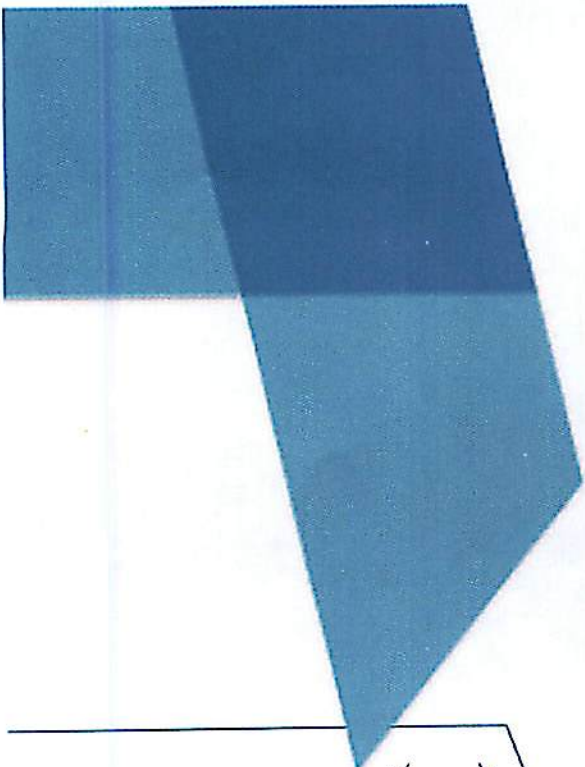


West Midlands

ACTION PLAN



INTRA
Interreg Europe

 European Union
European Regional
Development Fund


Coventry
University
Enterprises Limited

INTRA
Internationalisation of regional SMEs

This document has been prepared by the INTRA consortium within the framework of the exchange of experiences activities. Therefore, it only reflects the authors' views and the programme authorities are not liable for any use that may be made of the information



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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Project: INTRA (PGI01464)

Partner organisation: Coventry University Enterprises Limited

Other partner organisations involved: Coventry City Council

Country: United Kingdom

NUTS2 region: Coventry & Warwickshire

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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 addressed: The European Structural and Investment Funds
2014 to 2020**

Coventry and Warwickshire European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (ESIF)



2. INTRODUCTION

1. INTRA Project: Internationalisation of regional SMEs

INTRA project focuses on the role of public authorities in creating internationalisation services to support the competitiveness of the regional economies and thus contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy.

Developed by the project partners, it builds on internationalisation research findings as well as highlights the importance of regional quadruple helix partnerships to bring together universities, business, civil society and local authorities as the main stakeholders in research and design of new internationalisation policy models, wider acceptance of the good practices identified within the INTRA regions and preparation of new project proposals to be funded under the respective national Cohesion policy 2014 - 2020.

Figure 1: INTRA regions



INTRA partners exchange, explore and disseminate good practices in ways to promote internationalisation and improve competitiveness of the respective regions involved. INTRA has 6 partners from six different EU28 member states: Maribor Development Agency (SI), Regional Agency for entrepreneurship and innovations – Varna (BG), Foundation FUNDECYT Scientific and Technological Park of Extremadura (ES), University of Algarve (PT), Coventry University Enterprises Limited (UK), CAPITANK (IT) and is supported by the Managing Authorities for ERDF and represent the active stakeholders in internationalization.



INTRA PROJECT PARTNERS



Lead Partner - Maribor Development Agency



PP2 Regional agency for entrepreneurship and innovations - Varna (RAPIV)



PP3 Foundation FUNDECYT Scientific and Technological Park of Extremadura (FUNDECYT-PCTEX)



