Encouraging entrepreneurship at local and regional level

Examples of good practices from EER regions
How to revise your pdf file?

If these revising tools are not available in your pdf file, please contact us at the Publications Service and we will provide you with a new file.

Please use these tools to help us deliver a precise and correct job.
# Table of Contents

**Foreword** ........................................................................................................................................ 3

**EER 2011 regions**
- Brandenburg, Germany ........................................................................................................ 4  
- County Kerry, Ireland ........................................................................................................... 5  
- Region of Murcia, Spain ....................................................................................................... 6

**EER 2012 regions**
- Catalonia, Spain .................................................................................................................. 7  
- Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Finland ...................................................................................... 8  
- Trnava Self-Governing Region, Slovakia ........................................................................... 9

**Map of the EER regions** ........................................................................................................... 10-11

**EER 2013 regions**
- Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France .................................................................................................. 12  
- Region of Southern Denmark .............................................................................................. 13  
- Styria, Austria ..................................................................................................................... 14

**EER 2014 regions**
- Flanders, Belgium .............................................................................................................. 15  
- Marche Region, Italy .......................................................................................................... 16  
- Province of Noord-Brabant, Netherlands ........................................................................... 17

**EER 2015 regions**
- Lisbon, Portugal .................................................................................................................. 18  
- Northern Ireland, United Kingdom ...................................................................................... 19  
- Valencian Region, Spain ...................................................................................................... 20

**Key facts about the EER award** .............................................................................................. 21
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs are the backbone of the European economy. They provide two out of three jobs in the private sector and contribute more than half of the value added created by businesses in the European Union (EU). Since SMEs and entrepreneurs are also loyal to their territory and create stable, local employment, the presence of a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem immediately benefits regions and cities by reinforcing their social and economic tissue. Regional and local authorities therefore have not only a crucial role to play in supporting their SMEs and entrepreneurs, but also a clear responsibility towards them. While the EU can provide tools and incentives for the implementation of an efficient entrepreneurial policy, it is on the ground, at the regional and local level, that we can really foster the right conditions for entrepreneurs and SMEs to flourish.

This is why the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is fully supports and promotes the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA), which provides policy-makers at all levels with a toolbox allowing them to create environments in which entrepreneurs can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded.

In order to prove that regions and cities can make a real difference for their SMEs and entrepreneurs, the CoR has initiated the European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) scheme, which identifies and rewards EU territories that commit themselves to implementing a cutting-edge strategy aimed at mainstreaming the SBA principles.

During the five years of its existence, the EER label has been awarded to fifteen EU territories, which have successfully demonstrated that they are ready to tackle the challenge we have set them through the EER scheme. They have given tangible proof that regions can play a key role in boosting entrepreneurship and enterprise creation and in helping SMEs to grow further. The EER scheme encourages better cooperation between policy-makers and stakeholders through the creation of territorial SBA partnerships, strengthens multi-level governance in the delivery of SME-friendly policies and stimulates the exchange of good practices and cooperation initiatives between the EER regions.

This brochure of good practices showcases some of the most successful projects implemented by the EER regions. It is my sincere hope that these examples of excellence will inspire cities and regions across the EU to unlock their entrepreneurial potential and thus help achieve the Europe 2020 goals on the ground.

Markku Markkula
President of the European Committee of the Regions,
Chair of the EER jury
Access to capital for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

Brandenburg supports companies by providing low-interest loans, guarantees and equity investments for the start-up, expansion and acquisition of companies. In addition to these revolving financial instruments and grants, a Frühphasenfonds (an early-phase fund) was set up (www.fruehphasenfonds-brandenburg.de). This fund aims to boost the equity capital base of young, innovative SMEs in the early stages of their development, through subordinated loans and equity. Since the resources of the fund have been almost exhausted, an additional EUR 5 million has recently been added. This partly bridges the period to the start of the successor programme next year. In 2015 Brandenburg will launch a new equity fund, which will again receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), to be distributed to technology-oriented companies in the region, to support them in their seed, start-up and growth phase.

One of the very first companies to obtain money from the Frühphasenfonds is Metabonomic Discoveries GmbH (MD). It is a leading analytical and big data research company that provides tools for biotech and pharmaceutical development. The company was established in 2009. Back then, it needed investment to develop its platform technology into a commercial service and product. Start-up companies generally lack proof-of-principle, customers and financial resources. As banks and venture capital firms did not invest in the early phase, MD applied for the Frühphasenfonds and was successful in getting funding. Today, MD employs 10 individuals and is making a profit, serving customers worldwide. The company is based in Potsdam in the German capital region of Berlin-Brandenburg. More specifically, it is located in the Potsdam-Golm Science Park, home to more than 2,000 scientists and close to the renowned University of Potsdam and the Max Planck and Fraunhofer Institutes. Together with a vibrant start-up scene, this allows MD to keep pace with new developments in the scientific world. In 2011, the national KfW banking group awarded MD the title of GründerChampion in the Business Idea and Innovation category.

