



**European Committee
of the Regions**

**Unit C.2 – Commission for Economic
Policy (ECON), Europe 2020
Monitoring Platform, EER**

Application Form



European Entrepreneurial Region

European Entrepreneurial Region Award

2019

Region of Thessaly

1. Fact sheet



General information

Name of the territory	Region of Thessaly, Greece
Date of application	17.4.2018
Political endorsement	Dr Konstantinos AGORASTOS, Governor

Regional data

NUTS code	EL61	GDP/inhabitant (year)	12.393 (2015)
Population	725 847 (I.I.2017)	GDP growth rate (year)	-0.6% (2015)
Area in km ²	14 051	Unemployment rate (year)	25.5% (2016)
Cohesion Policy category	<input type="checkbox"/> More developed region <input type="checkbox"/> Transition region <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Less developed region		

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The territorial EER strategy in a nutshell

Please provide a brief synopsis of your EER strategy in a maximum of 200 words.

Thessaly's EER strategy, which is the outcome of a collective, bottom-up process that involved stakeholders representing the regional triple-helix at the regional and sub-regional level, aims at reigniting the entrepreneurial potential in the Region and at reversing the decade-long decline in all major contextual indicators by complementing, and thus maximising the impact, of Thessaly's Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020.

Thessaly's EER strategy is frugal, realistic and feasible; it involves all the major regional actors working in a partnership-oriented approach. It consists of three specific objectives, namely nurturing entrepreneurship, supporting smart entrepreneurship and catering for SME needs, under the strategic objective "Reignite Entrepreneurship".

The EER label is considered as a valuable opportunity to align the regional stakeholders' efforts towards developing synergies and sharing knowledge and resources to promote and support entrepreneurship, providing linkages to extra-regional best practices and rewarding and promoting entrepreneurial role models.

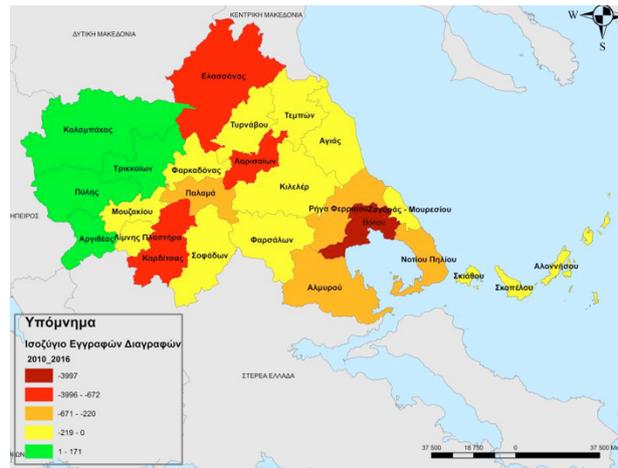
How did you learn about the EER 2019 call?	<input type="checkbox"/> CoR website	<input type="checkbox"/> E-mail announcement from the CoR
	<input type="checkbox"/> EWRC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Announcement in CoR Plenary/Commission meeting
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other CoR event	<input type="checkbox"/> Info table at CoR Plenary
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):	

2. Political vision

2.1 THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Located at the center of Greece, Thessaly is a region with limited competitive advantages at a global scale that has faced a significant decline in its economic output (GDP of € 9.07 billion at current prices in 2015 and stable since then, -25.6% versus the peak in 2012) and the third larger unemployment rate among the Greek regions in 2016 (25.5%, vs 7.8% in 2007). Thessaly's economic structure is mainly services-oriented (approx. 72% of the GVA in 2015 vs 65% in 2005), with manufacturing and the primary sector being at 12.93% and 12.25% respectively (2015).

The entrepreneurial fabric in the Region is characterised by the prevalence of SMEs, most of them family-owned, operating in low or medium-low innovation intensity sectors, focusing on the Greek market, with minimal in-house R&D. The few exceptions falling outside this description, most of them having emerged during the financial crisis, are promising but not able, yet, to become models for other entrepreneurs. A recent report by the National Institute of Labour and Human Resources indicates that the number of enterprises in the region has been declining since 2010 and only in 2016 the balance between firms established minus firms closed was positive; however, the cumulative balance since 2010 is negative, affecting the region's main urban centres (see inset map). Sustaining the positive net addition of new enterprises is the top priority of the Regional Government.