PP4 University of Algarve

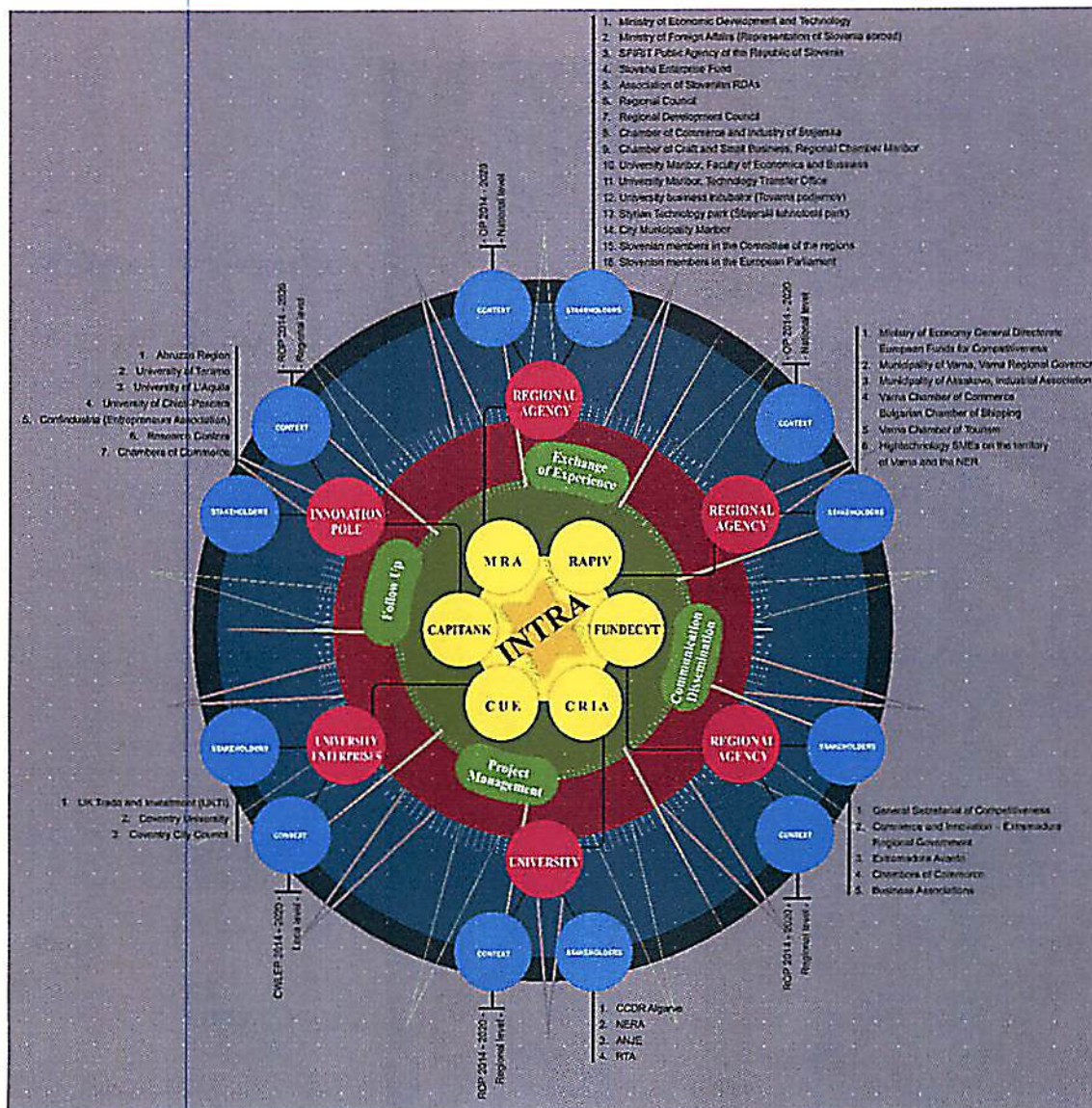


PP5 Coventry University Enterprises Ltd



PP6 CAPITANK - Chemical and Pharmaceutical Innovation - (Limited Liability Consortium)

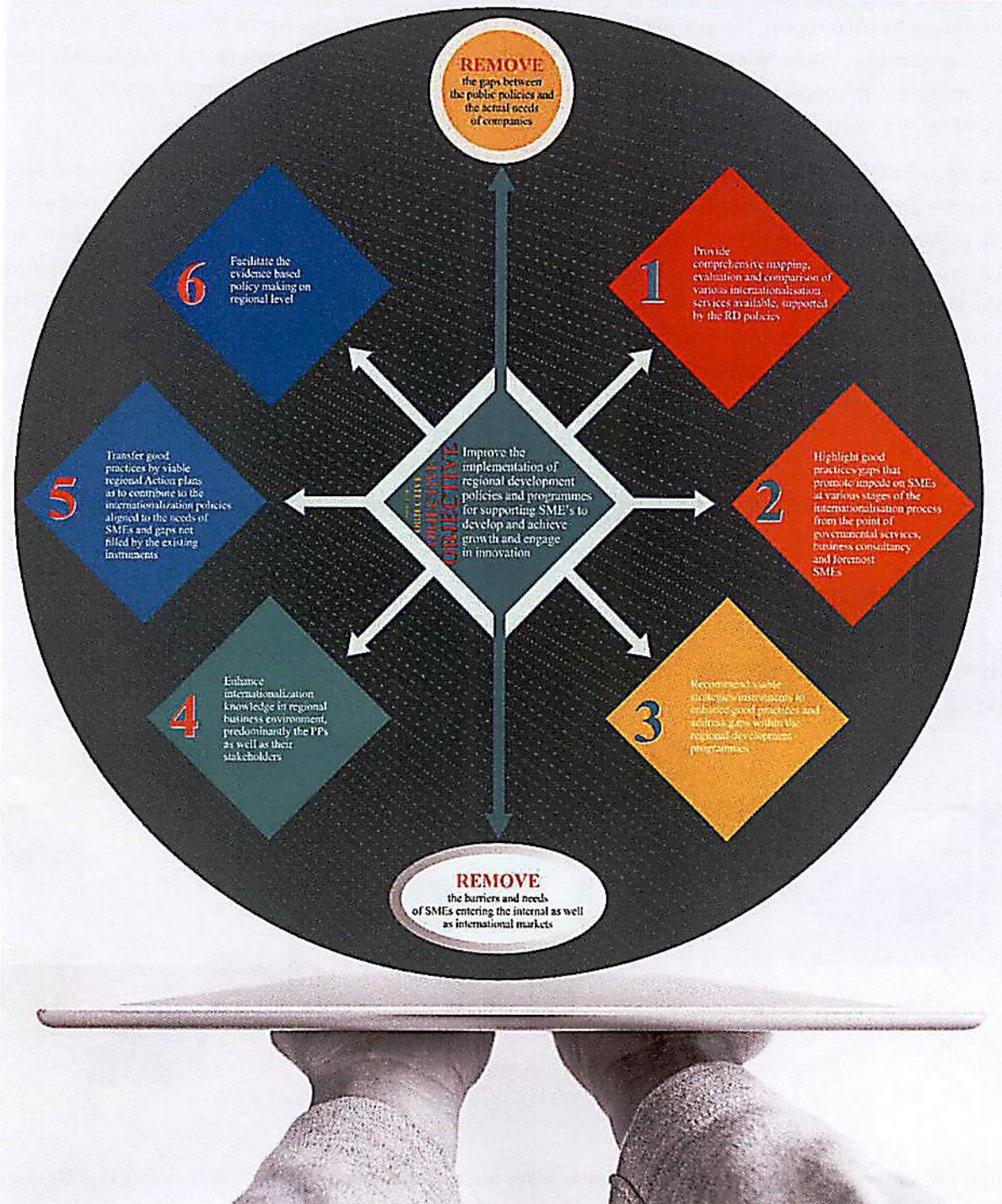
Figure 2: INTRA stakeholders



The objectives of INTRA are to provide comprehensive mapping, evaluation and benchmarking of various internationalisation services available across the regions, highlight good practices/gaps that promote/impede on SMEs at various stages of the internationalisation process.

