



**Improving
Structural Funds
for better delivery
of R&D&i policies**

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Action Plan

North-West (Romania)

May 2022

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1. General information



Project: *PGI05786 Improving Structural Funds for better delivery of R&D&I policies*

Partner organisation(s) concerned: *North-West Regional Development Agency*

Country: *Romania*

NUTS2 region: *North-West*

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The Action Plan aims to impact: Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
 European Territorial Cooperation programme
 Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument(s) addressed: *Priority Axis 1 – A region competitive through innovation, digitalization and dynamic enterprises (Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027).*



2. Introduction

2.1. Improve Project.

Structural Funds Programmes are the main policy instruments European regions have for building up Research, Technological Development and Innovation and support the implementation of their Smart Specialisation Strategies.

The policy instruments addressed by the IMPROVE project are mainly Structural Funds Programmes, except for the Municipal Plan for Development of Gabrovo (Bulgaria) and the Development Plan of Tartu City (Estonia), which have in common the goal of enhancing a knowledge based regional/municipal economic growth.

Beyond their different background, scope and particular target, these policies seek a smart, sustainable and inclusive regional/local development by means of actions and instruments that, to a greater or lesser extent, focus on entrepreneurship, competitiveness of regional/local businesses, employment, education and lifelong learning, innovation, research, technological development, etc.

Achieving an efficient delivery of regional development policies is crucial, not only in terms of making the best possible use of public funds, but also in terms of maximising regional potentials, fighting regional inequalities and strengthening Europe's economic well-being, as well as its social and political cohesion.

The partnership includes a wide range of regional realities, with different levels of economic development, more and less centralised administration systems and different levels of innovation performance, as well as distinct level of involvement in the management of the addressed policies (more strategic for some partners and more operative for others), which allowed a comparative analysis of the policy makers approaches and enriched the perspective about the management and implementation of Structural Funds.

2.2. Regional Action Plans

Produced by each partner, the action plan is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the interregional cooperation during the Phase 1 of the project will be implemented in order to improve the policy instrument that is addressed within their region. It specifies the nature of the actions to be implemented, their timeframe, the players involved, the costs and funding sources.

Based on a learning process that included a State-of-the-Art report for the identification of the areas of improvement of each Policy Instrument, the organisation of Thematic Workshops on key topics shared by the partnership, the participation in 8 Peer Reviews (organised in an on-line mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the identification of good practices, a 2nd round of visit (in a face-to-face mode) for an in-depth analysis of the GPs, and a close relation with the Regional Stakeholders' Groups, the action plans will be developed focusing on the improvement of the identified challenges within each region.

During Phase 2, the project partners will closely monitor the implementation of the action plans and will regularly check the extent to which the measures described in the action plan are implemented on the ground, evaluating the results of these measures and gathering evidence of success to be reported to the programme. During Phase 2 the project partners will continue to learn from each other and will exchange and build on the success achieved or on the difficulties encountered.

3. Policy context

3.1. The policy instrument



The 2014-2020 Regional Operational Programme – Priority Axis 1 “Promoting technology transfer” was initially selected by NW RDA as the policy instrument to be improved within the IMPROVE project. However, two important aspects motivate the need for change:

- **A different EU set-up:** The new multiannual framework (2021-2027) being prepared at the national level, in line with EU’s priorities;
- **A different governance mechanism:** The new role that NW RDA has in the governance of the policy instrument – that of MA for the new ROP 2021-2027 for the North-West region.

In this context, there is, however, a great potential for synergies and continuation of the work done so far in the IMPROVE project, given that the new Priority Axis 1 is similar in terms of target groups, but with a larger scope and wider objectives: *PA1 – A region competitive through innovation, digitalization and dynamic enterprises.*

Therefore, it is a learning opportunity for NW RDA in terms of **identifying what works best and how to overcome challenges in the design, governance and implementation of similar actions** in other partner regions and what could be transferred and adopted in order to improve policies for innovation support and competitiveness at the regional level.