Under the Greek institutional setting, the framework conditions affecting the entrepreneurial environment (i.e., taxation, investment in education and training, stimuli for R&D and investments, labour market, environmental regulations etc) are set at the national level by the Government, thus leaving the Regional Authority with few degrees of freedom to develop and implement place-based policies. The regional smart specialisation strategy (RIS3Thessaly) approved in 2015, and the Regional Operational Programme Thessaly 2014-2020 (ROP) approved in 2014 are the key documents that set out the region's strategy about the future of the regional economy and the regionally-available means to get there, respectively. The table that follows is an excerpt from the SWOT analysis in RIS3Thessaly.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of natural resources • Good access infrastructure (road, rail) and availability of industrial parks • Increasing local interest for small and medium scale investments in the region • Positive trends in the value of exports from the region • Evidence of latent innovation potential among enterprises • Two regional higher education institutions whose scientific specialisation is compatible to the regional economy • Good availability of human resources in science and technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of unique, nationally or globally competitive advantages • Prevalence of micro-enterprises in all sectors of the regional economy; lack of focal firms; • The regional businesses structure unfavourable for knowledge-intensive entrepreneurship • Limited international interest for investments in the region • Significant gaps in business support structures and services • Risk-averse population • Modest institutional capacity and limited means to support new and growing firms by the Regional Government

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong social capital has been developed through the RIS3 entrepreneurial discovery process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The governance of the regional innovation system has still room for improvement • Deteriorating entrepreneurial fabric due to the adverse macro-economic environment • Weak knowledge exchange between research/higher education and enterprises • Increasing pool of human resources in need for reskilling due to the transiting regional economy • The supply of university graduates is higher than the demand by local businesses
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New legislation on public procurement and a single electronic register for public contract notices in place since 2017. • New legislation in 2016 minimises time required to set-up a business and reduces red tape in obtaining licenses and permits • European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) earmarked for promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, both at the national and at the regional levels; novel financial instruments have been introduced to complement grants and subsidies • Low interest rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political risk • Unstable tax and labour regimes • Reform agenda not fully implemented at the national level • Access to finance is still highly problematic: government arrears are high and delays in payments between enterprises well above the EU average • Strong competition for talented graduates and skilled employees by more developed regions • Strong competition from other EU regions having a similar business structure

2.2 POLITICAL VISION

The overarching direction of the regional development policy is the **reversal** of the negative trends in all socioeconomic indicators in the region and the **re-orientation** of the regional economy towards knowledge and innovation, resource-efficiency and environmental sustainability, more and better employment.

Entrepreneurship has a central role in both strands of the regional development policy, being considered as the only means for creating more and better jobs, wealth and thus, social and territorial cohesion. The context suggests that at the medium term, growth will be mainly endogenous, driven by knowledge, people, capital and resources being regionally available.

2.3 EER STRATEGY

In this context, Thessaly's EER strategy is embedded by design within RIS3Thessaly and aims to maximise the impact of the ROP and other nationally managed Operational Programmes in the Region by mobilising and coordinating activities by the regional stakeholders in the following lines of action:

1. **Nurturing entrepreneurial spirit:** This stream of activities aims to cultivate cultural and behavioural change towards entrepreneurship in the general population and special target groups (students, minorities, women and youth).
2. **Supporting smart entrepreneurship:** This stream of activities aims to stimulate investments in the RIS3 priority areas, promote innovation and enhance knowledge exchange between academia and industry.
3. **Catering to SME needs:** This stream of activities captures the commitment by the Regional Authority to address the most critical issues that were identified by the stakeholders during the consultation process and can be resolved regionally.

The EER strategy will be co-funded by the budgets of Regional Authority and the participating stakeholders, leveraging and effectively using more than €200mil of ESIF funds by 2023.

3. Governance and partnership

Thessaly's EER Strategy was defined in a bottom-up manner following a series of consultations with more than 20 regional stakeholders representing all strands of the triple-helix at the regional and the local level (including two regional associations of employers, two regional higher education institutions, four sub-regional business chambers, three scientific chambers, two NGOs, municipalities, and four local professionals' associations) facilitated by the Regional Governor.