Upon the selection of good practices, the viable strategies/instruments to enhance good practices and address gaps within the regional development programmes were elaborated and described in the Policy recommendations and will be implemented in the regional Action plans as to contribute to the internationalisation policies aligned to the needs of SMEs and gaps not filled by the existing instruments.

Figure 3: INTRA objectives

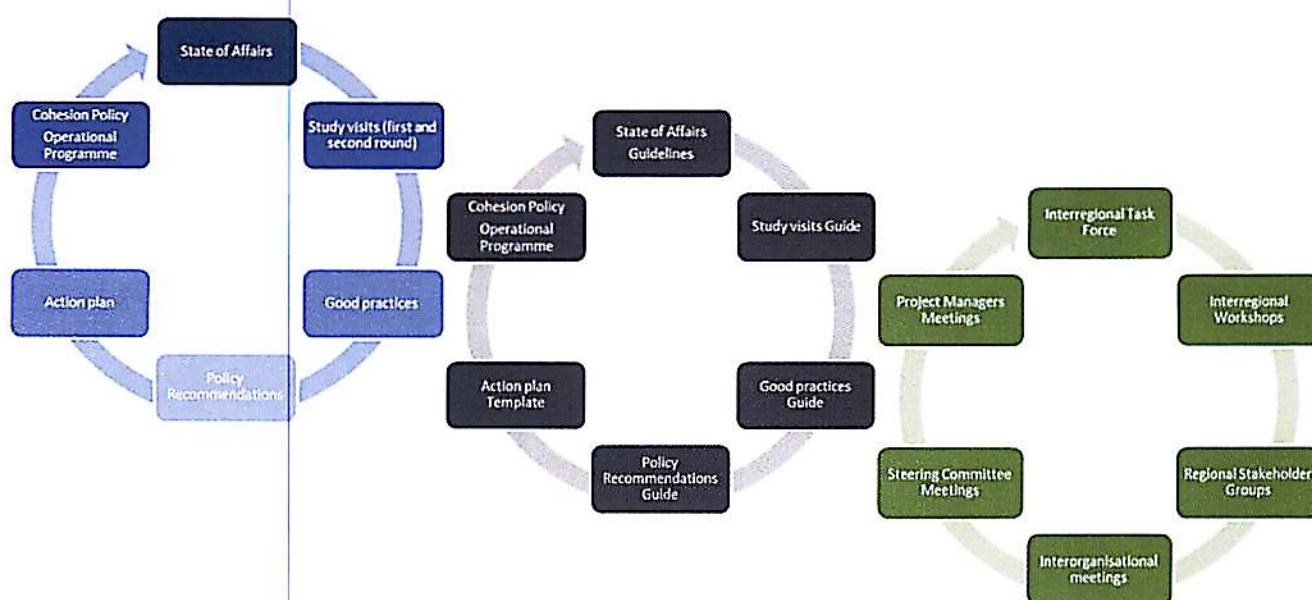


2.2 Regional Action plans

Produced by each region, the action plan is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the cooperation 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 the Knowledge Sharing Strategy, which was prepared to facilitate a process of knowledge transfer and dialogue between internal and external stakeholders, as well as facilitate active involvement of regional stakeholders (meetings, workshops, interviews), resulting in solutions that contribute to internationalisation of regional SMEs within each of project partner regions, and beyond. INTRA followed the logic described in the INTRA Knowledge Sharing Cycle as depicted in Figure 4: circle 1 represent the main deliverables; circle 2 the supporting documents for the facilitation of the process; circle 3 the forms of cooperation within INTRA project.

Figure 4: INTRA Knowledge Sharing Cycles



In terms of results, cooperation can influence policy instruments in various ways and may take different forms (see figure 5 below), which can sometimes be interconnected.

Figure 5: Type of policy Improvements

Type 1: implementation of new projects

Type 1 implies that the policy instrument provides funding as is the case with Structural Funds programmes. Thanks to interregional cooperation, managing authorities and other relevant bodies can find inspiration in other regions and import new projects to be financed within their programmes. This type of impact requires the availability of funding in the programme.



Type 2: change in the management of the policy instrument

Interregional cooperation can also influence the way policy instruments are managed.

New approaches can be adopted thanks to lessons learnt in other regions. For instance, a new methodology for monitoring or evaluating a measure can be developed within the policy instrument. A managing authority or any other relevant body can also improve the way thematic calls are organised or the way projects are selected. The governance of the programme may also refer to the way environmental issues are integrated into the different measures of the operational programmes.



Type 3: change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument

The third type is the most challenging since it requires a change in the operational programme. To integrate the lessons learnt from the cooperation, some managing authorities can modify existing measures or even create new measures in their programme.