With the Smart Specialization Strategy of NW region (RIS3) for 2021-2027 being finalized, and the great responsibility that the new MA role poses in terms of ability to influence policies in the RDI field, there is an **additional need to explore and learn as much as possible on how to better address the competitive sectors, how to design and implement the calls and interventions, with the final goal of strengthening the maturity of the regional innovation ecosystem.**

As such, both the ROP P1 2021-2027 and the RIS3 2021-2027 are targeted by the Action Plan.

3.2. Main challenges or areas of improvement

(Details about regional barriers and challenges. Key stakeholders involved. Information updated from the Peer-review report.)



Despite the improvements in the innovation performance and degree of cooperation throughout the 2014-2020 period, some of the initial challenges in mobilizing the regional ecosystem persist, while other challenges have emerged now that the ROP has been regionalized.

As such, building on the Peer Review Report, the following top challenges require further action in the 2021-2027 period:

- **The need to develop tools and activities that help measure the impact of ROP NW 2021-2027 Priority 1.**

The current lack of monitoring and assessment of the RIS3 leads to a lack of vision in terms of the functioning and impact of ongoing initiatives, as well as a lack of foresight in the development of future actions. As indicated in the Peer Review Report, the development of a tool able to collect and analyse facts and data would help with the effectiveness of the actions developed and inform potential amendments to the existing and future policies, as well as to guarantee the transparency and proper implementation of the ROP and the development of the RIS3 strategy through the participatory engagement of the regional R&D actors.

- **The need to tailor instruments for different TRL levels, as well as for the various stages of business development, while taking into account territorial specificities.**

While the policy instrument (ROP P1 2021-2027) can mostly provide financial support to the regional innovation actors, other types of support are equally needed and expected by target groups and stakeholders. In addition, tailored instruments for companies in different stages of their innovation maturity and development from a business perspective are needed, in order to facilitate the effective use and capitalization of the monetary support, finally helping the ecosystem increase its

performance on multiple levels (internationalisation, cooperation, technology transfer, network building and access to new resources and opportunities, etc.).

This is also closely related to governance – strengthened dialogue and interaction between SMEs and other innovation stakeholders and the MA and RIS3 management team would help better tailor calls for projects and types of actions supported in a coherent and predictable way.

- **The challenge of balancing the top down and bottom-up approaches, through EDP, in order to boost dialogue among regional stakeholders as key factor for improving the innovation ecosystem.**

The implementation and coordination of research and innovation support policies should therefore be ensured, through a governance mechanism that allows effective dialogue, co-creation and knowledge sharing, at three levels: strategic, technical, and bottom-up. At the moment, the INNO platform aims to gather multiple actors of the regional innovation ecosystem in the same virtual space, to provide resources and to connect stakeholders in an easy and intuitive way. Although in an incipient phase, the platform is the one stop shop for RIS3 and innovation support of NW RDA, therefore it could be further equipped with additional features (such as dashboards and monitoring tools) in order to increase the visibility of the ecosystem as a whole.

3.3. Identification of best practices relevant for the Policy Instrument

(Indicate the GPs from other partners' region identify as more relevant for your Policy Instrument, based on the 2nd round of in-depth analysis. Please fulfil as many tables as needed.)



| | |
|--|--|
| NAME OF THE GP | Smart Specialization Monitoring Tool |
| OWNER | Extremadura, Spain |
| DESCRIPTION | The RIS3 Monitoring System integrates external and internal data on the R&D&I activities of all the agents of the innovation system, allowing, through interactive visualisations and full access to the data, to carry out an in-depth exploration of the ecosystem, to analyse and better understand the R&D&I activities of all actors and the evolution of the regional smart specialisation pattern. |
| TRANSFERABILITY ASPECTS TO THE REGION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This GP example responds directly to the first challenge identified (i.e. lack of monitoring and assessment tools related to RIS3 implementation). • Such a tool would immediately create important synergies with the existing INNO platform, developed by the NW RDA to promote and connect stakeholders / initiatives under RIS3. • Also, it would allow for better planning based on facts and data, increasing the agency's ability to respond to better understand the market and trends. • Finally, it has a high transferability potential, although specific operational aspects should be assessed more in-depth. |