For more information, please visit www.metabonomicdiscoveries.com and http://youtu.be/LEnMhoYB0gU.
Enterprise Month

The inaugural Enterprise Month took place in March 2014 as a collaborative initiative between the Institute of Technology, Tralee — led by the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (CEED), Kerry Education & Training Board, enterprise support state agencies — Enterprise Ireland, Kerry Local Enterprise Office, North & East Kerry Development, South Kerry Development Partnership, IDA Ireland and Udarás na Gaeltachta (dedicated to companies established in Gaelic speaking locations). Events are held throughout the year to promote entrepreneurship and starting businesses across the region. The Enterprise Month of March shone a spotlight on just some of what is on offer all year round. Each organisation provided sponsorship of EUR 1,000 towards the operational running of the month, and private sponsorship of EUR 1,500 was secured from the Bank of Ireland.

The Enterprise Month was created with a number of objectives in mind, namely to:

• give established businesses and budding entrepreneurs an opportunity to network;
• give established businesses and budding entrepreneurs the opportunity to find out about the assistance (funding and soft support measures) available to them to grow and sustain a business in Kerry;
• foster an entrepreneurial mind-set across the county;
• showcase business success stories throughout the region;
• provide a referral pipeline for state agencies;
• provide a referral pipeline for the New Frontiers programme1; and to
• provide a referral pipeline for Innovation Vouchers2 and Innovation Partnerships3.

A variety of events took place around the county including breakfast meetings, lunchtime briefings and evening seminars. These events were free and targeted specific business groups including start-ups, existing businesses, retail, women entrepreneurs, students, rural entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs, tourism and hospitality.

The month was hugely successful and contributed to raising the profile of entrepreneurship across the county. Throughout the month, 854 people attended 23 events (excluding Kerry Local Enterprise Office events and mentoring clinics). Ten new companies are now participating in the New Frontier programme of which three participants were referred through Enterprise Month. The month also resulted in three Innovation Vouchers and two Innovation Partnerships.

1 New Frontiers is Enterprise Ireland’s national entrepreneur development programme for innovative, early-stage start-ups. It is a three-phase programme, based in 14 campus incubation centres across the country. Each year, New Frontiers funds 150 companies.

2 The Enterprise Ireland Innovation Voucher initiative was developed to build links between Ireland’s public knowledge providers and small businesses. Innovation Vouchers worth EUR 5,000 are available to assist a company in exploring a business opportunity or problem with a registered knowledge provider.

3 The Innovation Partnership Programme helps companies to access the latest skills and expertise from research institutes throughout Ireland. The programme can provide up to 80% of the cost of research work to develop new and improved products, processes or services, or generate knowledge and know-how.
Encouraging entrepreneurship at local and regional level

"Entrepreneurial Municipality" initiative

Municipio Emprendedor (Entrepreneurial Municipality) is a pioneering initiative launched by the government of the Region of Murcia through its Regional Development Agency, INFO Murcia.

This initiative was established within the framework of the Region's Plan Emprendemos (Entrepreneurship Plan) as well as the regional "Entrepreneurial Act" adopted in 2013, as a concrete example of Murcia's commitment to supporting SMEs and entrepreneurs on the ground.

The Entrepreneurial Municipality project is based on the idea that municipalities, which are the natural and immediate environment for entrepreneurs and companies, should be able to exercise their regulatory and taxation competences with the aim of enhancing economic activity in their territories.

In this context, INFO signed an agreement with each participating municipality to facilitate the implementation of various collaboration schemes. In all cases, the purpose is to foster municipal actions, not only for promoting business activities among entrepreneurs and SMEs, but also for developing an environment that is conducive to business creation and consolidation. To achieve this, several measures have been implemented, such as administrative simplification, business promotion, entrepreneurial culture support, municipal tax reductions for entrepreneurial projects and infrastructures.

Any municipality in the region that is interested in this project can negotiate and sign an agreement with INFO Murcia and commit itself to implementing measures such as:

• fostering entrepreneurship in society;
• identifying potential business niches in the municipalities;
• identifying and supporting entrepreneurs and business people in the municipalities;
• providing funding and tax benefits to foster the development of new business activities in the municipalities;
• simplifying paperwork and speeding up administrative procedures related to the implementation of business activities;
• promoting and supporting regional Business Nursery Network infrastructures; and
• identifying and making valuable use of existing business infrastructure.