During the 2nd Phase of INTRA Project (starting April 2019 - March 2021) the project partners will closely monitor the implementation of action plan, 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 on to the programme. During the 2nd phase 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. Description of the West Midlands region

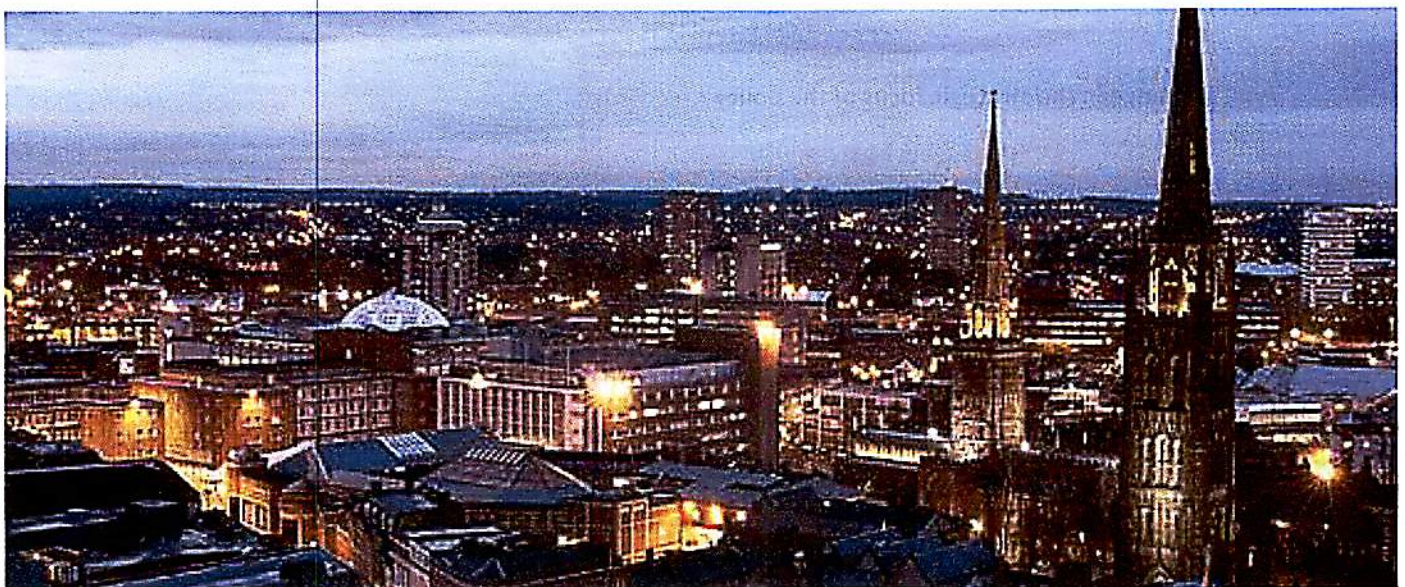
3.1 Regions in United Kingdom

Figure 6: English regions NUTS II (West Midlands)

The West Midlands region (NUTS II) is one of the 9 regions in England. The region is considered a central Hub being centrally situated in England, it is very well connected by rail, road and air transportation. Most places in England are less than a couple of hours away and make the region very accessible.

The West Midlands region covers a total area of 13000 km² and has a population of 5.8Mio inhabitants (ONS 2016 estimation).

The region is quite geographically diverse including a combination of rural and urban areas. It is comprised of the United Kingdom second largest city, Birmingham. Its municipality includes the metropolitan districts of Wolverhampton, Dudley, Solihull, Sandwell and Walsall. This area is surrounded by the more rural counties of Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, and Shropshire, plus the metropolitan district of Coventry.



3.2 Coventry and Warwickshire Internationalisation environment

In 2017 CUE conducted an SME survey and several interviews with relevant stakeholders supporting SME internationalisation. As a result of this analysis, key findings emerged in terms of barriers, drivers for SMEs internationalisation and gaps to be further addressed. These findings are summarised below.

From the SMEs viewpoint:

The West Midlands region is composed for 98% of micro SMEs and very small SMEs. The nature of these companies mean that they would lack resources both financial and human to dedicate to potential internationalisation opportunities.

Companies tend to have been accessing initial information through their local chambers of commerce or the UK Department for international Trade (DIT).

Micro SMEs, tend to feel they are not supported enough and do not have the time to be looking for the information. Therefore it is crucial to them to be able to access the right support. More effort needs to be taken towards making the information very clear, concise and available to them. Companies tend to not be aware of the local schemes and the initiatives that could benefit them.

Funding is an important factor to support companies with their initial market research and in particular to fund their trade missions, attendance to exhibitions or fairs for example. This has been described as a first step in their internationalisation journey.

Even though most companies declared having an international strategy in place, it seems the conversion into real implementation is only due to their own knowledge and efforts. They have identified that in order to make their company competitive they need to access new markets but they seem to have difficulties finding the right person to talk to who can either inform them or act as a trusted representative in the market they are interested to penetrate.

They are motivated by the potential growth, the gain in market size and profit that internationalisation would mean. They can voice their desire and attempts to internationalise though they lack the confidence and the knowledge of how to do so. The insufficiency of information, their shortage of skills and lack of experience in internationalisation, often means they don't address the correct support agency.

From the support providers' viewpoint:

The region has sufficient support mechanisms, and provide adequate financial support to initiate companies' internationalisation first steps.

SMEs lack the time and staff to dedicate to learn the internationalisation process and rely on support providers to give them bespoke advices, normally over a sustained period of time. It becomes difficult for support providers to satisfy needs of every SMEs despite the wish to do so.



