities of Interreg Europe are essential to attract and involve regions in the projects and analysing their internal situation. This will allow for better cooperation in bringing people together. Considering its prospects, the Interreg programme will continue to be operative.

ELŻBIETA KSIĄŻEK
ESSPO Project Coordinator, Poznan Science and Technology Park (PSTP)

Elżbieta Książek remarked on the importance of launching the project ESSPO as previous attempts to support European SMEs had provided few visible results. ESSPO aims to create effective and efficient SME support service portfolios for SMEs by responding to 5 specific questions – how to: recognise SME needs, identify the right policies, make support understandable and accessible, organise a flexible service, and evaluate the effects of the support.

CHRISTIAN SAUBLENS
Former Director, EURADA

KEYNOTE SPEECH: POST-COVID ERA CHALLENGES SMES WILL FACE AND NEED SUPPORT WITH

According to Mr. Saublens, the crisis provides new opportunities for those who resist it. There will be indirect and direct impacts on enterprises. It is legitimate to lobby for flexibility in the agendas such as the green deal, the digital agenda, and the new industrial policy. Companies need to reimagine their action plans, scanning post-crisis opportunities, learning from the crisis (what was done wrong and what could
be improved), and figuring out resilience strategies. RDAs should develop new scenarios, targets, and priorities for imagining the future. Crisis management should be less top-down and more data-driven, using both insights and operations teams.

SESSION 2: HOW TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF SMES, POST-COVID

VAIDO MIKHEIM

Project Manager, Tartu Science Park

Vaido Mikheim stressed the implementation of a Holix approach by Tartu Science Park, with constant interactions between university, government, and industries. The post-Covid era has provided a unique opportunity to initiate meaningful dialogue with SMEs. Scholars, policy makers, and business support organizations should work in synergy to put in place instruments designed to meet the needs of SMEs, he says.

NATHALIE BOULANGER

Head of European policies, DEV-UP Centre-Val de Loire

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the support ecosystem of Centre-Val de Loire, coordinated by DEV’UP and formed by economic developers, has been coping with the ongoing emergency. They have conducted over 1 800 interviews with regional companies to better meet their needs and spot opportunities for them after the crisis to better allocate services and funding. Questionnaires and surveys with both closed and open questions have been collected in a common database, as well as the feedback from the intermediaries.

DESISLAVA KOLEVA

Projects and Economic Development Chief Expert, Gabrovo Municipality

The Municipality of Gabrovo has conducted a business survey addressing local companies. The aim was to study business options and recommendations for the future of the local economic development of Gabrovo. Mainly manufacturing companies took part, these being the backbone of the local sector. The survey showed the interest of many companies in making public-private partnerships. The effects of Covid-19 were also polled, and the results show that most companies have suffered a decline in revenues since the start state of emergency. Additionally, more than half of the surveyed companies state the introduction of teleworking.
SESSION 3: SOLUTIONS AND LESSONS OF ESSPO REGIONAL PARTNERS

ELŻBIETA KSIĄŻEK
Lead partner of ESSPO, Poznan Science and Technology Park

Elżbieta Książek spoke about the Living Lab for Policy Instruments. She noted that the users of policy instruments are most often SMEs but could also include other actors such as regional authorities, intermediaries, and researchers. Elżbieta believes that using this living lab approach can shorten the time it takes from recognising SME needs to having a good prototype instrument, as well as improving the chances that said instruments will work.

JUAN GARATE
International Director at ICT Division, Tecnalia Research and Innovation

TOURISM AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: SOME GOOD PRACTICES TO REVAMP THE TOURISM SECTOR

As Juan stressed, the heavily hit tourism sector is in need of new practices and ideas to make it competitive once again, especially for the economies that strongly depend on it. New programmes will be needed to revamp it, particularly to support SMEs; digital transformation will be an opportunity for this. The Basque Country has implemented several initiatives that have been taken as an example and executed in other countries. One started 4 years ago with the idea of providing SMEs with digital tools to improve their businesses and offer more services. As a result, 90% of the region’s SMEs were certified with a Quality Level of Digitalisation. This initiative will be expanded especially to Latin America, which faces the same problem in the field of new technologies.

BEATRIZ CASADO
Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Department, ICE Castilla y León

As has been the experience of Castilla y León, networking is key for new opportunities for accessibility to services. The Entrepreneurship & Innovation Network covers a wide range of actors and has more than 120 members and seeks to enhance entrepreneurship, talent, and innovation. They have developed an innovative financial project called the “financial shuttle” which establishes a one-stop shop for business financing, helping with access to public and private instrument. Thanks to the CENTR@TEC Program, over 5 000 participants have gained access to training in new technologies, knowledge transfer, and business innovation support.
DIETER MEYER

CEO, MCON Dieter Meyer Consulting GMBH

Dieter Meyer remarked that even in large regions, it is possible to reach SMEs in a very targeted and needs-oriented manner and to quickly design support instruments based on changing framework conditions. In Lower Saxony, the regional government implemented a very effective based-place policy, providing funds for local SMEs while enhancing the process of digitalisation and participation to innovation networks.

VENCESLAVA YANCHOVSKA

Manager, Innovation Norway Sofia

Venceslava Yanchovska talked about Innovation Norway and the EEA and Norway Grants. Innovation Norway aims to stimulate businesses to enhance commerce and socio-economic profitability, in addition to realising the commercial potential of the regions. As a result of the coronavirus crisis they launched a €100 million programme to support Norwegian businesses, particularly in restructuring and innovation, by creating a package for green restructuring, a new loan scheme for green shipping, a subsidy scheme for the tourism industry, and an action plan on export.