Results that have been achieved so far

In September 2014, some 18 municipalities signed the Entrepreneurial Municipality Agreement in the Murcia region: Alhama de Murcia, Cehegín, Molina de Segura, Yecla, Totana, Cartagena, Cieza, Archena, Lorquí, Puerto Lumbreras, Águilas, Abarán, Fuente Álamo, Mula, La Unión, Jumilla, Santomera and Beniel. Another four are in the process of doing so: Lorca, Murcia, Fortuna and San Pedro del Pinatar.

Thus, 71% of the region's territory is covered, as well as 84% of the region's population.

Thanks to public initiatives like Entrepreneurial Municipality, Murcia region is increasing the inter-annual ratio for newly established companies (Murcia at 1.7% compared to Spain at 0.8%), and for creating self-employment (Murcia at 3.7% compared to Spain 2.4%).

For more information, please visit:

www.institutofomentomurcia.es/web/emprende/entrepreneurial-municipality

Catalunya Emprèn

The Catalunya Emprèn programme was established by the Government of Catalonia to identify, prioritise and coordinate activities and complementary actions in the field of entrepreneurship, through synergies among agents of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. This programme aims to create a favourable business environment (including access to finance), promoting entrepreneurship, implementing the regional research and innovation strategy for smart specialisation (RIS3), as well as identifying obstacles, barriers and critical measures for entrepreneurship.

It is structured around three main areas:

1) Promoting the entrepreneurial spirit:
   - Raising awareness about the importance of creating new business projects and the entrepreneurial process as a whole; showcasing testimonies of our country’s entrepreneurial culture, activities and resources in the field of education, universities, etc.

2) Supporting the creation of new business projects:
   - Providing advice and support from territorial agents in the early phases of business conception and start-up.

A programme that supports business creation through private-public collaboration, consisting of a network of more than a hundred organisations and aims to:
   - assist about 30 000 potential entrepreneurs;
   - support the creation of over 4 000 business projects; and
   - consolidate 4 500 businesses (launched less than three years ago).

3) Supporting the consolidation and development of business projects with high growth potential in the early stages:

For this particular area, the Start-up Catalonia Programme was developed: an integral, flexible and tailor-made initiative. The programme is addressed to innovative start-ups (launched less than five years ago) and aims to provide them with support to grow faster and stronger.

A network of seven business accelerators has been set up around Catalonia, with a group of experts offering growing companies a range of support, such as coaching, mentoring, networking activities, training, as well as advice and support for general key processes:

- search for funding;
- innovation;
- internationalisation;
- investment in entrepreneurial teams of innovative start-ups and professionalising developers’ teams;
- fostering entrepreneurs in the execution of their growth plan; and
- support for business management

Start-up Catalonia gathers resources and initiatives from public and private organisations specialised in providing services and focused on the growth of start-up enterprises.

Each year, Start-up Catalonia works with more than 100 companies simultaneously.

Thirty-one successful companies ended the programme in December 2013.

- All of them are still active and growing.
- The total turnover of the 31 companies increased by 60%.
- Exports have multiplied by four. The weight of exports in the total turnover of these companies represented 5.8% in 2012. At the end of 2013, the weight of exports in total turnover was 14.8%.
- Seven companies started their export activity.
- Twenty-one of the 31 companies concerned were actively exporting by the time they had completed the programme.
- They went from employing 110 workers in December 2012 to 182 at the end of 2013. This is an increase of 72 employees, with an average of 2.4 workers per firm.
- Fourteen companies secured external financing and three companies raised their first round of funding.
Regenerating growth by supporting young entrepreneurship and business renewal

Helsinki-Uusimaa Region is proud to have become one of Europe’s hubs for technology start-ups. It is committed to making continuous efforts to support the creation of SMEs in order to regenerate business and growth in its smart specialisation strategy for 2014-2020 (www.uudenmaanliitto.fi/en).

The region’s competitive advantage will be reinforced through the following spearheads — Urban Cleantech, Human Health Tech, Digitalising Industry, Welfare City and Smart Citizen — to transform Helsinki-Uusimaa into a smart, sustainable and well-being region.

To date, most of the growth-oriented start-ups in the region are created and nurtured through the entrepreneurship activities and measures of the higher education institutions. To support the regional entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem in a holistic and efficient approach, Helsinki-Uusimaa seeks to foster regional development in a quadruple helix model, to enable smart platforms and bring regional stakeholders and assets together. Through orchestration in entrepreneurship, innovation and business activities, it allows start-up support providers, such as universities, cities and the government, to turn innovation excellence into business and growth.

