



**Application form**

**European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) Label**

**EER 2014**

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# Presentation of the political vision

## **Flanders in Actions as a lever towards a top region in Europe**

Flanders has the ambition to be a region where entrepreneurship is highly appreciated and supported with a broad range of policy and governance measures. According to the '*Flanders in Action*' multi-annual plan, the Flemish government aims at positioning Flanders - in a sustainable way - among the very best performing European regions. An important step in the realization of the '*Flanders in Action*' plan was the signing of the '*Pact 2020*' (in January 2009) with twenty ambitious main objectives and clear corresponding targets. In signing this '*pact*', the main stakeholders in Flemish society, with the representative entrepreneurial associations, took full responsibility and commitment to cooperate and support the realization of the selected objectives.

'Flanders in Action' is focused on seven intertwined breakthrough actions:

*The open entrepreneur*

*Flanders learning society*

*Innovation Centre Flanders*

*Green and dynamic urban region*

*Europe's smart hub*

*Caring society*

*Decisive governance*

For the 'open entrepreneur' there are six goals defined:

- A new action plan for fostering entrepreneurship
- The 'gazelle leap' for strong growing companies
- A new industrial policy
- Developing attractive city centers for retail and small businesses
- Developing more export to fast developing markets
- Attracting more foreign direct investments in Flanders

To be able to measure the progress the Flemish government selected 337 quantifiable projects - fitting in the twenty objectives of '*Flanders in Action*' - to be accomplished towards the end of 2014. 281 are actually 'on schedule'.

'Flanders in Action' represents the actual and full implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy and in particular the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan and the Small Business Act.

## **Developing entrepreneurial potential**

For the next two years Flanders aims at creating a better entrepreneurial environment focusing on the development of entrepreneurial potential by:

- Stimulating more citizens to set up a business and ensuring that start-ups are of high quality
- Ensuring that successful companies can develop their business rapidly
- Offering the opportunity to entrepreneurs to engage in international consortia embracing 'open innovation'
- Supporting healthy companies to make the transition to a knowledge driven, innovative and sustainable ('green') business with high growth potential

## **Two main axes**

The New Industrial Policy is the central theme around which all economic policy is formulated. More precisely, the political vision of the Flemish government follows two main axes:

- To develop the *proper support* measures for entrepreneurs in *each phase of the life cycle of an enterprise*, from pre-start till take-over
- To make a *selection of priority themes*; in the case of the EER Label for 2014 we talk about 3 main topics
  - *Caring Society*: use the opportunities of a society with an aging population to develop new technology and services for this target group

- *Innovation and Creativity* : develop the creative and innovative skills of entrepreneurs and support them to turn these skills in a successful business case
- *Developing a Green and Dynamic Urban Region* : employ the experience and knowledge gained in cleaning up the historical pollution in this densely populated, heavily industrialized, energy demanding region to develop enterprises and support entrepreneurs that use this expertise in our own region and on the international market. This includes the reduction of energy use and the large scale introduction of sustainable energy.

### Incentives and resources

For these priority themes Flanders develops a broad range of incentives and resources:

- clusters and incubators that provide an attractive physical environment to start a new business and where entrepreneurs can develop a fruitful collaboration
- set up collaboration with associations that use several media, organize events and set up platforms to exchange experience and expertise
- specific grants and other financial support mechanisms to boost eco-efficiency and innovation and a collaboration between large enterprises, SME's and research institutes

To support all these initiatives Flanders also created the resources to use European financial support (the different EU grant schemes) as effectively as possible.