After considering the interventions in support of entrepreneurship that have already been planned for implementation through the regional and the national operational programmes, the stakeholders reflected on how they can best contribute their knowledge, resources and networks so that the impact of the above interventions is maximised and relevant knowledge and best practices are diffused and deployed region-wide.

The Regional Authority committed itself to take immediate action and address the most problematic areas of its performance, as indicated by the stakeholders representing entrepreneurs. This process has led to an action plan, which is partnership-oriented, fully owned by the respective partners and frugal; these three attributes, in conjunction with the monitoring indicators associated with the strategy guarantee its efficient and effective implementation.

The governance structure that will implement Thessaly's EER Strategy is based on a three-tier model organised as follows:

- *Strategic level:* The responsibility for the overall direction and management of the EER Strategy is delegated to the Regional Innovation and Entrepreneurship Council (RIEC), a 15-member body consisting of high-level stakeholders representing the quadruple helix, which was established in 2016 by the Governor to provide strategic guidance on entrepreneurship and innovation. RIEC reports to the Regional Assembly. RIEC's main tasks include setting objectives and monitoring performance, supervising the Action Plan, providing political and institutional support and liaising with former EER regions, national and European authorities. RIEC has a similar role within the regional smart specialization strategy.
- *Co-ordination and Management:* The responsibility for the co-ordination of the partnership and the management of the Action and the Communication Plans is delegated to the Department of Programme and Project Management (DPPM), Directorate of Regional Planning of the Region of Thessaly. DPPM will also provide progress reports, collect monitoring information and liaise the EER action plans with other organisational units within the Regional Authority.
- *Implementation:* Each activity included in the Action (and the Communication) Plan has been delegated to a single owner that has already defined the terms of reference, a budget and a credible timetable for delivery of the intended results. The owner organisation will be responsible for implementation. Additional stakeholders may participate as contributors.

4. Action plan

Thessaly's EER Strategy supports the political objective of reigniting the regional entrepreneurial activity and reorienting it towards higher value-added activities by addressing three specific objectives, namely

1. **Nurturing entrepreneurial spirit:** this specific objective is achieved through four actions that address SBA principle I;
2. **Supporting smart entrepreneurship:** this specific objective is implemented through four actions that address SBA principles VIII, VI and I; and
3. **Catering to SME needs:** this specific objective is implemented through four actions that address SBA principles IV and VI.

Given that 99.8% of enterprises in the region are SMEs and that the Action Plan was heavily influenced by stakeholders representing SMEs, it clearly abides by SBA Principle III ('Think Small First'). Limiting the number of SBA principles addressed by the Action Plan was a purposeful decision of the stakeholders to maintain focus, efficiency and effectiveness.

The sections that follow describe how Thessaly plans to reach its EER Strategy's specific objectives by presenting their rationale, a summary description of the approach followed by specific information on the planned activities that includes target groups, output indicators, expected outcomes and the result indicators.

Specific Objective I: Nurturing entrepreneurial spirit

Rationale: The regional Smart Specialisation Strategy estimates that by the end of 2023 the regional stakeholders will leverage up to € 350 mil. of public expenditure from the regional (€ 52.8 mil.) and the national operational programmes in support of entrepreneurship (ERDF, ESF and EARDF), with grants and subsidies to leverage private investment being the major delivery instruments. Moreover, € 1.1 mil of public expenditure was also earmarked by the Regional Operational Programme to set up a Regional Innovation Agency that will provide, among others, one-stop-shop services for entrepreneurs and investors. The Region is actively exploiting opportunities for interregional collaboration and knowledge exchange in this field by participating in several Interreg Europe, Erasmus+ and COSME projects (i.e. INNOGROW, SMART HUB, 4GROWTH, SMARTWAY and others). Early results from the national OPs indicate that all calls are oversubscribed, indicating strong demand, and the entrepreneurial sector is on track to hit the target co-funding values. However, data on the NACE codes of newly-established enterprises in the region indicate that need-, rather than opportunity-based entrepreneurship is the dominant pattern within the regional entrepreneurial fabric, and this raises significant concerns. rather few regional enterprises have managed to perform well in securing competitive research funding from non-regional sources. This, in conjunction with the effects of a ten-year long recession that strongly deteriorated propensity to enterprise in the minds of the population, suggests that urgent measures are needed to change the society's attitude towards entrepreneurship, improve the self-confidence of entrepreneurs-to-be and promote opportunity-based entrepreneurship.