| | |
|--|---|
| NAME OF THE GP | Management of the EDP at the S3 priority level through the setting up of steering committees |
| OWNER | Centre, France |
| DESCRIPTION | <p>The steering committees mobilize the regional innovation ecosystem around a strategy designed and implemented in a shared manner within each RIS3 priority.</p> <p>Since 2014, each RIS3 priority was steered by a team made of an industrialist (pilot role) and a figure from public research (co-pilot). There was no funding for, and no institutionalization of that function. The approach was essentially based on the legitimacy and capacities of these individuals to play the role expert and to incarnate the ecosystem of the priority in the recommendations they made towards the steering committee of the RIS3.</p> |
| TRANSFERABILITY ASPECTS TO THE REGION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This GP directly responds to the challenges related to the limited coordination at the RIS3 priority level (governance) and to the need to better adapt instruments to company needs. • While some organisations that are part of the working groups can mobilize change at the regional innovation ecosystem level, their role is rather informal in relation to the RIS3. • There is a clear need to appoint sectoral representatives that would steer the discussion and bridge the existing dialogue gap between the MA and the market. • The novelty element for the NW region and the similarities in terms of governance structures increased its attractiveness as an example to follow. |

4. Action Plan

4.1. General description



(General explanation about the actions to be implemented, in line with the lessons learned from the project. Specify the name and number of actions.)

The proposed actions aim to facilitate dialogue, cooperation and to promote efficiency in the regional innovation ecosystem of the NW region. As a response to the main challenges identified and building on the best practices from Centre-Val de Loire and Extremadura, two actions are foreseen: (1) one covering the way RIS3 priorities are managed, attracting market know-how and bridging the gap between existing needs and opportunities and strategic priorities of the NW RDA, and (2) one covering the monitoring of existing initiatives in RIS3 priorities. These actions would enable:

- Better dialogue between stakeholders
- Mapping and understanding of the RDI landscape in the region, beyond statistical indicators
- Enhanced coordination at the RIS3 priority level and at the strategy as a whole
- Data-driven decision-making
- Promotion of initiatives at the ecosystem level, with RIS3 achievements acting as a branding element for the NW region

4.2. Action 1

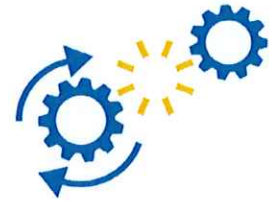
4.2.1. Summary of the action

| Context of the Action Plan | | Instrument to be improved | Monitoring and assessment of RIS3 |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Policy instrument tackled | | Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS3) and ROP NW 2021-2027 P1 | |
| Name of the ACTION 1 | | Priority | |
| Creation of a monitoring and assessment tool for RIS3 | | (x) | High |
| | | | Medium |
| | | | Low |
| Activities | Funding Sources | Costs | 2022 |
| | | | Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 |
| 1 Elaboration of a guiding document establishing the objectives and mechanisms for monitoring and assessment (what to monitor, how to monitor, how to use the information retrieved from the monitoring). | | - | x |
| 2 Elaboration of a guiding document for the data collection and processing in order to facilitate data collection in a systematic way and based on a similar understanding of the sectors, priorities, technologies. | | - | x |
| 3 Appointment of a responsible team made up of both RIS3 department representatives and the MA, to bridge the link with ROP P1 implementation, on the one hand, and with the wider RDI community/ecosystem, on the other. | | - | x |
| 4 Design of an online tool, potentially integrated with the INNO platform. | | | x |
| 5 Preliminary promotion of the initiative, to identify relevant ways to collect data and involve stakeholders. | | | x x |
| Players involved | | Indicators/ Monitoring | |
| Responsible | Functions | Indicators | |
| A RIS3 department | Implementation and operationalization | 1 | Based on the short survey |
| | | | No |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|
| B | ROP NW Management Authority | Providing guidance and overseeing the process; generating inputs for feeding in with data for ROP P1 | <i>Based on the short survey</i> | |
| C | RIS3 Managing Committee | Providing guidance in terms of elements to be monitored and assessed; decision making together with the MA regarding the further steps to be taken, RDI stakeholders engagement | <i>Based on the short survey</i> | |

4.2. Relevance to the project

(Describe how this action derives from the project and in particular from the interregional exchange of experience. Where does the inspiration for this action come from?)