### Entrepreneurial SWOT-analysis Flanders

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Central position in Europe: international hub for economic activity: over 60% of European purchasing power within a 500 km radius</li> <li>▪ Very dense network of waterways, railroads and motorways with very good connections to neighboring countries</li> <li>▪ Ports of world importance: Antwerp, Zeebrugge, Gent and international airport Zaventem</li> <li>▪ Adjacent to the European political decision center Brussels.</li> <li>▪ High level educational system that delivers a large amount of highly educated young people each year</li> <li>▪ World-leading research institutes and universities (e.g. IMEC, VIB, iMinds, VITO, KULeuven, UGent, UAntwerpen, UHasselt, VUB)</li> <li>▪ High rate of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship</li> <li>▪ A broad spectrum of business government support measures</li> <li>▪ Economy showed to be equipped quite well to withstand the economic crisis (in comparison to other EU countries)</li> <li>▪ Large share of SMEs in businesses makes the economy strongly anchored in local society</li> <li>▪ Very open economy and strong ties to neighboring economies</li> <li>▪ Starting a business is regarded as a good career choice by two out of three people</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aging population creates possibilities in health care and welfare innovation.</li> <li>▪ Large amount of capital in private hands, sitting in saving accounts that do not yield large interests anymore. This money could be mobilized to invest in new businesses</li> <li>▪ The practice of Public-Private Partnerships is gaining more and more entry in investments</li> <li>▪ Large output of young high potentials coming out of higher education creates a thriving and innovative knowledge community</li> <li>▪ Ambitious, hard-working mindset of the Flemish</li> <li>▪ Large share of 'entrepreneurial employees' (employees that help develop their company)</li> <li>▪ Tradition in creative industries</li> <li>▪ Urbanization, high population density, concentration of industry and intensive agriculture have stimulated policy rules to force stakeholders to find innovative solutions for clean tech and sustainable energy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High labor costs make it difficult for industry to resist moving to low wage countries</li> <li>▪ Low number of fast-growing companies and growth-oriented early-stage entrepreneurs</li> <li>▪ High percentage of Belgians (74%) think self-employment is unfeasible although this number is decreasing**</li> <li>▪ Lack of young people with specialized technical skills</li> <li>▪ High environmental pressure</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lower wage countries gain more and more access to the same knowledge as high labor cost economies</li> <li>▪ Aging population: less young people available with specific skills, high number of aging entrepreneurs</li> <li>▪ Economic crisis inhibits businesses' access to finance</li> <li>▪ Growing scarcity of raw materials</li> <li>▪ Resources and energy will become more expensive (increasing cost for entrepreneurs)</li> </ul>

\* GEM 2011 Report for Belgium & Flanders (2013). Bosma, Crijns and Holvoet, Steunpunt Ondernemen en Regionale Economie

\*\*Flash Eurobarometer 354. Entrepreneurship Country Report Belgium

## Action Plan EER

Flanders is one of the top regions when it comes to entrepreneurship. To stay at the top and even improve ourselves, continuous action is needed. This is reflected in this EER action plan, which is a non-exhaustive and non-complete reflection of the actions Flanders will take, listing only the main priorities and initiatives.

The **main theme** throughout the EER year and overall goal of this action plan is to stimulate and support Flemish businesses, big and small, in every phase of their life cycle. **Specifically**, Flanders considers **three topics** to be the main challenges for the economy in the near future and these will shape the actions Flanders takes in the EER and following years:

***i) Innovation and Creativity*** are at the heart of Flanders' economic success. Continuous innovation and creativity are very important if Flanders wants to keep up with the top regions, to attract investments and to have competitive advantage towards other, upcoming, economies.

***(ii) Caring Society*** aims to meet the challenges associated with the rapidly ageing Flemish population (pensions, health care, societal problems). These challenges can be tackled by developing innovative solutions. Flanders can be an example for every society that, in time, will be confronted with similar challenges.

***(iii) Developing a Green Dynamic Urban Region*** will support businesses to create and adopt green solutions for their everyday operations, to become cleaner and even save money in the long run. This will help Flanders reach ambitious climate goals.

# **1. The Small Business Act and the main EU policy initiatives/instruments**

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Flanders' economy thrives thanks to its numerous SMEs and fully subscribes to the SBA. It considers this act a valuable roadmap to strengthen SMEs in their everyday functioning. They are the heart of the economy and therefore Flanders "thinks small first".

## **1.1 Mainstreaming the ten principles of the EU's revised Small Business Act for Europe (SBA) and applying the "Think Small First" principle at the regional and local level**

### **Improved access to finance to invest and grow**

The economic crisis has had the undesired effect of cramping the market for granting credit to families and businesses. This has put the economy under substantial pressure, especially for SMEs. For this reason, the Flemish government is drawing up a **Bank Plan** to stimulate the credit market again, and assuring that SMEs get access to the funding they need. It is the Flemish ambition to become the region with the best financing for SMEs in Europe.