NewCo Factory: supporting early-stage start-ups for growth

Despite its high reputation as a new land for start-ups, the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region has relatively few SMEs that are looking to grow. As a flagship programme initiated by the City of Helsinki and operated by EnterpriseHelsinki, the NewCo Factory (www.newcofactory.fi/) aims to accelerate the creation of new start-ups with international growth potential, by serving as a platform where the owners of business ideas, professional talent and investors can meet. The NewCo Factory focuses on bridging the gap between the ideation stage and the start-up phase, and offers services such as mentorship, networking and access to seed funding to early-stage start-ups. It also provides a co-working space for start-up companies.

The ultimate goal of the NewCo Factory is to create 100 start-ups yearly and 300 to 500 new jobs within four years. Since its inception in 2013, the NewCo Factory has already served more than 1 000 entrepreneurs/participants in its events. In 2014, four start-ups of the NewCo Factory were selected as finalists for the Red Herring Top 100 Europe list, including Youlapse Oy, Avansera Oy, Tespack Oy and Invesdor Oy.

At present, the NewCo Factory mainly supports activities and entrepreneurs in Helsinki. It works closely with public and private partners in the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region and seeks European partners for acceleration and co-working spaces for its clients. From 2015, the NewCo Factory will benefit from multi-finance. It is part of the implementation of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Programme 2014-2017 and the Smart Specialisation Strategy of the Region 2014-2020.
ITE – Intelligent Energy

The Intelligent Energy Project aims to make progress, on numerous fronts, in bilateral and interregional cooperation between Austrian and Slovak regions at regional and municipal level and in the private sector in the area of sustainable energy development. The intention is the cross-border development of expertise in the field of renewable and sustainable energy management.

In pursuit of environmental objectives (climate protection), this project will take into account the best possible use of available local and regional resources with a view to achieving the highest value added for the region. It will place emphasis on raw materials as well as resources such as solar energy, wind, water and waste.

Project aims and areas:
- energy efficiency,
- energy storage, and
- energy production.

In the long-term, the project objectives will focus on complete independence from imported (mostly fossil-based) energy. The project objectives are defined as follows:
- to contribute to climate protection goals under the Kyoto Protocol, with regional reductions in CO2 production at the forefront;
- to use available primary regional renewable energy resources to cover energy needs;
- to contribute to the creation of a meaningful mix of energy sources within the scope of long-term supra-regional energy management; and
- to contribute to reductions in energy consumption, particularly to reduce dependence on imports of fossil energy carriers.

The TSGR will contribute to the following project outputs:
- the establishment of an international energy cluster (Institute for Renewable Energy Sources);
- a partnership of 20 to 25 entities covering the issue of renewable energy sources on both sides of the Austrian/Slovak border;
- the production of a TSGR energy security strategy for the sustainable development of the energy industry, with emphasis on renewable energy;
- the development of five energy concepts;
- the development of five “eco-checks” of different-sized communities (cities, municipalities, associations);
- the preparation of five publications covering different areas in relation to projects, themes and experience in the field of energy;
- the organisation of ten workshops and seminars on renewables and sustainable development in the energy industry; and
- the development of five cross-border pilot projects on renewable energy sources and sustainable energy development.

Generally, the Intelligent Energy Project aims to reduce regional dependence on imported energy and to draw on renewable sources.
Encouraging entrepreneurship at local and regional level

**EER 2011**

Brandenburg, Germany  
www.mwe.brandenburg.de

County Kerry, Ireland  
www.ittralee.ie

Region of Murcia, Spain  
www.carm.es

**EER 2012**

Catalonia, Spain  
www.gencat.cat

Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Finland  
www.uudenmaanliitto.fi

Trnava Self-Governing Region, Slovakia  
www.trnava-vuc.sk
Examples of good practices from EER regions

EER 2013
Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France
www.nordpasdecalais.fr
Region of Southern Denmark
www.regionsyddanmark.dk
Styria, Austria
www.verwaltung.steiermark.at

EER 2014
Flanders, Belgium
www.agentschapondernemen.be
Marche Region, Italy
www.impresa.marche.it
Province of Noord-Brabant, Netherlands
www.brabant.nl

EER 2015
Lisbon, Portugal
www.cm-lisboa.pt
Northern Ireland, United Kingdom
www.nilga.org
Valencian Region, Spain
www.indi.gva.es

www.cor.europa.eu/eer
Nord France Amorçage

The co-investment fund **Nord France Amorçage** (NFA) was set up as part of the Regional Innovation Strategy (SRI) by the Nord Pas de Calais Region in 2012 in order to help SMEs finance their innovation.