This action responds to the **need for better monitoring and assessment of RIS3 as a whole but also in relation to the ROP 2021-2027 Priority 1 implementation**. The need was highlighted as well by the Peer Review Report.

Additionally, there are several favourable conditions that would enhance the design and implementation of such a tool, including:

- RIS3 has a dedicated platform (i.e. the INNO platform described in section 3.2) aiming at connecting regional innovation ecosystem actors
- the significant IT development in the region in the past years (which would help find efficient and effective solutions to make it operational and user-friendly for multiple stakeholders),
- the innovative approaches taken by NW RDA in promoting RIS3
- the existing networks of regional RDI actors, with the NW RDA as facilitator

Having a one-stop-shop for RIS3 would be an important element that helps showcase and visualise in one place the (sometimes) disparate projects and initiatives that in fact contribute to RIS3 implementation. It would be a good start to promote and better valorise the existing regional resources and perhaps act as a branding element for the region. Additionally, not only ROP P1 2021-2027 contributes to RIS3 implementation, but there are multiple other funding sources and initiatives that can be showcased and connected in order to facilitate decision-making based on market understanding.

4.2.2. Nature of the Action

(Describe precisely the content of Action 1. What are the specific activities to be implemented?)

Building on the experience of Extremadura region, such a platform requires significant **data collection** effort, in a systematic manner, involving the entire RDI ecosystem in the region. This is a challenge, especially since RIS3 is not only supported through the



ROP P1 2021-2027, but also through research grants, scientific research, business RDI activity, collaborative projects funded through various sources (national, international).

Another challenge refers to relying on the regional actors to provide data and contribute to such a monitoring tool. As such, NW RDI would act as the regional enabler / orchestrator to facilitate the regular data collection process, through the established networks of relevant stakeholders. Connecting with business support groups, universities, research institutes, clusters and other umbrella organisations is already an ongoing and successful activity of the NW RDI (both the RIS3 department and the organisation as a whole), but this activity could be included on the agenda.

Therefore, the activities foreseen for this action refer to:

Activities to be implemented within the timeframe of the IMPROVE project, in order to ensure a realistic implementation:

- Elaboration of a guiding document establishing the objectives and mechanisms for monitoring and assessment (what to monitor, how to monitor, how to use the information retrieved from the monitoring).
- Elaboration of a guiding document for the data collection and processing in order to facilitate data collection in a systematic way and based on a similar understanding of the sectors, priorities, technologies.
- Appointment of a responsible team made up of both RIS3 department representatives and the MA, to bridge the link with ROP P1 implementation, on the one hand, and with the wider RDI community/ecosystem, on the other.
- Design of an online tool, potentially integrated with the INNO platform.
- Preliminary promotion of the initiative, to identify relevant ways to collect data and involve stakeholders.

Activities to be implemented beyond the IMPROVE project, to ensure implementation and achievement of tangible results:

- Implementation of the online tool.



- Operationalization of the tool – feeding with data, promotion of the initiative, embedding it as a regional promotion tool for the innovation activity.

4.2.3. Stakeholders involved

(Indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the implementation of Action 1 and explain their role)

This action is mainly focused on the internal teams of the NW RDA – both the RIS3 department and the MA and Managing Committee of RIS3. However, regional stakeholders, such as members of the EDP working groups could be involved on behalf of RIS3 sectors in order to provide inputs and insights related to: initiatives coming from the market that are in line with RIS3 objectives, providing data, promoting and disseminating the results of the regular monitoring to other interested groups (national or international networks, wider public etc.).