To achieve this, the following actions are planned in the run up and during the EER year 2014:

- The creation of a **High-Level Consultation Body** where people of the Flemish banks, of the federation of Belgian financial institutions, of entrepreneur and business organizations and representatives of the Flemish government and government institutions are represented. This to ensure a rapid information current and fast and decisive initiatives and engagements in order to create and maintain trust and efficiency in the credit market. This will already be operational in 2013, and fully implemented by 2014.
- **Dealing with specific obstacles for SME-financing**, such as the fee for funding-loss in case of premature redeeming of a credit, the wrong use of credit for short-term financing and the often low quality of submitted credit files.
- **Developing other forms of SME-financing**, such as Crowdfunding, the Win-win Loan (to direct private savings to the funding of SMEs), warrant schemes (Gigant, Generic Warrant and Green Warrant) and new funds for long-term financing of SMEs with limited government warrants to anticipate stricter Basel-III demands.

Additionally, in the spring of 2014, an academic conference will be held to discuss this topic and the mentioned actions.

### **Smart regulation to enable SMEs to concentrate on core business**

Making the life of entrepreneurs and businesses easier is an important goal for the Flemish government because they realize that Flanders can still make significant improvements there. Improvements will be made through smart interaction between business and government and smart regulation. Two important actions will do just that:

- **The Integrated Desk** will become a central 'front-office' for all business-related requests and a hub for the contact between the entrepreneur and the government. This contact-center / portal site is to be launched in the beginning of 2014.
- **Law Moderation** is aimed at reducing the administrative and bureaucratic burden and thus helps businesses concentrate on their core-business. Everyone can continuously report regulation or practices that are too burdensome or just functioning badly to a central contact point. Additionally, since 2005 already, a RIA – or Regulation Impact Analysis – is an obligatory part of every regulation approval procedure of the Flemish government. This is to be extended with an impact analysis that concerns businesses by 2014.

### **Making full use of the Single Market and going international**

The Flemish economy is one of the most 'open economies' of the world. To help businesses go international and use the Single Market to their advantage is key to the sustainable success of our economy. The Flemish government supports this internationalization in every way possible. Several supporting initiatives are currently already running, others will become active in the run-up to or during the EER-year.

- The **Enterprise Europe Network** (EEN) – partner in Flanders is actively supporting businesses in creating or extending their network in and outside of Europe. It organizes for example numerous b2b- and brokerage events where Flemish enterprises can meet potential partners throughout Europe.
- **Flanders Investment and Trade** (FIT) constantly promotes international trade and investment by organizing events, trade missions, and hands out an award called ‘De Leeuw van de Export’ – ‘The Lion of the Export’ to two (one big, one small) Flemish businesses with exceptional merits in trading internationally. In the run-up to the EER-year and again during the EER-year, FIT will organize together with Enterprise Flanders the ‘Week of the Internationalization’ in which – among other activities – a new Lion of the Export will be awarded and a stakeholders platform ‘Growth and Professionalization’ will be organized. This platform will introduce potentially fast growing companies to companies that have realized a fast growth over the past years (+ 20%), named ‘Gazelles’.
- Enterprise Flanders will start by the beginning of 2014 on a **tour of Flanders** in which they will engage in a round of storytelling. **Testimonies** of successful entrepreneurs will be brought to SMEs to share experience and create the eagerness to follow these **role models**.

### **Helping SMEs face the challenges of globalisation and climate change**

To help the Flemish industry to survive and grow, the government has developed ‘**The New Industrial Policy**’ together with various stakeholders. It is a policy plan comprising fifty actions for transforming industry. Its aim is a new productivity offensive that will restore our companies’ competitiveness in a sustainable manner. The most important factor for renewing industry involves innovative entrepreneurs, creative and skilled employees, fruitful partnerships with other companies, training and scientific institutions.