Its goal is to support the funding of innovative SMEs, from early stage to middle stage investment. Innovative SMEs find it difficult to obtain finance. They need to raise significant high-risk funds and are looking for medium to long-term profitability. Early stage investment requires time, which is why it is necessary to have tools ready to take risks over the long term.

NFA provides equity capital financing and operates systematically under the same conditions: private equity firms provide the seed capital. NFA raises more funds by redirecting private investment capital towards early stage capital, and can increase the SMEs’ innovation abilities.

This fund benefits SMEs that have projects involving technological as well as non-technological innovations, and relevant mainly, but not exclusively, to strategic excellence sectors included in the SRI: terrestrial means of transportation by rail, trade industry for the future, materials and applications for sustainable use, and the nutrition-health-and-longevity sector. These companies contribute to inclusive, innovative and sustainable growth, and create jobs and wealth for the Nord Pas de Calais Region.

Originally endowed with EUR 5 million, NFA receives many applications. In 2013, the fund was raised to EUR 10 million, of which EUR 6.5 million were provided through the ERDF and EUR 3.5 million through the Nord Pas de Calais Region.

Through this public fund and support from ERDF funding, the Nord Pas de Calais Region is confirming its strong position in the financing of innovative SMEs. In September 2014, 21 SMEs, mainly from the health and ICT sectors, had already received EUR 5.2 million. NFA can contribute up to EUR 500 000 for each company.

NFA, alongside Business Angels, has for instance supported Keycoopt, a start-up that created a platform for recruiting managers by co-opting, as well as Delfmens, a nanotechnology company.
Welfare Tech Invest – innovation and growth through improved access to venture capital

Access to finance is a challenge for entrepreneurs and SMEs, also within the areas of business excellence in the region of Southern Denmark. In order to improve access to venture capital for health and welfare technologies, a venture capital fund entitled Welfare Tech Invest – Southern Denmark was set up. This fund, launched in 2012, invests in welfare tech entrepreneurs in the region. At present, there is DKK 75 million in the fund dedicated to this purpose. Furthermore, the capital fund provides loans to entrepreneurs in the region’s rural areas. A further DKK 20 million is foreseen for this purpose.

Welfare Tech Invest – Southern Denmark is part-funded with money from the region of Southern Denmark and EU funds. Welfare Tech Invest is managed by professional investment managers with specific expertise in investing seed money, accelerating growth in entrepreneurial companies and the specific business area of health and welfare technologies. Money from Welfare Tech Invest will, on a case-by-case basis, be matched with money from other investors and loan providers.

Targets for Welfare Tech Invest for the next five years:
• to invest in 12 young companies in the welfare technology sector in the region;
• to grant 30 loans to companies in the rural areas of the region; and
• to create between 175 and 250 new jobs in the portfolio companies.
Styria – The World’s Green Tech Valley

Styria offers a high concentration of R&D (4.7% of GDP), strong industry and green pioneers with a long history in this field. The award-winning and innovative cluster organisation ECO WORLD STYRIA was set up to transform the region into a leading business hotspot – the World’s Green Tech Valley.

Within the ECO WORLD STYRIA cluster, 170 clean-tech companies, manufacturers, service providers and scientific organisations in the areas of green energy, green building and green resources have been joining forces since 2005. ECO serves both local companies and Styria by developing and implementing services and projects aligned with the growth drivers of innovation and international markets.

New tools offered by this cluster include “technology radars” and the “green tech challenge” for creating next generation products, the “service exchange”, with direct access for regional companies to ten clean-tech clusters around the globe, as well as Green Tech Research Styria, with 1 200 researchers from various universities joining forces.

ECO now actively develops more than 20 joint industrial innovation projects a year worth EUR 20 to EUR 30 million. The results are new products on the market such as the “invisible” solar system SKIN®energyroof for historical cities or a LED-Booster with 30% higher light effectiveness.

The cluster companies rate Eco World Styria as “excellent” at 1.3 (1 = best grade, 5 = worst grade). ECO WORLD STYRIA has been ranked as the world’s best clean-tech cluster in two rankings so far (2012 Global Cleantech Directory and 2010 Cleantech Group, the renowned US investor network).
Examples of good practices from EER regions

EER
2014

Flanders, Belgium

Enterprise & Growth - Gazelle Leap

Flanders boasts many competitive companies with strong know-how and high-quality products or services. Nevertheless, it still lags behind where fast-growing, internationally oriented companies are concerned. Flanders in Action (ViA) wants to boost their number by 2020. This is necessary because these companies breathe new life into the economy.