Regional stakeholders have the expertise, capacity and knowledge to support SMEs, but it is not always easy for providers to reach every one of them.

SMEs need to be supported along their customer journey, without feeling the administration burden, or feeling like they are sent from one agency to another. There is a need for the basic SME support packages and initiatives to all include the importance of internationalisation as an initial point of support by making companies aware of their international potential.

4. Policy tackled



<i>Table 1: The European Structural and Investment Funds 2014 to 2020 Coventry and Warwickshire European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (ESIF)</i>	
Policy/Strategy	European Structural and Investment Funds 2014 to 2020 Coventry and Warwickshire European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (ESIF)
Brief Description	Within Coventry and Warwickshire European Structural and Investment Strategy under the priority 3: "Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs)" several action to support internationalisation were included. The UK Government's 'Plan for Growth' recognises the importance of a competitive SME base to the global competitiveness of the overall UK economy, and identifies a key ambition to make the UK one of the best places in Europe to start, finance and grow a business (Policy: Making it easier to set up and grow a business). In order to achieve this, the Government's plans focus in particular on



	<p>measures to support SMEs in accessing the finance they need, and in exploiting new global export markets (Policy: Increasing the UK's exports and attracting inward investment). These activities focus particularly but are not limited to:</p> <p>Additional promotional, marketing and engagement activities to increase the awareness of exporting and its benefits amongst potential exporters.</p> <p>Additional support for new and existing exporters to exploit overseas markets (e.g. capacity to expand, management capability and skills training - 'pre export' support and export support)</p> <p>Access to dedicated sector specific (Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering; Digital Technologies) international trade support. A collaborative programme that will provide bespoke international trade advice for key sectors or fund trade missions to target markets.</p>
Managing Entity	The ESIF is managed by the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership led by Coventry City Council
Scope	Regional/local
Target group	SMEs
Budget Available	Priority 3: 21 930 915 €
Indicators	<p>Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support</p> <p>Number of enterprises receiving grants</p> <p>Number of enterprises receiving financial support other than grants</p> <p>Number of enterprises receiving information, diagnostic and brokerage</p>



4.1 Policy Recommendations (EU and West Midlands specific)

As the result of the initial work carried out through the exchange of experience with the INTRA partners but also at regional and organizational level, we will see in this section that we discern 2 levels of recommendations: the EU policy makers' level and regional stakeholders' level.



Recommendations for the EU level:

This set of recommendations is targeting the EU level as they would be important while policy makers are setting up their EU strategy. In this INTRA context, the next operational programme of each members' state as well as managing authorities, will develop their priorities, economic strategy to respond to the EU strategies and priorities, therefore the following EU recommendations are important:

1. Specific EU internationalisation support: SME need to be supported for internationalisation at EU level through a standard mechanism. Enterprise Europe Network, which is the official EC mechanism to support enterprises should focus also on providing internationalisation support to entry level SMEs. This would allow all EU SMEs to be given a minimum support level despite the national or regional providers.
2. The focus of future programming period 2021-2027, should include provision after Brexit on how SMEs are able to access to EU and non EU markets. The EU single market has been rightfully the focus, but in current event, it seems even more relevant that support for EU SMEs to enter non-EU market is given.

Recommendations for the local level:

Based on the INTRA findings and the views of the regional stakeholders few recommendations should be followed to improve the regional SMEs international support.

It is clear that the main SMEs internationalisation support providers were very much agreeing to the results. Despite having interviewed stakeholders from different types of organisation, it was obvious that their aim is one: boosting regional growth by supporting SMEs become more competitive and internationalisation ready.

1. **Work together:** the regional stakeholders are well aware that they need to work closely together to make sure that SMEs receive the most adequate support.
2. **Precise information:** more work needs to be done to simplify the information presented to SMEs but also to make internationalisation mainstream, the message in the region needs to be consistent as well as out there.
3. **Reduce administration:** SMEs need to be supported along their customer journey, without feeling the administration burden, or feeling like they are sent from one agency to another
4. **Enhanced support:** by working together, support providers will be able to give strategic advices with an appropriate initial diagnostic, customise the support according to the SMEs internationalisation experience and meet the expectations of companies.
5. **Business support infrastructure:** it is important that national governments invest in the business support infrastructure and continue to build capacity of business support providers. This would allow them to provide the level and depth of support that SMEs will require to diversify, adapt to economic and political change at both the EU and global levels, and break into new international markets.

5. Good Practices observed: transformative potentials

In the context of Interreg Europe Project INTRA, a good practice is a national, regional or local initiative aimed at supporting SMEs to internationalise.

It can be, for example, a project, a process, a policy or a technique which has some evidence of success in reaching its objectives. Moreover, a good practice has the potential to be transferred to other geographic areas through regional strategy and policy. The total number of 98 good practices were listed under the project INTRA.

In the whole phase 1 the selection, evaluation and validation process was done that resulted in 84 listed good practices.

The whole process is depicted in the Figure 8. The 84 good practices can be observed at:

www.interreg.europa.eu/intra project website.

Good practices observed have been collected in the *Good Practice Guide on SME Internationalisation*.