Flanders has **several grant schemes and premiums** that encourage greener solutions and reward innovation in this field. Strategic Ecology Support, Ecology Premium Plus, Rational Energy Use Premium and Green Power Certificates are the most important ones. These financial support instruments help carry the extra cost of investing in innovative technology that will help those businesses face the challenges of climate change. Especially for SMEs, these financial support mechanisms often make the difference between investing in a certain technology, or not.

To give an indication of the importance of these grant schemes: in 2013 a budget of € 63 million has been allocated for Strategic Ecology Support and Ecology Premium Plus. In 2014 Flanders will continue this effort to support cleantech and sustainable energy.

SMEs can get **financial support for environmental and energy consultancy** (‘KMO-portefeuille’).

The second element that helps businesses face the challenges of globalization and climate change is **innovation**. As will be discussed later on in this document, innovation is a specific focus theme of the Flemish vision. To involve SMEs in this paradigm, the Flemish government stimulates the creation of clusters and incubators where businesses help each other innovate and grow. In chapter 4, Sustainability, we will elaborate further on this.

### **1.2 Presenting a forward-looking strategy to increase the innovation potential of small enterprises**

Strong enterprises innovate. That’s why Flanders invests in the innovation potential of its businesses. For SMEs, innovating is not that easy. With smart initiatives, Flanders will involve SMEs in the innovation that pushes our economy upwards.

#### **Innovation Centre Flanders**

In the framework of the Flanders in Action plan, it is a goal to make Flanders an Innovation Centre. To achieve this, Flanders uses a broad set of measures that support businesses across a whole range of challenges: from strategic fundamental research to increasing innovation absorption capacities. In this application however, we focus on two specific new measures that will help SME innovate in the EER-year: Innovation Trainings and ‘LED-netwerk’.

The **innovation capabilities of SMEs** are often not as developed as they are with larger companies, while innovation is an essential component for the consolidation and the growth of activity and employment in Flanders. To develop the innovation potential with SMEs, a plan has been drawn to develop **innovation trainings** for SMEs and the Flemish government has allocated an extra budget, in order to reach as many SMEs as possible.

By creating **easy-entry networks of expertise ('LED-network')**, Flanders will bring SMEs closer to the available expertise that is concentrated in higher education institutes. This will create a win-win situation for both SMEs and higher education as knowledge is transferred to where it's needed in the economy.

### **Factory of the Future**

The New Industrial Policy's economic pillar strives to create a '**Factory of the Future**'. The Factory of the Future is a smart, people-oriented, efficient, ecological 'factory' or production unit that is connected to other companies and knowledge centers through reliable networks, which means it can respond effortlessly to new expectations in the economy. The value chains and clusters created as a result are the sum of complementary capacities.

A **strategic learning platform** has been created to identify synergies that new industrial business practices in the Factory of the Future require and facilitate. It provides demonstration projects and companies can exchange experiences and ambitions. The goal is to **showcase best practices**. This will reach its maximum potential in 2014.

Other strategies are aimed at developing innovation-driven cluster platforms, bundling policy instruments so that SMEs can also participate in the transformation, digitalizing processes in value chains and supporting internationalization.

## **2. Entrepreneurship**

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### **2.1 Promoting entrepreneurship in education**

At the end of 2011, the Flemish government created an action plan '**Entrepreneurial Education**' that is implemented in 2012 and 2013. In this action plan, through various channels, an entrepreneurial attitude is stimulated among students and teachers from primary school to university.

In 2014, the focus will be put on a **Learning Platform for Higher Education**. This will be a stakeholder's platform in which knowledge sharing on various topics of entrepreneurship in education is stimulated.

The Flemish government and Enterprise Flanders support **structural partners**. For example, VLAJO – 'Flemish Young Enterprises' – aims at reaching 100.000 students in 2014 and Stichting Ondernemend Onderwijs – 'Foundation Entrepreneurial Education' wants to extend its reach by 10% in 2015-2020.