Objective

ViA wants to create an appropriate economic climate to facilitate and support the growth of companies, focusing on internationalisation and on fast-growth companies referred to as gazelles. The presence of gazelles is of vital importance for the Flemish economy: this relatively small group of companies plays a substantial role in job creation. The top ten fastest-growth businesses in terms of turnover account for no less than 42% of the total number of newly created full-time jobs in the Flemish economy. Apart from their important economic added value, they fulfil an exemplary role for start-ups and young entrepreneurs in Flanders.

Approach

Fast-growing companies are confronted with problems specifically related to their strong growth. That is why a tailor-made policy with specific focus on these companies is needed. In the Flemish context, this specific policy is provisionally called ‘Gazelle Leap’. Gazelle Leap offers intensive coaching to promising, ambitious entrepreneurs. It targets businesses with high-growth potential and medium-growth companies.

In practice

Flanders in Action focuses on:
- improved identification and selection of potential gazelles;
- individual guidance for identified growth companies on their growth strategy and business model;
- high-quality coaching for businesses with high potential and having an international growth perspective;
- general awareness-raising and dissemination of information through information sessions, networking and other training initiatives for potential gazelles; and
- proactive communication about public instruments with identified growth companies.

To this end, the most important government partners (Enterprise Flanders Agency, Flanders Investment and Trade, IWT, Participation Company Flanders) work closely with interested employers’ organisations. Through this coordinated approach, the government intends to stimulate the growth ambitions of companies and work on a culture shift in the entrepreneurial world and society.

Measurable outputs

By 2020, Flanders would like to rate as high as the top five European regions. This means that the share of fast-growing companies will have to grow to almost 5%. In 2011 and 2012 the proportion was 3.12% and 3.52%, respectively.

Over a period of two years (2014-2015), Flanders intends to reach the following targets:
- 380 companies using opportunity analysis;
- 500 firms applying for a premium for the recruitment of an export or growth manager; and
- 100 companies seeking to achieve an international breakthrough through coaching.

After completion of the programme, these companies are individually monitored in terms of growth. Our hope is that at least 150 high-growth companies emerge from this group.
One of the three 2014 EER Awards went to the Marche Region, which is considered to be the Italian region of small producers par excellence, and emphasises the effectiveness of its regional policy for supporting micro, small and medium-sized businesses. This led to the adoption of the regional strategy for the implementation of the Small Business Act in April 2014.

Among the various actions specifically directed at SMEs, the Marche Region has developed an integrated financial instrument aimed at the revival of entrepreneurial activities throughout the regional area affected by the economic and employment crisis.

The purpose of the initiative, launched in 2013 under the national Cohesion and Development Fund, is to support projects submitted by micro-enterprises and SMEs, for productive investments connected to business creation, or the expansion/diversification/modernisation of existing productive units, including experimental development projects, and for innovative start-ups, with a substantial impact in terms of increasing employment.

In order to be eligible, each project must include costs related to tangible and intangible assets, as well as to consultancy services for a total amount of EUR 150 000 to EUR 2 million, and provide a new employee with a permanent contract for each amount of EUR 150 000 of eligible investment by the end of the project (max. 24 months from the starting date).

The evaluation criteria used to select the projects include their scientific, technical and managerial viability, economic impact, financial sustainability and degree of innovativeness.

The aid provided is calculated according to the size of the company and the type of new employment created, and in line with the aid intensities percentages provided established under Commission Regulation (EC) No 800/2008.

The regional initiative can rely on a budget of approximately EUR 15 million, allocated to three different regional areas (Merloni area, Piceno area and the residual regional area).

By September 2014, it had supported 91 entrepreneurial projects, including 25 innovative start-ups, in various manufacturing and production services sectors (for instance mechanics, electronics, agribusiness, audio-visual and ICT), and guaranteed more than 300 new jobs.

This instrument will be maintained as long as financing is available, and in any case until the end of the programme (scheduled for 2017). The success achieved so far has led regional policymakers to advocate a similar mechanism under the new Structural Funds programming period, financed by the ERFD and the ESF.
Brabant, Europe’s heart of smart solutions

The province of Noord-Brabant aims to be among Europe’s top five most entrepreneurial and innovative regions. Multinationals, small and medium-sized businesses, government bodies and knowledge institutions work together to boost innovative solutions for major social issues, such as Life Sciences, Bio-based Economy and Sustainable Energy. Brabant invests in a healthy business climate because a pleasant living environment needs a sound economy. Entrepreneurs face difficulties when they try to make use of financial instruments to ensure the continuity of their companies. Brabant’s strategy for responding to these difficulties stands out. Its finance strategy focuses on providing funding solutions and making it more straightforward for entrepreneurs to obtain finance.