4.2.4. Timeframe

(Specify the timing envisaged for action 1)

July 2022-July 2023

4.2.5. Cost and funding sources

(Estimate the costs related to the implementation of action 1 and how it will be financed. Is it through the policy instrument(s) indicated in Point 3?)

EUR 200,000 – could be funded through ROP P1 2021-2027

4.2.6. Monitoring of the activities

(Indicate how the activities will be monitored during Phase 2.)

The monitoring of the activities will be conducted based on a survey with yes/no questions, highlighting the progress towards the goal of each activity. The questions are displayed in second-level bullet points.

- Elaboration of a guiding document establishing the objectives and mechanisms for monitoring and assessment (what to monitor, how to monitor, how to use the information retrieved from the monitoring)

- Has the guiding document been prepared (yes/no)?
 - Does it contain all the necessary components to allow for the proper understanding of the scope (yes/no)?
- Elaboration of a guiding document for the data collection and processing in order to facilitate data collection in a systematic way and based on a similar understanding of the sectors, priorities, technologies.
 - Has the guiding document been prepared (yes/no)?
 - Does it contain all the necessary components to allow for the proper understanding of the scope (yes/no)?
- Appointment of a responsible team made up of both RIS3 department representatives and the MA, to bridge the link with ROP P1 implementation, on the one hand, and with the wider RDI community/ecosystem, on the other.
 - Has the team been assigned (yes/no)?
 - Does the team consist of the relevant members in order to cover the envisaged scope (yes/no)?
- Design of an online tool, potentially integrated with the INNO platform.
 - Has the platform concept been prepared and approved (yes/no)?
 - Have the technical specifications been established (yes/no)?
- Preliminary promotion of the initiative, to identify relevant ways to collect data and involve stakeholders.
 - Has the communication strategy been established (yes/no)?
 - Have stakeholders been informed about the initiative and feedback collected (yes/no)?

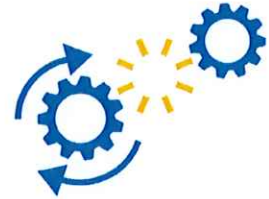
4.3. Action 2

4.3.1. Summary of the action

| Context of the Action Plan | Instrument to be improved | Governance of RIS3 | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--------|------|----|----|------------|------|----|----|----|---------------------------|
| | Policy instrument tackled | RIS3 and ROP NW 2021-2027 P1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Name of the ACTION 2 | | Priority | (x) | | | | High | | | | | |
| Appointment of sectoral steering committees at the RIS3 priority level | | | Medium | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | Low | | | | | | | | | |
| Activities | | Funding Sources | Costs | 2022 | | | | 2023 | | | | |
| 1 | Establishing the profile of the steering committee members (by the RIS3 department) | | - | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | |
| 2 | Establishment of the roles and responsibilities – goals, milestones, performance measurement | | - | | | x | | | | | | |
| 3 | Recruitment of the steering committee members | | - | | | | | x | | | | |
| 4 | Operationalization of the steering committees | | | | | | | | x | | x | |
| Players Involved | | Indicators/ Monitoring | | | | | | | | | | |
| Responsible | | Functions | | | | | Indicators | | | | | |
| A | RIS3 department | Launching calls for applicants, operationalization | | | | | 1 | | | | | Based on the short survey |
| B | RIS3 Managing Committee | Definition of roles, structure and mission | | | | | | | | | | Based on the short survey |
| C | RIS3 Scientific Committee | Operational role | | | | | | | | | | Based on the short survey |

4.3.2. Relevance to the project

(Describe how this action derives from the project and in particular from the interregional exchange of experience. Where does the inspiration for this action come from?)