Approach: The proposed activities under Specific Objective I are in line with the stakeholders' understanding of what is needed in the region to guarantee the additionality of the OP funding. Action I.1 aims to extend the reach of entrepreneurial education beyond the regional HEI students, improving population and geographic coverage. Action I.2 aims to institutionalise a novel scheme for setting the regional agenda in issues that require intersectoral cooperation. Actions I.3 and 4 aim to compensate the lack of support structures for specific niches in the regional entrepreneurship by demonstrating the partners' awareness of the issues and their commitment to contribute their limited resources.

Action: I.1 Fostering entrepreneurial spirit in the Region

Owner/Participants: The two regional Higher Education Institutions / The four regional Chambers of Commerce

Target group: The general population

Activities: The two regional HEIs, building on their strong offerings for entrepreneurial education addressed to their students, will extend their audience to include the general population and deploy, with the help of the regional Chambers, the locus of delivery of their offerings outside their premises.

A series of open seminars, short courses, workshops and other educational events will be organised during the EER year, extending the reach of entrepreneurial education throughout the region. Moreover, all opportunities to involve regional entrepreneurs in presenting success stories and act as role models will be pursued.

Outputs: Number of educational events organised; Number of people trained

Outcomes: Improving the attitude of general population towards entrepreneurship

SBA Ref: Principle I: Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded

Action: I.2 Thematic Learning Networks

Owner/Participants: The four regional Chambers / Sectoral-professional bodies; the two regional Higher Education Institutions; the local chapters of Economic Chamber of Greece and Technical Chamber of Greece

Target Groups: Entrepreneurs, companies, sectoral /professional bodies

Activities: The four Regional Chambers in collaboration with the two regional HEIs, sectoral bodies (Federation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants, Regional Tourism Federations etc), the Economic Chamber of Greece and the Technical Chamber of Greece will set up thematic learning networks, provisionally in the fields of agri-food branding, tourism destination management, family business succession, circular economy and exports. Each thematic learning network will be organised around an assessment of enterprise needs, aiming to provide either an agenda of open issues or solutions to specific problems and common issues identified within each theme.

The proceedings of the thematic learning networks will involve working meetings and exchanges of views with professional bodies, other businesses or experts and presentations of good practice.

Outputs: Number of thematic networks established; Number of reference guides produced

Outcomes: Improving the common understanding of the issues at stake at the regional level; Collaborative problem solving

SBA Ref: Principle I: Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded

Action: I.3 Supporting Regional Start-ups

Owner/Participants: Local chapters of Technical and the Economic Chamber of Greece and the four regional Chambers

Target Group: Young entrepreneurs; start-ups

Activities: The partnership that owns Action I.3 will set up a distributed business incubator providing cost-based access to facilities (office space, telephone, internet, secretarial assistance) and business support services (business planning, ICT, new product development, human resources/hiring, legal, accounting, fundraising, networking) to the short-listed entries of the Regional Innovation Award for the best start-up of the year (see Action II.1 below) for a period of two years, under the condition that they establish their new company in Thessaly.

A network of mentors consisting of experienced members of the partner organisations, acting on a voluntary basis, will also be developed to support the start-ups until they leave the incubator.

Outputs: Number of start-ups supported

Outcomes: Viable start-ups

SBA Ref: Principle I: Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded

Action: I.4 Support Structure for Social Cooperative Businesses, Home Businesses and Special target groups

Owner/Participants: Region of Thessaly/ All regional Chambers, Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government, Economic Chamber of Greece

Target Group: Minorities; Unemployed; Immigrants; Youth and the elderly

Activities: The Region of Thessaly in collaboration with the regional Chambers of Commerce, the Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government (on behalf of the regional municipalities) and the regional chapter of the Economic Chamber of Greece will set up a distributed support structure that will provide services to:

- (a) individuals considering the establishment of Social Cooperative Enterprises or artisan businesses;
- (b) members of special target groups (minorities, immigrants, unemployed, the youth and older people) interested in setting up and developing their own enterprises.

The structure will provide coaching, mentoring and basic legal, tax, advisory and information services using the voluntary contributions of experienced members of the partners.