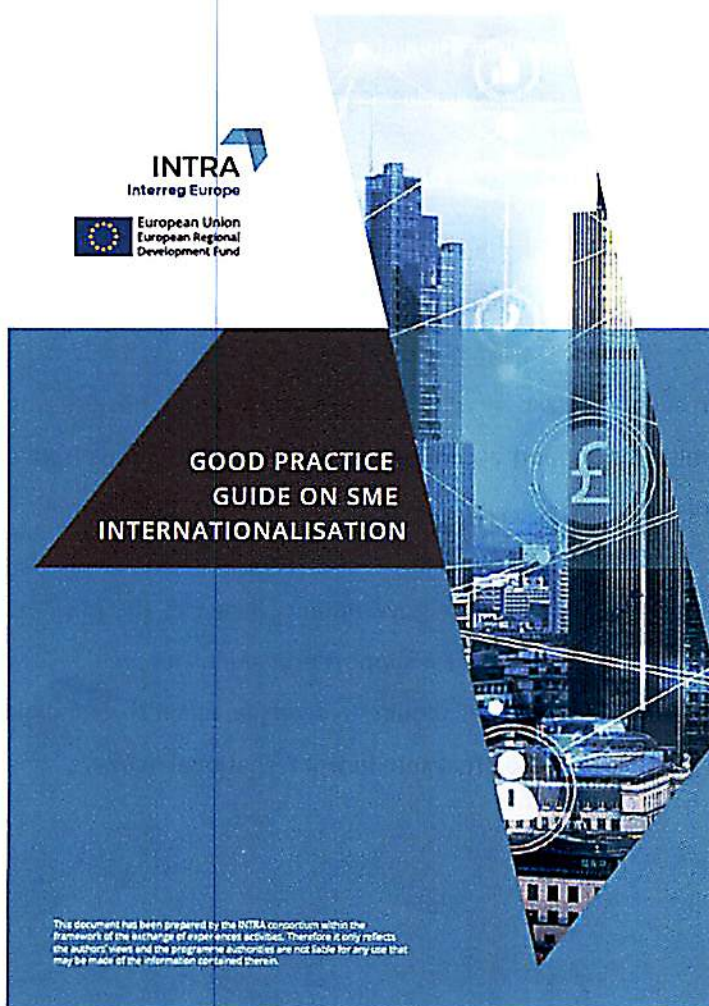
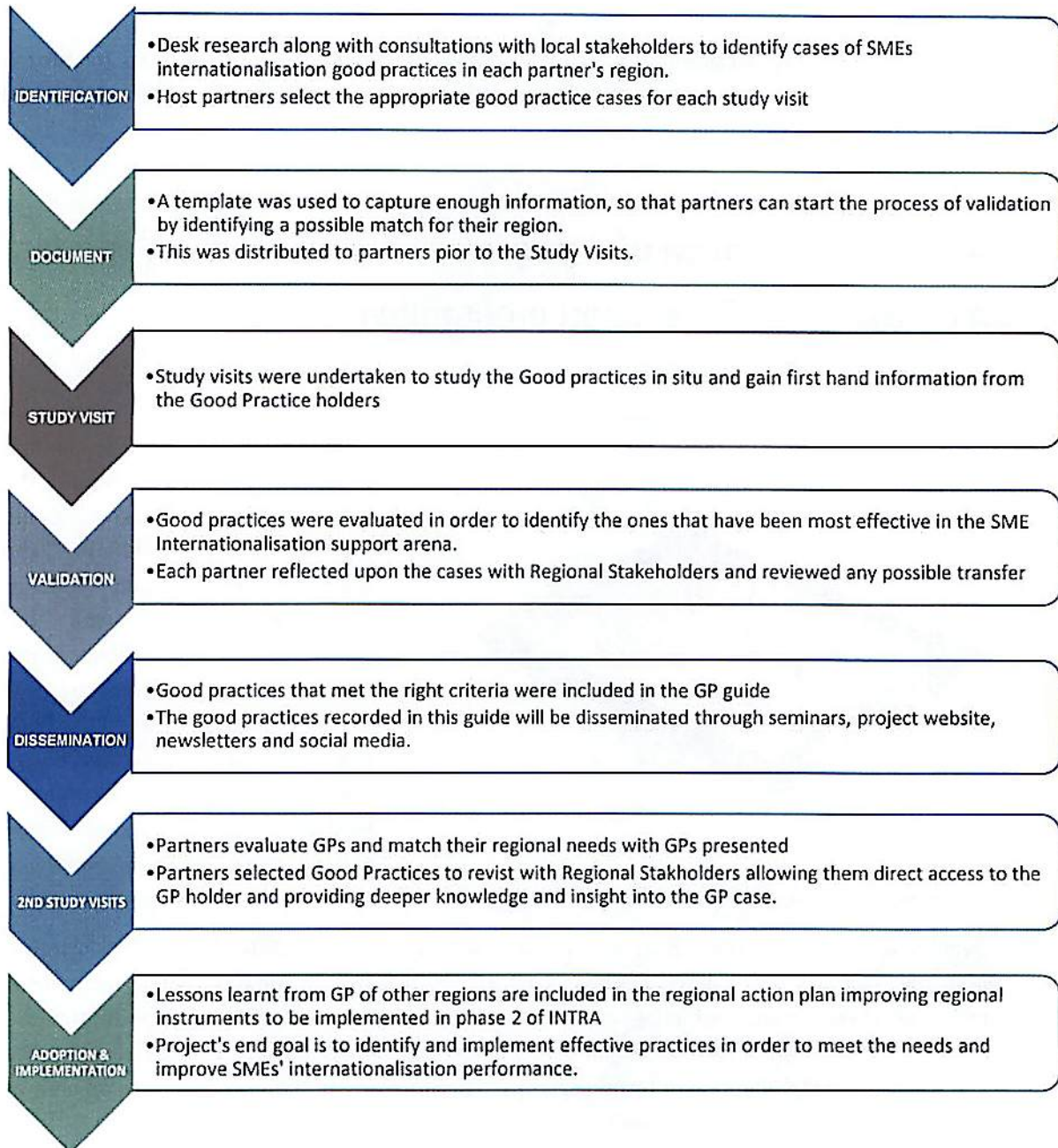


Figure 7: Good Practice Guide on SME Internationalisation.