### **2.2 Improve the desirability of starting a business**

Already, various media projects are supported by Enterprise Flanders to improve the desirability of starting a business in the broad public. These include TV shows on the main Flemish channels, fiction as well as non-fiction, in which entrepreneurship is the main topic. The following TV-shows reach between up to 900.000 viewers per episode (> 30% market share):

- '**Crème de la Crème**' is a fiction series about a family-owned business with female entrepreneurs in the lead roles;
- '**Topstarter**' is a competition rewarding the best business plan with the support of a successful entrepreneur.

These projects are to be evaluated in 2013. In case of a positive evaluation new similar projects will be organized and supported.

Apart from these conferences and fairs to promote entrepreneurship take place on a regular basis. They mainly attract people already involved in (starting) a business, but at the same time, they create a buzz around entrepreneurship that boosts the desirability of it. For example: **'Ondernemen in Vlaanderen – Entrepreneurship in Flanders'** is a yearly conference/fair to promote entrepreneurship; the **Starters Week** is a roadshow where a starting entrepreneur finds all information he needs.

### 2.3 Improve the feasibility of starting a business

The desire to start a business does not make it feasible. In addition to stimulating the desirability of starting a business, Flanders thus acts to make it feasible for as many potential entrepreneurs as possible. Some of the most important actions in that respect are mentioned earlier in chapter 1, when discussing the Bank Plan and the Integrated Desk. These will facilitate the access to finance and the communication with the authorities. But there are more actions pending:

- To support starters and young businesses, Enterprise Flanders will launch a call for generic projects that aim to **improve the business competences of (pre)starters and young businesses**. Enterprise Flanders will support the best projects through financial and technical channels.
- Following the same principle, Enterprise Flanders also will launch a new call for projects that focuses on **mentorship projects** for starting entrepreneurs.
- In 2014, Enterprise Flanders will launch a new business plan competition in which **the best business plans** are supported. This competition has different formats for students, teachers, and other potential entrepreneurs.

Thanks to initiatives like these, Flanders is and will remain one of the regions where starting businesses are most resilient and best supported in the world.

### 2.4 Improve the entrepreneurship potential in focus groups in society

It is a good thing to stimulate entrepreneurship throughout society, but in certain focus groups the existing potential does not always come out. It is important for Flanders that this unused potential emerges.

Several projects to improve the **entrepreneurship potential with specific focus groups** are already running, and will be launched again in 2014. These focus groups are: youth, 50-plus, immigrants, the mentally and physically challenged and women.

- The **'Bright Young Starters Platform' (Bryo)** aims at 50 new enterprises per year, and the creation of 300 direct and 450 indirect jobs after 2 years.
- **'Enterprise Today, 50 plus!'** wants to reach 30.000 50-plussers through several channels (folders, workshops) and accompany 120 starter trajectories.
- **'Immigrant Pre-Starters to Strong Entrepreneurs'** wants to reach out to as many young immigrants as possible and accompany 300 starter trajectories.
- **'Autonomous and Self-Guiding Entrepreneurship'** wants to reach 2500 challenged jobseekers per year, accompany 35 trajectories and coach 20 people to entrepreneurship.
- **'Entrepreneur in Sight'** wants to reach 250.000 women through raising awareness, have 750 participants in information sessions and accompany 210 starter trajectories.

Besides these focus groups, Flanders will specifically stimulate entrepreneurship in the 2014 EER-year dedicated priority themes:

- A **road mapping tool for the creative and cultural sector** is being developed with all sector stakeholders and will become active in 2014. It comprises an adapted business plan-approach that helps creative minds set up a qualitative and professional business plan.
- A new **competition** to select and show the most inspiring cases of new services and technology in the **‘Caring Society’** priority theme.
- A new **contest** to select and show the most innovating cases of initiatives in the **‘Developing a Green and Dynamic Urban Region’** priority theme.

## 2.5 Initiatives that support a business in every phase of its lifecycle

Flanders has a range of schemes that support businesses in a specific situation, but three important initiatives will be in focus in the EER-year 2014 to address the challenges. These initiatives will be up and running in the EER-year. In the meanwhile various stakeholders will be consulted to fine-tune the measures so that they address the specific needs of SMEs in the best possible way.