Outputs: Number individuals supported through the structure

Outcomes: New SCE/AE established by the support of the structure;

New enterprises established by members of special target groups supported by the structure;

New jobs created by the above

SBA Ref: Principle I: Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded

Result Indicators:

The following result indicators will be monitored to assess the degree of achievement of Specific Objective I:

- R.1.1 Attitude of the general population towards entrepreneurship (regional survey)
- R.1.2 Number of permanent thematic networks operating in the Region
- R.1.3 Number supported start-ups staying in business 3 yrs after they were established
- R.1.4 Number of new SCEs, new business by special target groups members established

Specific Objective II: Supporting smart entrepreneurship

Rationale: The regional Smart Specialisation Strategy estimates that by the end of 2023 the regional stakeholders will leverage up to € 100 mil. of public expenditure from the regional (€ 11.5 mil.) and the national operational programmes for research and innovation, with collaborative research projects between research and industry and research infrastructures being the most prevalent delivery instruments. Moreover, approximately € 20 mil. of public expenditure is expected to leverage additional private funding towards establishing new, knowledge-intensive enterprises in the region. Finally, € 1.1 mil of public expenditure was also earmarked by the Regional Operational Programme to set up a Regional Innovation Agency. Early results from the national OPs and Horizon2020 indicate that the regional research sector is highly competitive in securing research funding, on track to hit the target values set by RIS3Thessaly. However, rather few regional enterprises have managed to perform well in securing competitive research funding from non-regional sources. This, in conjunction with the low-tech, low-innovation structure in the majority of the entrepreneurial fabric in the region, suggests that other pathways for knowledge exchange between academia and industry should be explored.

Approach: This stream of activities under Specific Objective II of the EER strategy aims to complement the interventions planned under the OPs (Actions II.1-2) and also engage the regional stakeholders into policy experimentation (Actions II.3-4). Action II.1, which is expected to be the cornerstone of the EER year in Thessaly, institutionalises, under the EER label, a regional innovation contest aiming to signal the stakeholders intent towards reorientation of the regional economy into high value-added activities, acknowledge and reward the efforts of the top regional performers at an annual basis. Action II.2 introduces *proactive* technology brokerage as a means to diffuse relevant knowledge and demonstrate innovations stemming from HEI research to enterprises working in RIS3 priority sectors, i.e., where critical mass and absorptive capacity already exist. Action II.3 is a small-scale policy experimentation project, aiming to further enhance knowledge exchanges between research, enterprise and civil society by adapting a mature instrument, namely the UK Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, to the context of Thessaly. In the case of a positive evaluation, the Region will mainstream this instrument in the next programming period. Finally, Action II.4 aims to evaluate the feasibility of leveraging private-sector funds from the region to address the burning issue of limited pathways to capital for regional innovators and regional innovative enterprises at their early stage.

Action: **II.1 Thessalian Innovation Awards**

Owner/Participants: Region of Thessaly

Target Groups: Leading regional innovation performers (established enterprises, start-ups, researchers)

Activities: Action II.1, initially developed by the local chapter of the Technical Chamber of Greece, is the flagship activity within the EER Strategy aiming to signal the stakeholders intent towards reorientation of the regional economy into high value-added activities, acknowledge and reward the efforts of the regional performers in six areas of performance within the Regional Innovation System: (a) innovation of the year; (b) fast-growing enterprise of the year; (c) start-up of the year; (d) successful technology transfer of the year; (e) public-sector innovation of the year and (f) most promising research project of the year.

The contest will receive significant media attention from the day it is launched, the Awards Ceremony will be a major publicity event, the success stories of the finalists and the winners will be widely disseminated to the public during the second half of the EER year.

Outputs: Rules of contest and call to be published in 12/2018.
Award Ceremony in mid-2019.

- Outcomes:*
- Increased public awareness on how innovation improves competitiveness and spurs growth;
 - Region-wide recognition of achievements of the regional top performers and the promotion of role models;
 - Encouragement to innovators to exploit the commercial and business opportunities, become entrepreneurs and stay in the Region.