Providing funding solutions

Four thematic investment funds worth a total of EUR 475 million offer a powerful boost for entrepreneurs who focus on innovation, energy, broadband and nature. One of these funds is the Innovation Fund Brabant, a EUR 125 million public investment fund, financed by Brabant. When including private investments, a total capital injection of EUR 375 million should be made. This injection should consist of 200 to 230 investments in innovative SMEs, particularly during the high risk start-up stage. The fund will create around 1,400 to 1,600 labour years in immediate jobs. This figure will be multiplied when business develops successfully.

Moreover, Brabant helps entrepreneurs to turn their knowledge into successful companies. The programmes Bright Move, Starterslift and Ondernemerslift+ provide entrepreneurship education to students, coach new innovative entrepreneurs and provide loans to carry out market research or develop prototypes. Brabant co-finances these programmes.

Helping entrepreneurs to find finance solutions

SMEs sometimes struggle to find the right finance solution among traditional funding options and new options like crowdfunding and credit unions. MKB Financieringspoort is a partnership of various public bodies that informs entrepreneurs about funding options, gives advice on funding applications and puts entrepreneurs in touch with investors. The partnership’s activities should create a total investment of EUR 50 million by 2017.

The Made in Brabant platform brings entrepreneurs and investors together online. Based on their own preferences, investors select the entrepreneurs they expect to be potentially successful. Made in Brabant collaborates intensively with informal investors and investment networks. Seed funds and investment companies are involved in order to promote co-financing and follow-up financing.
Lisbon is working very hard to position itself as a global START-UP CITY.

The starting point for this strategy was the Lisbon Participatory Budget (2010). One of its winning projects was the creation of an incubator. Since then, the Lisbon City Council has collaborated with a diverse range of partners to create STARTUP LISBOA (www.startupilisboa.com) and the Lisbon Incubators Network (www.incubadoraslisboa.pt).

The creation of business incubators is one of the most effective and innovative ways to attract micro-enterprises, SMEs and young entrepreneurs and ensure their survival in the early stages. STARTUP LISBOA opened its doors in 2012 and is part of an urban regeneration project for the downtown area of the city (Baixa) which includes the reuse of historical buildings. It was implemented in cooperation with public and private partners, who played a decisive role in the process. This incubator project is near and dear to the city because it was born of the will of the citizens. It fits into Lisbon’s strategy to foster the citizens’ participation and entrepreneurial spirit and to diversify its economic activities.

The focus is to support entrepreneurs in the development of business ideas that are particularly innovative, mainly to foster their implementation in the market and attract investment to grow their businesses. One of the biggest advantages of STARTUP LISBOA is that it facilitates the exchange of experience and knowledge among entrepreneurs.

To broaden its entrepreneurial dimension, Lisbon has been developing partnerships with incubators of the city/region, creating a true entrepreneurial ecosystem. Several spaces in incubators are made available to entrepreneurs who want to launch and develop their innovative ideas. There is a strong focus on entrepreneurship. The city, in partnership with a diverse range of private and public stakeholders, is investing in a solid network of incubation and acceleration spaces at the local and regional level.
Enterprise can replace division and sustain us: changing the headlines about Northern Ireland

The EU’s Committee of the Regions has recognised the growth and progress of Northern Ireland’s energetic SME sector and some of the equally entrepreneurial agencies that support these companies.

The creative industries sector is one of the sectors that has benefited from this support and experienced substantial expansion. The visual arts, crafts and performance arts in particular are the main beneficiaries. Each of these areas, with their associated SMEs, supported through the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme and EU Regional Development Fund, have experienced significant economic growth over the last four years. The sector is worth an estimated GBP 330 million to Northern Ireland (source DCAL, NISRA data, with verified figures for 2009).

Think Globally, Act Locally

Northern Ireland’s twenty-six local councils (currently undergoing a major reform which will reduce them to 11 new councils) take advantage of branding as entrepreneurial districts to drive their local economies and play an important part in facilitating the recent success of SMEs. As you travel across the region, you will come across many examples of how local community-based initiatives have seized the opportunity to grow, with the help of local government, serving local people and using local produce and materials and renewing the skills of their forefathers.