- Enterprise Flanders will set up **the platform ‘Growth and Professionalization’** in which ‘Gazelles’ (fast-growing businesses) will share their experience with entrepreneurs in potential fast-growing businesses. This has to boost the growth of businesses. This helps to push the Flemish economy towards more growth. It will be fully operational by the EER-year.
- The **‘Stakeholders Platform Transfer and Acquisition’** aims to develop several tools to raise awareness, inform, coach and advise, and stimulate the transfer or acquisition of SMEs. This way, Flanders wants to avoid that SMEs disappear when their founder quits. Because of an aging population, this is a real challenge for many SMEs in Flanders.

With smart, down-to-earth schemes and initiatives like these, Flanders helps its SMEs to overcome the obstacles and challenges that undoubtedly arise at some point in the life cycle of a business.

## 3. Cross-cutting themes/EU dimension

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### 3.1 Transfer of good practices from other regions

In order to have a **transfer and sharing of good practices**, Flanders will invite previously EER-awarded regions and fifteen benchmark regions to several planned EER-events and organize a round table to discuss and share each other’s experiences. This **round table event** will be organized in 2013 already as a preparation to the EER-year. The Liaison Agency Flanders-Europe of the Flemish government will play an active part in this.

After the EER-year a report will be made on the experiences and **lessons learned**, which will be disseminated among the other EER-awarded regions and benchmark regions.

### 3.2 Benefits for local, regional, and EU level

Flanders has benefitted undeniably from European cooperation and the Single Market. An open economy like ours has every interest in international understanding and common goals. The best interests of the EU, of Belgium, of Flanders, and of every Flemish city, municipality or citizen is one and the same: an open economy with thriving entrepreneurship at the heart.

For this reason, all the measures proposed in this respect will benefit all these levels at the same time:

- **Local communities** are stronger and create jobs and welfare for their members when local entrepreneurs and businesses appear, grow and endure.
- **The regional economy** is completely dependent on its entrepreneurs. It is no longer possible for a knowledge-driven economy like the Flemish to compete on price or natural resources. Flanders has to be an innovative, smart, sustainable economy. Innovative, smart, sustainable entrepreneurship is therefore of paramount importance.
- **The EU and its members** benefit from the efforts Flanders will make because Flanders strives to be a role model for other regions and to be a dependable partner in the lead group of Europe.

Flanders will not let the eventual non-awarding of the title EER 2014 be a reason to cancel all the initiatives that are mentioned in this plan. Nevertheless, the EER Label would give these actions an extra shine by showing that Europe and Flanders support entrepreneurship together. This will give the citizen the confidence to undertake new ventures.

### 3.3 Use of EU funding

Flanders constantly tries to use the European funds as efficient as possible. Through various channels like the ESF Agency Flanders, ERDF calls or Enterprise Europe Network, businesses and business associations get the financial support they need. This way, all the actors are **embedded in European common goals and interests**.

In the EER-year 2014 Flanders will launch an initiative to use the new COSME funds as efficiently as possible for SMEs. A broad consultation with all the stakeholders will be held on this topic.

## 4. Sustainability

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Europe's **20-20-20 targets** (20 % cut in emissions, 20 % improvement in energy efficiency and 20 % increase in renewables) are translated in national or regional (Flemish) goals:

- Reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases with 15 % in 2020 compared to 2005
- Reduction of energy use with 13 % to the end of 2016, compared to the mean final energy use in 2001-2005
- Share of renewable energy in total energy consumption is at least 13 % in 2020

In order to reach these goals the **Flemish Climate Policy Plan 2013 – 2020** defines how these goals will be reached. The progress is monitored carefully. A multi-annual action plan ensures the implementation of the policy goals. Important tools to support and stimulate entrepreneurs and small businesses to make the necessary adaptations and a transition to a low carbon economy are among others:

### 4.1 Financial stimuli

Financial stimuli such as rewards for the production of 'green power' (**'green certificates'**; the cost-efficiency of this instrument is being monitored continuously and - if necessary - adapted), rewards for the cogeneration of power and heat, rewards for the production of heat based on biomass or the use of residual heat via new connections between enterprises. The last ones are launched in 2013 and will be fully operational in 2014.