Figure 8: Good practice process within INTRA project



5.1 Good practices: Transferability Elements

Good Practices that are the basis for the preparation of action to be implemented in the Phase 2 of the Project INTRA in West Midlands (NUTS II) are those observed in the first and second round of study visit in Extremadura (Spain).

The INTRA project with its facilitation of exchange of experience will serve as the basis for further development of internationalisation services in the region, organising collaboration among different institutions in the region, providing SMEs services.

6. ACTION: Integration of digital internationalisation support in existing ERDF SMEs support programmes

6.1 Background



While a great deal of discussions and exchange occurred through the INTRA interregional tasks force and working group meetings, the regional steering group meetings and the meetings with the stakeholders while attending the first and second round of study visits in Extremadura (Spain), 2 good practices were identified with elements to be transferred from the learning of Digital Expande, from Badajoz, Spain and the International

Voucher scheme that was presented in Algarve, Portugal.

The Coventry and Warwickshire (C&W) region, has been active in the digital field as an historical viewpoint. The West Midlands in large, has been known for being a hub for the video games industry, as an example and always viewed technology as an enabler. Despite recognising the importance of this, the region has not specifically addressed the gap that is even more important between the current SMEs base, and the need of the adoption of technologies in their processes, in their product development or in the opportunity in accessing new markets.

What is specific to the UK, is that the UK Department for International Trade- DIT, is the official national body which is in charge of supporting internationalisation for companies. For example, they have been active in supporting companies to develop their e-commerce. A specific international trade advisor specialising in e-commerce has been able to support companies in the past.

As mentioned in the recommendations for the region, DIT and regional intermediaries do not always work together and as a result, companies get lost in the support they could receive. The difficulty we are

faced with is for companies to receive support from the start which will not only strengthen their digital skills but with the aim to be competing internationally (almost a 2 in 1 approach).

Through the review of the INTRA good practices and at the second round of study visit in June 2018 with discussions around the differences offered by our colleagues from Digital Expande, it became clear that SMEs in our region, were not always ready to internationalise and were not equipped with the right basis.

SMEs are not at the right level and do not spend enough effort in understanding that technology can not only improve their current processes and products but it can also be a great opportunity in having the right “electronic window” to the world. SMEs tend to think about having an online presence but they would not have the right skills or frame of mind to be able to create an international opportunity through this channel. It is merely enough to have a website and a lot of consideration should be taken care of when thinking of a digital international strategy.

The main idea is to improve the current offering of current ERDF programmes supporting SMEs and making this a transversal support that could be delivered under the form of an “internationalisation voucher” similarly as the initiative seen in Faro on 26-27th September 2017.

Thanks to the discussion that occurred while visiting the Extremadura region in Spain, The INTRA second round of study visit allowed our representatives from the managing authority in Coventry and from the UK Department for International Trade (DIT) to participate and meet with the colleagues from Extremadura regional government, Extremadura Avante and their chamber of commerce on the 5th and 6th June 2018. A thorough discussion between stakeholders in both regions occurred and compared the initiatives that were ongoing. It became more important that not only new technologies were the focus of the SME support but also to present companies with a better digital marketing strategy.

In a matter of fact the current initiative from DIT in the west Midlands, with the international trade advisor in e-commerce, was already a good step to go into this direction but it did not offer companies the opportunity to understand how emerging and new technologies could be incorporated to improve their services and processes. This would in turn make them more competitive in an international market by also making sure that this was also reflected in their international digital strategy.

After further discussions at the regional stakeholders group meeting in Coventry on 19th September 2018, it was decided that this aspect of international digital strategy both in terms of accessing markets adequately but also for SMEs to understand the importance of incorporating technologies within their core processes was responding:

- To the needs of the SMEs becoming as a mean to be internationally competitive
- To the wish of business support providers to provide SMEs with a complete basic support package

Table 2: Interregional learning to improve the ESIF strategy implementation

<i>Challenge identified in the current ESIF</i>	<i>Good Practice identified to be transferred</i>	<i>What element was learnt from interregional exchanges</i>	<i>Improvement to be achieved</i>
SMEs have been given support but SMEs do not see the link with internationalisation readiness	Digital Xpande support Programme, Extramadura (SPAIN)	The programme focuses on using digital technologies to support the international positioning of SMEs in potential new markets by rising SMEs opportunities internationally	SMEs become more competitive internationally thanks to integrating digital technologies
Simplifying the process to allow business support providers to work together	Internationalisation voucher, Algarve, Portugal	This short term approach allows a very simplified process for SMEs. They have one voucher that can be used to support their internationalisation needs with different providers.	Business Support Providers will offer a complete package and work together to support SMEs. Their services will appear unified under one digital voucher.

6.2 Description of the Action

During the phase 1 of INTRA, CUE was in constant dialogue with Coventry City Council, DIT and C&W chambers of commerce who are key stakeholders in internationalisation support. All members of the stakeholders group participated either in the first or second round of study visits, and benefited from first hand discussions and exchanged of experiences with INTRA partners from all regions. After the regional stakeholders group meeting in Coventry on 19th September 2018, it was agreed that all regional ERDF support should incorporate and should offer to companies the possibility to receive digital support to make them internationalisation ready and should become part of the basic SMEs support package. The process of accessing this added support through the current programmes delivered under the ESIF strategy, would be simplified as a digital voucher. This voucher would give company the opportunity to have the support needed, and this would allow regional business support providers to work across programmes and initiatives seamlessly.