One such example of a council-led success story is to be found on the Ards Peninsula (www.ards-council.gov.uk) on the east coast of Northern Ireland. Scores of artisan craft businesses are to be found across this picturesque and mainly rural and coastal borough. They are often located in remote communities and function through self-help and networking. These businesses are staffed by a combination of either full-time or part-time artists who describe themselves as sole traders or micro businesses. Through the assistance of local government and the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, these businesses form themselves into a collaborative network to facilitate the exchange of ideas and develop into a robust infrastructure of creative and economic support services, reaching out to artisan partners in European partner countries including Finland and Italy.

Today the project has set itself apart insofar as the participating businesses have built, and continue to build, their creative and cultural infrastructure. The project now has a membership of one hundred businesses, which are actively seeking to become even more entrepreneurial since they are trying to compete more effectively and sustainably on a global platform.
SU CV: Entrepreneurship through the five public universities in the Valencian Region

The Directorate General of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Cooperatives (DGEEC) is part of the Regional Ministry for Economy Industry, Tourism and Employment of the Regional Government of Valencia.

The DGEEC is looking to harness some of its main sources of talent in the region, the five public universities in the Valencian Region, in order to enhance and transfer this talent to the social and economic sectors, thereby increasing the competitiveness of the regional business fabric.

In this way, the DGEEC aims to act as a major interface and source of financing for newly created firms. Through the SU CV Awards, the Directorate General offers recipient firms financing in the form of equity participation loans, complemented by non-repayable contributions from the university of origin (Universitat Politècnica de València, Universitat de València, Universidad Miguel Hernández, Universitat Jaume I, Universitat d’Alacant) of up to 25% of the total amount of the participation loan.

The objectives of this scheme are to:
- support and foster the entrepreneurial spirit in universities of the Valencian Region;
- contribute to the development and consolidation of the firms created within the university system of the Valencian Region; and to
- foster and strengthen relations between universities in the region.

STARTUPV 2k13: the path to success

Prior to this recent joint scheme of the five public universities with SU CV, entrepreneurial activity in all of the participating universities has been outstanding.

The competition STARTUPV 2k13 for entrepreneurs organised at the Universitat Politècnica de València was a driving force in the creation of the SU CV competition, and was a vehicle for detecting the synergies of the public universities in the region.

Three hundred and ninety-eight projects led by more than 600 entrepreneurs entered the STARTUPV 2k13 awards. Thirty-five projects were selected from these 398 business ideas to go through to the final stages of the competition. Ten of these received an award. During the course of the event, a group of local businesses presented six different technological challenges, for which the participants came up with ten potential solutions, five of which were chosen.

SU CV intends to build on this successful experience in order to make a region-wide impact on untapped entrepreneurial potential at the five public universities.

The underlying objective of SU CV is to create, galvanise and foster a spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation throughout the various university communities, encourage new business ideas that will help to renew markets, develop and strengthen university-business relations, support progress and contribute to the socioeconomic development of the Valencian Region.
European Entrepreneurial Region

Key facts about the EER award

Who participates in the jury?
- The President
- The First Vice-President
- Chair of the ECON Commission
- Coordinator of the Europe 2020 Monitoring Platform

Institutional partners:
- European Parliament
- European Commission, Directorate-General Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
- European Economic and Social Committee

EER regions:
- Representative of a previous EER region

Economic and social partners:
- Eurochambres
- UEAPME
- Social Economy Europe

Principles of the Small Business Act
1. Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded
2. Ensure that honest entrepreneurs who have faced bankruptcy quickly get a second chance
3. Design rules according to the “Think Small First” principle
4. Make public administrations responsive to SMEs’ needs
5. Adapt public policy tools to SME needs: facilitate SMEs’ participation in public procurement and better use State Aid possibilities for SMEs
6. Facilitate SMEs’ access to finance and develop a legal and business environment supportive to timely payments in commercial transactions
7. Help SMEs to benefit more from the opportunities offered by the Single Market
8. Promote the upgrading of skills in SMEs and all forms of innovation
9. Enable SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities
10. Encourage and support SMEs to benefit from the growth of markets

Want to learn more?
- Decision on the Review of the European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) scheme, 154th Meeting of the Bureau of the Committee of the Regions, 12 September 2014, ref. CdR 4057/2014, item 7;
- Study ‘Implementation of the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA) and Entrepreneurship Policies at Local and Regional Level’, Committee of the Regions, September 2012;
- Study ‘Fostering innovation at regional level: Lessons from the European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) experience’, Committee of the Regions, 2015;
- Guidebook ‘Regional Implementation of the SBA’, European Commission, 2014 (Guidebook Series ‘How to support SME Policy from Structural Funds’, vol. 5).

Indicative timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EER launch</th>
<th>Deadline for applications</th>
<th>Award ceremony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>