### 4.2 Grants

- The **'Ecology Premium Plus'** supports enterprises to invest in new cleantech and sustainable energy techniques (performing better than the 'business as usual' scenario). This scheme is evaluated and adapted each year.

- The '**Strategic Ecology Support**' funds enterprises to develop innovative unique and integrated solutions (not available 'on the shelf') for environmental problems. This new scheme is launched in 2013 in order to make it possible for enterprises to start innovative cleantech projects in 2014.
- The '**Environmental and Energy Innovation Platform**' provides financial support for the collaboration between researchers and entrepreneurs to launch new products and/or processes on the market. A new call (with a raised amount of funding) will be launched in 2013 to develop innovative projects in 2014.
- SME's can use the knowledge of **PRODEM**, the PROmotion- and DEMonstration Centre for cleantech and sustainable energy to find solutions for an innovative, more sustainable production.
- SMEs can get **financial support for environmental and energy consultancy** ('KMO-portefeuille').

#### 4.3 Associations

- The new association **I-Cleantech Flanders** (launched in 2013 to be fully operational in 2014) brings together enterprises and other stakeholders (such as universities) to cooperate on innovative cleantech solutions. One of the goals is to stimulate the use of European grants and funds such as FP7 Cooperation Environment (the future Horizon 2020), LIFE+ and Eco-Innovation.
- Similar associations are **Power-Link** and **Smart Grids Flanders** for the sustainable energy sector that stimulate and bring together entrepreneurs. These associations also use European Funds (such as the ERDF or IEE) to promote the use of sustainable energy.

#### 4.4 Clusters and incubators

In order to facilitate the start of new SME's focusing on cleantech and sustainable energy clusters such as **Greenville**, **Energyville** and **Greenbridge** offer affordable offices and collective services.

#### 4.5 Campaigns

In order to accelerate the transition to the sustainable '**Factory of the Future**' the Flemish government supports campaigns focused on industrial sectors such as **Buildchem** for the building industry (with a lot of SME's). The campaign kicked off in 2013 and will be continued in 2014.

#### 4.6 Networking

- The transition from waste management to a cradle-to-cradle materials cycle is discussed in a network as **Plan C**, including creative entrepreneurs.
- Several **LED-networks** focus specifically on cleantech and sustainable energy.

## 5. Towards successful implementation

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At the start of the EER-year a **kick-off event** will be held in which all the actions and initiatives are elaborated and all stakeholders are invited. From then on, **every three months during the EER-year a new event** to discuss the coming three months' events and initiatives will be held. At the end of the EER-year, a closing event will be held.

Enterprise Flanders will appoint a project leader that reports to the 'EER Flanders' steering committee every two months on the **state of play** and the progress that has been made. This report will specifically deal with experiences, indicators, budgets

and timing. The steering committee will intervene when necessary and report to the Committee of the Regions every six months.

## 5.1 Indicators

Every action will be appointed with specific indicators in due time. The Flemish government also wants to see some macro-indicators reached:

- 2.000 **starters accompanied** in their start-up trajectory in 2014 and in 2015.
- A 10 % increase in **new business started** in Flanders in 2014, compared to 2012, with a significant increase for specific target groups:
  - **Women entrepreneurs** in 2014 compared to 2012.
  - **Challenged entrepreneurs** in 2014 compared to 2012.
  - **Immigrant entrepreneurs** in 2014 compared to 2012.
  - **Young entrepreneurs** in 2014 compared to 2012.
  - **50-plus entrepreneurs** in 2014 compared to 2012.
- 1200 businesses making the '**Gazelle Leap**' and growing 20 % in 2014 and in 2015. 20 businesses making a '**Strategic Transformation**' in 2014.
- 30.000 entrepreneurs reached through **awareness campaigns and information on 'Transfer and Acquisition'**
- 500 businesses reached through '**transformation events**' on **Caring Society, Creativity and Innovation, and Developing a Green Dynamic Urban region**.
- 100 businesses bringing **testimonies on their transformation trajectory**.

## 5.2 Sustainability of the measures taken

The actions that are discussed in this action plan are both an effort made in the frame of the EER-year, and a **reflection of a road that Flanders has already taken**; a road that leads to **2020**. To plan this road, the Flemish government cooperates with every actor in society and economy. This is the only way to sustainable growth and success.