SBA Ref: Principle VIII: Skills and Innovation
Principle I: Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and Entrepreneurship is rewarded

Action: **II.2 Bridging Research and Enterprise**

Owner/Participants: University of Thessaly and Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly / Enterprise Association of Industries in Thessaly and Central Greece; Europe Network-Hellas; 4 local business chambers

Target Groups: Enterprises with 10 or more employees in RIS3 priority areas

Activities: The Technology Transfer Offices of the two regional Higher Education Institutes will design with the contribution of the major regional stakeholders of the enterprise sector, by the end of 2018, and implement during 2019 a *proactive* technology brokerage campaign. The objective of this campaign is to demonstrate, diffuse and disseminate the most relevant knowledge and research outputs to potential users of the enterprise sector in the Region, stimulate adoption and develop new knowledge exchange partnerships that make effective use of the delivery instruments in ESIF-funded operational programmes (i.e., collaborative research, clusters, spin-offs, innovation vouchers) or formal means of knowledge exchange (contract research, consulting). The campaign will be supported by a single web portal provided structured and easy navigational access to the research outcomes and services provided by both HEIs together with easy to understand descriptions in text or video formats.

Outputs: A web-portal listing the research results and services of the two regional HEIs (3/2019); 8 one-day technology brokerage events during 2019;

Outcomes: Improved adoption of innovations by SMEs;
Increased number of SMEs collaborating with HEIs;

SBA Ref: Principle VIII: Skills and Innovation

Action: **II.3 Pilot Application of Knowledge Exchange Partnerships**

Owner/Participants: University of Thessaly and Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly

Target Groups: Enterprises or non-profit organisations based in the Region; young graduates

Activities: Action II.3 is essentially a policy experimentation activity, aiming to adapt the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, a very effective delivery instrument initially developed in the United Kingdom, in the regional context so that it can be mainstreamed through the ROP during the next programming period. The pilot phase involves developing the rules for such a programme and launching it in for ten graduates that will enrol in postgraduate courses at the Master's level in September 2019 with highly reduced fees. No similar programme exists in Greece and therefore, appropriate credit will be given to EER award in making this happen.

Outputs: Rules of participation for interested parties and call for applications (3/2019);
Up to 10 1-year long KEPs launched (9/2019)
Evaluation of the KEP pilot phase (12/2020)

Outcomes: Focused transfer of knowledge and technology from academia to industry;
Stimulation and enhancement of business-relevant research;
Enhancement of business and specialist skills of a recently qualified graduates;
SBA Ref: Principle VIII: Skills and Innovation

Action: **II.4 Feasibility Study for a Regional Innovation Fund**

Owner/Participants: Region of Thessaly / Regional Development Fund; Hellenic Business Angels Network;
Co-operative Bank of Thessaly / Investors

Target Groups: Entrepreneurs; Enterprises at the first stages of their lifecycle

Activities: Action II.4 aims to explore the feasibility of setting up a regional scheme that would support early-stage innovative enterprises in securing access to capital, beyond public grants and subsidies, so that they can grow. The feasibility study will assess the applicability of a wide range of options such as loans on trust, micro-credits, revolving credit-repayable short-term loans, business angels, crowdfunding (recently regulated by Law 4416/2016). The experience of previous EER Regions will be actively sought in developing this activity.

Outputs: Feasibility Study (12/2019)

Outcomes: -

SBA Ref: Principle VI: Facilitate SMEs' access to finance
Principle VIII: Skills and Innovation

Result Indicators:

The following result indicators will be monitored to assess the degree of achievement of Specific Objective II:

R.2.1 Media attention given to innovation and opportunity-based entrepreneurial activity

R.2.2 Number of SMEs engaged in all forms of technology transfer with regional higher education institutions

Specific Objective III: Catering to SME needs

Rationale: The Reform Programmes in place since 2010 have introduced several major organisational innovations in public procurement and e-procurement, transparency, advanced licensing processes, simplification of enterprise set-up processes, facilitating the cash flows for ESIF programme participants, access finance for setting-up new enterprises and stimulate investment in the strategic sectors of the Greek economy and others. However, the complexity of several key administrative procedures and the effectiveness of public sector staff in supporting enterprises are still considered as negative issues by entrepreneurs.

Approach: This stream of activities under Specific Objective III captures the Regional Authority's commitment to address the most critical issues that were identified by the stakeholders during the consultation process and can be resolved regionally. Actions III.1 and 3 address the expressed needs of the enterprise sector regarding the improvement of service provision by the SME-facing departments of the Regional Authority and the reduction of the average time between procurement of goods or services and payments. Action III.2 aims to reduce the ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the permitted uses of land and help both interested entrepreneurs find the right spot for launching their business and also improve the process of issuing operation permits. Action III.4 aims to apply the "Think Small" principle of the SBA into the call drafting process of the ROP.