This action responds to two challenges identified at the regional level, also highlighted in the Peer Review report:

- The need for improved coordination at the RIS3 level, from a strategic, technical and bottom-up point of view
- The need for better adapting support measures to beneficiaries and the stage of development in which they are

These two needs could be addressed by a **steering committee structure at the RIS3 priority level**, taking a more active role in mobilizing the innovation ecosystem actors, on the one hand, and the strategic and technical alignment, on the other.

At the moment, in North-West region, RIS3 is governed by a Managing Committee, comprising high-level representatives of the regional business environment, academia, R&D institutions, innovation ecosystem multipliers as well as various other national level representatives. This structure has an advisory role in the implementation and monitoring of RIS3. It is complemented by a Scientific Committee, which ensures the connection with European networks that could bring value added to RIS3 implementation. For each specialization domain, there is a Working Group appointed, based on the quadruple helix model, with the role of supporting and developing the EDP, as well as of developing project ideas (pilots, cooperation, etc.). These structures are assisted by the RIS3 management team.

However, there is no specific "leadership" structure around the working groups or around the RIS3 strategic priorities, that would have the **leading role in generating directions of development or prioritization of niches over a certain period of time**. While some organisations that are part of the working groups can mobilize change at the regional innovation ecosystem level, their role is rather informal in

relation to the RIS3. Hence, they cannot develop, for example, development scenarios for the priority domain, or mobilize action around specific niches.

4.3.3. Nature of the Action

(Describe precisely the content of Action 1. What are the specific activities to be implemented?)

The experience of Centre-Val de Loire has provided a few interesting aspects, that respond to the identified challenges in our region, as well as provide guidelines on potential future steps.

As such, the main idea of the Action is **to appoint a steering committee structure at the RIS3 priority level**, that would have a practical role in bridging the NW RDA and the regional innovation ecosystem actors, on the one hand, and in providing advice on potential future actions to be prioritized within the priority in order to properly capitalize on the existing market trends, funding opportunities, actors' interests and needs.

In the Centre-Val de Loire case, some of the steering committee leaders were cluster managers – this could be an asset to be further exploited in the NW Region as well, given the tradition, strength and know-how that they developed across time.

Specific activities proposed are:

- Establishing the profile of the steering committee members (by the RIS3 department)
- Establishment of the roles and responsibilities – goals, milestones, performance measurement
- Recruitment of the steering committee members
- Operationalization of the steering committees

4.3.4. Stakeholders involved

(Indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the implementation of Action X and explain their role)

This action should be implemented by the NW RDA –the RIS3 department. Similar to Action 1, regional stakeholders, such as members of the EDP working groups could be involved on behalf of RIS3 sectors as a potential candidates' pool for the steering

committee. All regional innovation ecosystem actors could be targeted, based on a clear selection criteria.

4.3.5. Timeframe

(Specify the timing envisaged for action X)

July 2022-July 2023

4.3.6. Cost and funding sources

(Estimate the costs related to the implementation of action X and how it will be financed. Is it through the policy instrument(s) indicated in Point 3?)

Remuneration according to official recruitment policies.

4.3.7. Monitoring of the activities

(Indicate how the activities will be monitored during Phase 2.)

The monitoring of the activities will be conducted based on a survey with yes/no questions, highlighting the progress towards the goal of each activity. The questions are displayed in second-level bullet points.

- Establishing the profile of the steering committee members (by the RIS3 department)
 - Profile established (yes/no)
- Establishment of the roles and responsibilities – goals, milestones, performance measurement
 - Roles and responsibilities established (yes/no)
 - Goals, milestones, performance measurement established (yes/no)
- Recruitment of the steering committee members
 - Application form (yes/no)
 - Application launched (yes/no)
 - Selection procedure established (yes/no)
 - Interviews done (yes/no)
 - Selection of relevant candidates (yes/no)
- Operationalization of the steering committees
 - First meeting of the steering committees conducted (yes/no)



| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Date: | 16.06.2022 |
| Signature: | |
| Function: | Livia Sanda Cătană-Interim General Director |
| Organisation: | North-West Regional Development Agency |
| Stamp of the organisation: |   |