# EER Activities and communication

Enterprise Flanders will develop a specific and detailed **communication plan for the 2014 EER year** (with an approach of different target groups) using the EER Label as a prime quality label with and on all communication instruments, initiatives and events in order to promote a broad range of (new) tools and resources for entrepreneurs in Flanders.

This will be done at the end of 2013 to be ready and stand by to launch the EER Year as of the early start of 2014. This communication plan will also pay attention to the '**post EER year activities**'. The results of the initiatives, activities and campaigns will be closely monitored in order to know the positive and maybe less positive effects.

This will make it possible to continue the best practices, to improve where necessary and eventually to replace the less fruitful actions.

The EER Label is also an ideal 'flag' to show on official government **missions** (for instance carried out by the Minister-President of Flanders, Flanders Investment and Trade and/or Enterprise Flanders) all over Europe and to inspire other European regions in ameliorating the incentives for entrepreneurship in their own region.

At the same time the EER Label will be an asset and incentive for foreign companies to invest in Flanders.

Specifically for these missions Enterprise Flanders will develop an integrated and attractive **EER Label** set of communication tools, with among others printed materials, presentations (explaining the importance of the EER Label) and a promotion picture.

A special part of the Enterprise Flanders **website** will be devoted to the (program, results ...) of the EER year, with the possibility to register for a new **EER 2014 newsletter**. The EER Label will also be linked to the website and all communication initiatives of '**Flanders in Action**'.

**Every outgoing piece of information** (mail, letter, new leaflet or booklet, report ...) will bear the **EER logo** with a link to the EER website. On every public appearance of Enterprise Flanders in 2014 (for instance presence on international fair trades) the EER Label (logo and importance) will be prominently put in the picture.

## EER activities in Flanders

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In 2014 The EER Label will be promoted and used intensively for a large array of EER activities.

### Competitions

In 2014 **5 different EER competitions** will be launched:

- A call for best projects improving the competences of starters and young businesses
- A call for best projects focusing on mentorship for starting entrepreneurs

- In 2014 Enterprise Flanders will launch a new business plan competition
- The 2014 EER-competition for the 'Trends Gazelle Awards'
- A competition for best practice transformation stories in Care, Creative and Green sectors

### **Events**

In 2014 at least **4 different EER events** (one in each quarter) under the EER 'flag' will be organized.

1. A 2014 **EER kickoff meeting** for a broad audience to give a view on the year program, goals and initiatives.
2. An **academic EER conference** focusing on the necessary steps and new initiatives to improve access to finance for SME's and entrepreneurs.
3. An **EER program with several seminars during the 'Week of the Internationalization'**. During these seminars the 3 priorities 'Developing a Green Dynamic Urban region' (with specific consideration for the goals and preliminary results of the 'New Industrial Policy'), 'Innovation and Creativity' and 'Caring Society' will be the main themes.
4. A final **closing conference that** shows the results of this year, focusing among other items on the results of the 5 EER competitions. For this event Flanders will invite all previously EER awarded regions and fifteen benchmark regions to organize a roundtable to discuss and share each other's experiences.

### **Media**

Specifically for the EER year, at least **8 different press conferences** will be organized.

But Enterprise Flanders will not only rely on 'passive' media contacts. An **EER media action plan** will be created to invite specialized journalists from the printed and audiovisual media to use the EER Label as an opportunity to interview inspiring entrepreneurs (with once again a focus on our main 3 topics for the 2014 EER year). Their testimonies should not only be a trigger for starters, but their experience also will give valuable feedback to the government in general and Enterprise Flanders in specific for our own policy and governance.

**Special attention will be paid to audiovisual and social media** since they play an important role in reaching a broad audience (including entrepreneurs). The evaluation of results and effects due to the financial support given to fiction and non-fiction shows and programs on diverse TV channels in 2013 will be an important benchmark. Enterprise Flanders will use it as well as possible to choose the appropriate and most effective approach and channels to encourage entrepreneurship in Flanders during the 2014 EER year.