Action: **III.1 Improvement of SME-facing service provision by the Regional Administration**

Owner/Participants: Region of Thessaly / Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly Business School
Target Groups: All regional enterprises
Activities: The Business School of TEI Thessaly, working together with the department heads, will design a research instrument aiming to assess the service quality of all SME-facing departments of the Regional Administration by the end of 2018. This research instrument will be administered at a semi-annual base starting in 1/2019, the results will be processed and disseminated to the public by the Directorate of Transparency and E-Government, accompanied by quality metrics at the department level. The department heads will be delegated the task of improving the performance.
Outputs: Semi-annual service quality metrics for all SME-facing departments of the RA with 2H2018 being the baseline values.
Outcomes: Continuous improvement in SME-relevant key performance indicators.
SBA Ref: Principle IV: Make public administrations responsive to SMEs' needs

Action: **III.2 Enterprise Location Chooser GIS**

Owner/Participants: Region of Thessaly /
2 regional chapters of the Technical Chamber of Greece; Municipal Planning Offices;
National Ministry of Environment and Energy
Target Groups: Entrepreneurs; Investors;
Activities: The partnership that implements action III.2 will codify the fragmented legal framework that regulates land use at the national level and associate it with NACEv2 codes in urban and rural areas by either mapping the 27 categories of land use to the NACE codes or by taking into account, where appropriate, mappings that were defined by administrative or judicial decisions. The results will be available through a web-based Geographical Information System as open public data enabling any interested beneficiary to know what type of entrepreneurial activity is permitted where, and relieve the regional administration functionaries from the task of manually cross-referencing permit applications with legal texts.
Outputs: A web-based GIS covering one mainly urban and one mainly rural municipality in the Region by the end of the first half of the EER year;
Assessment of the take-up of the system by the end of the EER year;
A project fiche for the full deployment of the system through the ROP.
Outcomes: Acceleration of the licensing processes administered by the Region of Thessaly
SBA Ref: Principle IV: Make public administrations responsive to SMEs' needs

Action: **III.3 Minimisation of Late Payments from Public Contracts**

Owner/Participants: Region of Thessaly
Target Groups: All enterprises performing contracts awarded by the Regional Authority and their subcontractors
Activities: All the organisational units of the Regional Authority (including the Regional Development Fund) will monitor their average time between invoice and payment on a semi-annual basis, starting on the second half of 2018, reflect on the root causes, propose and implement measures for improvement on an ongoing basis until they meet or exceed the 30-day requirement set by the Late Payment Directive 2011/7/EU.
The same organisational units will introduce special clauses—to be drafted by the Region's legal office by the end of 2018—in their calls for tender that will require payments to subcontractors to be made within 60 days or less from the day the main

contractor was paid and introduce statistical sampling processes to verify that this is actually the case.

Outputs: Late payments monitoring reports covering main contractors and subcontractors (2/2019, 8/2019, 2/2020)

Outcomes: Continuous reduction in the average time between receipt of goods or services and payment;

SBA Ref: Principle VI: Facilitate SMEs' access to finance and develop a legal and business environment supportive to timely payments in commercial transactions

Action: **III.4 Public Consultation of ROP calls addressed to SMEs**

Owner/Participants: Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020

Target Groups: All enterprises eligible for funding under the ROP.

Activities: The Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 will implement public online consultation for all calls addressed to enterprises, keep the consultation open for at least 20 days and publicly report what corrective action was taken within 10 working days after the end of the consultation process.

Outputs: One consultation report per ROP call addressed to SMEs

Outcomes: Improved awareness of the SMEs concerns regarding ROP calls.

SBA Ref: Principle IV: Make public administrations responsive to SMEs' needs
Principle III: "Think Small First"

Result Indicators:

The following result indicators will be monitored to assess the degree of achievement of Specific Objective III:

- R.3.1 Percentage of improvement in the overall service quality vs the baseline values (2/yr)
- R.3.2 Time in days to issue an operating permit (2/yr)
- R.3.3 Average time in days between service / product delivery and payment (2/yr)
- R.3.4 % of SME consultation remarks that were incorporated into ROP call texts.