Through the INTRA phase 2 it has been agreed that the following 4 ERDF regional programmes under the current instrument ESIF will be proposing digital support to increase SMEs internationalisation readiness:

- C&W Innovation Test Beds

- Focus Digital
- C&W Green Business
- C&W Business Support

We will use the findings of INTRA to further shape services being delivered through these projects that would not have included this angle otherwise. INTRA enabled these programmes to ALL incorporate the importance for SMEs to be internationally competitive by enhancing the use of digital technologies either by focusing on their international digital strategy and/or how the use of technologies could improve their products, services and/or processes. The new improved activity will be that SMEs will not feel disoriented as they will use one digital voucher that will be utilized across the 4 programmes under the form of workshops, one to one consultancy and/or revenue grants.

Under this digital voucher will be offering to the SMEs:

- Workshops specifically focusing on processes associated with internationalisation, in addition to the other more general workshops that were planned for the project.
This will include the delivery of workshops on e-commerce and branding and marketing – for *CW Innovation Test Bed*, adding digital marketing themed workshops to the existing workshops being delivered on product development.
It will include specialist workshops around e-commerce and how to access international markets for the *Focus Digital* projects.
It will include delivering workshops through *CW Green Business* on using e-commerce as an alternative technique to current processes as a means of reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions.
- One to one consultancy digital support for internationalisation of the SMEs. This strand will include support through *CW Business Support* on potentially growing the business through accessing international markets.
- Access to revenue grants, particularly through *Focus Digital* (e.g. financial support to access specialist support to develop websites) and *CW Innovation Test Bed* to test and launch new products that could be exported internationally (including securing of any IP rights).

The activities are being added to the existing already signed 4 projects. They have been approved and officially launched on the 27th February 2019.

They are already started and CUE has been tasked to contact the individual project managers for the 4 projects, to discuss how this will be implementation will affect the 4 programmes individually. All 4 projects overall aim is to support SMEs to increase their competitiveness, in different ways, and the angle of internationalisation readiness through their digital strategy and/or technologies incorporation to improve their process/product, is what will be added as an horizontal measure thanks to INTRA.

The digital voucher will be initially set up to allow a smooth transition to adding this added services under the current 4 programmes. As mentioned above the 4 programmes will be including digital internationalisation specifics to their delivery. They already had set up similar activities but for



other topics, which means they already had in place a team of business specialist to deliver. Coventry City Council and CUE will be deciding to find appropriate dates with programmes managers and consultants to add the new workshops in the coming months. This will include but is not restricted to:

- CW Innovation Test Bed: 1 workshop + grant available to test/launch product to be exported
- CW Green Business: 1 workshop
- CW Business Support: consultancy support
- Focus Digital: 1 workshop + grant available to develop website for internationalisation

All these projects approved under the current instrument, ESIF are managed by Coventry City Council, managing authority in our case, for the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP), apart from Focus Digital who is led by CUE.

The success of these additional internationalisation themed workshops or 1:1 support within these programmes would be measured by the number of SMEs using this digital voucher attending the workshops or receiving support, the number of SMEs subsequently securing grants of at least £1,000 (they would be referred to the relevant grants fund after completing the relevant workshop and 1:1 support), and any change in the business' performance (e.g. accessing new markets, introduction of new business processes) through the relevant programme tracking and monitoring systems.

The aim is to provide initially 50 SMEs with digital internationalisation support. One digital voucher will give access to one of the above mentioned support. If the scheme seems successful, additional digital voucher could be released.

The INTRA team would work with the respective project and programme managers to access the relevant performance and monitoring data.

6.3 Players involved

Managing Authority / Intermediate Body:	Coventry City Council
Intermediaries involved:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coventry University Enterprises Ltd • Warwickshire County Council • CWLEP Growth Hub • C&W Chambers of Commerce

6.4 Timeframe

Timeframe for the implementation of the Action is April 2019 - December 2021

6.5 Costs

The team delivering the support will be comprising existing staff for the ERDF programme already ongoing.

This would include workshops, one to one support and grants that SMEs would be eligible to access through these four programmes supporting SMEs competitiveness under European Structural and Investment Funds 2014 to 2020 - Coventry and Warwickshire European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (ESIF):

OC06R17P0607 C&W Innovation Tests Beds ERDF budget is £1.8 Mio.

06R18P02718 C&W Business Support ERDF budget is £4.78 Mio.

OC06R15P 0084 Focus Digital ERDF budget is £1Mio.

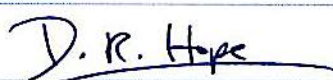
OC06R17P 0614 C&W Green Business ERDF budget is £3.2 Mio.

6.6 Funding sources:

ERDF: 50% co-financing depending on the type of programme

6.7 Monitoring of the Action plan implementation

The monitoring of the implementation of the proposed actions will be on a regular basis, both within the region according the steps defined in the action plan and also informing the INTRA partners on regular basis through online meetings and three PPs meetings as envisaged in the Application Form. Specific attention will be set on the indicators: 50 SMEs supported through this added support. The project partner will also use the high political event to demonstrate the impact of INTRA on the regional/national activities in internationalisation policy.

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Signature:	David Hope 
Function:	Programme Development Manager
Organisation:	Coventry City Council



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



75907



Stamp of the organisation:

Date:	16/8/2019
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