5. Communication plan

Thessaly is committed to organise an effective EER Year and understands that a clear and focused communication strategy is key to success. The Regional Authority communicated its intention to apply for the EER 2019 award in fall 2017, engaged the regional stakeholders in a series of consultations to prepare its application and received 19 letters of endorsement in support for its bid.

The overarching communication theme will be “**Reigniting Entrepreneurship**” entailing three communication objectives aligned with the Action Plan:

1. Build awareness and positive attitude around entrepreneurship;
2. Promote the entrepreneurial potential of the region inside and beyond;
3. Promote the commitment of the stakeholders to remove barriers to entrepreneurship.

The Region of Thessaly will coordinate and manage the delivery of the communication plan, develop all types of material to be used and monitor its impact.

In terms of timing, the communication plan is organised around three main stages as follows:

	<i>Pre-EER Year 3Q2018 – 4Q2018</i>	<i>Stage Early EER Year 1Q2019-3Q2019</i>	<i>Late EER Year 4Q2019</i>
<i>Objectives:</i>	Generate interest; Engage the target groups.	Manage expectations; Maintain and grow engagement; Highlight the importance of the outputs.	Value outputs and commit to follow-up where needed; Assess achievement of outcomes;
<i>Key activities:</i>	Prepare the visual identity of the EER strategy, set rules of use by the partners; Finalise communication plan; Set up the digital channels; Set up monitoring indicators and append them to the EER strategy monitoring system; Organize a major event for the launch of the Action Plan;	Make wide use of the visual identity in all channels; Organise events and participate in events at the regional, national and European levels; Maximise participation in all activities in the Action Plan, disseminate results, highlight the expected impact; Extend the use of the visual identity in selected partner-organised events beyond the action plan.	Organize a major event for the closing of the EER Year; Prepare the EER Year Yearbook and Final Report;
<i>Key Outputs:</i>	Visual identity; Multilingual website; Social media accounts; Kick-off conference; Media kits	EER year calendar of events; quarterly activity reports and press releases;	Final conference; Yearbook and Final Report; Media kits
<i>Major event(s):</i>	EER Year launch conference	Regional Innovation Awards Ceremony; European SME Week	EER Year closing conference

Thessaly’s EER strategy aims to address specific target groups, which are explicitly identified in the Action Plan. The specific objectives of the communication plan and the key messages for each audience are listed below:

<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Specific communication objectives</i>	<i>Key messages</i>
Society at large	Instil positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship	“Thessaly needs more entrepreneurs for prosperity, employment and better lives for all”
Entrepreneurs	Affirm commitment to reduce barriers and leverage support for entrepreneurial initiatives	“Thessaly will do its best to support your initiatives and help you succeed”
Latent entrepreneurs	Unleash their entrepreneurial potential	“Entrepreneurship is the most exciting path towards achieving your personal goals and giving back to society”
Investors	Invest in Thessaly	“Consider investing in a Region that cares for the success of your investment”

The key messages will be communicated to the respective audiences by key public and private institutions that constitute the partnership implementing the EER Strategy and own the individual activities. In addition, key opinion leaders and persons acting as role models will be involved in communicating the key messages.

The communication plan will unfold through direct, indirect and digital channels, using a variety of communication tools tailored to the communication objectives and the most effective means for reaching the target audiences:

- *Online:* Website, networking platform, blogs, social media, e-bulletins, cross-posting in related sites, e-newsletter;
- *Offline:* Brochures, flyers, information packs, booklets, posters, invitations, guidelines;
- *Media:* Press conferences, interviews, press kits; TV spots, radio spots, newspaper/magazine ads, e-banners;
- *Events:* Launch and closing events, brokerage events, info days, road show, sponsorships, success stories
- *Promotional Material:* Promotion - display panels, banners, table flags, event kits, presentations, notebooks, calendars, folders, bags, mementoes with the label

Use of the EER Logo and referencing of the Committee of the Regions

The visual identity that to be designed for Thessaly’s EER Year will explicitly include the EER logo, which will be highly visible in all types of communications related to the EER. The Committee of the Regions will be explicitly mentioned in all communications that use the EER logo.

The EER logo will be included in all communications related to entrepreneurship organised or supported by the Region of Thessaly during the EER Year. The use of the EER logo by the rest of the partners will follow a similar approach, that will be explicitly defined in the final version of the Communication Plan.