ESSPO
Interreg Europe

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Efficient
support services portfolios
for SMEs

EFFECTIVE SME SUPPORT

ACTION PLAN FOR BASQUE COUNTRY

CONTENTS:

PART I – GENERAL INFORMATION

Project: **PGI00087 ESSPO- Efficient support services portfolios for SMEs**

Partner: TECNALIA Research & Innovation- TECNALIA

Territory concerned: Basque Country Region

Country: Spain

NUTS2 region: Basque Country Region

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PART II – POLICY CONTEXT

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**: **ICT Good Practices programme for SMEs**

CONTEXT:

POLICY BACKGROUND
Policy Instrument:

The Policy Instrument selected, **ICT Good Practices programme for SMEs** (framed under **BASQUETOUR Programme),** is devoted to improving **SMEs innovation and competitiveness from an integral perspective within the tourism sector**. Tourism is a means for SMEs competitiveness in the Basque Country region. The aim is to consolidate the region as a quality destination from the perspective of **sustainable and smart tourism,** taking into consideration the need to incorporate ICT related technologies within the daily operative of SMEs.

Policy Priorities and strategies related to Policy Instrument selected:

- **ESSPO project and INTERREG Priority selected:** The Policy instrument fits under ESSPO. Efficient support services portfolios for SMEs. Interreg Europe priority 3, as it specially focuses on SMEs growth on national and international markets and on their improved engagement in innovation processes.
- **Operational Programme: Basque Country regional Operational Programme 2014-2020. Priority Axis3: Improve SMEs Competitiveness.** The objectives of Axis 3 are the basis for the development of this Action Plan, which among others, are the following ones: creation of new enterprises, improving access to financing and advanced services; support to the **creation and broadening of advanced capacities for the development of product and services, promote the development and**

consolidation of SMEs, by improving access to financing, technology and access to advanced support services and promote innovation of SMEs and cooperation for innovation in all fields.

- **BASQUETOUR Programme** is managed by **BASQUETOUR**[1], the **Basque Agency for Tourism,** from the Department of Tourism, Trade and Consumption of the Basque Government, created in 2006 to lead the promotion and implementation of the Basque tourism competitiveness strategy[2]. It aims to improve the **competitiveness of tourism** (in general and especially SMEs) as an economic activity that generates wealth and employment; to improve the **positioning of Euskadi** in strategic segments and to consolidate the **Euskadi brand** as a tourist destination in the issuing markets.

- **Governmental Programme Legislature XI** (2016 – 2020). **Compromise 28** Promoting excellence and sustainability in Basque tourism and **Initiative 5**: Strengthen the commercialisation of the tourist offer both in conventional formats and innovative proposals, encouraging the incorporation of new technologies for the configuration of new value proposals in the tourist offer[3].

- The **2030 Basque Tourism Strategy**[4]**:** It sets the vison for 2030 where Euskadi **intends to grow in a sustainable way, to consolidate as a destination of excellence and to make Euskadi a reference in Europe.**

- **The Strategic Plan for Tourism, Trade and Consumption 2017-2020:** it **aims to consolidate Euskadi as a quality destination that brings wealth and prosperity to Basque society and the sector, from the perspective of sustainable tourism**[5], among which promoting **competitiveness** in the Basque tourism industry, especially SMEs and to provide a diversified offer.

- The **Tourism Master Plan 2017-2020:** The Plan has been prepared following a **participatory methodology** with public and private agents from the region. These dynamics and participatory processes have permitted to obtain more information on key aspects and priorities to be addressed related to the competitiveness of the sector in general.

- The **Tourism Marketing Plan 2017-2020**[6]: It highlights priorities and actions as well as relevant data to better understand tourism context, challenges and needs in the Basque Country region.

- **Euskadi's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3**)[7]**:** It results from a participatory process involving the various stakeholders from the 'quadruple helix', in combination with an adequate multilevel governance, that from the regional level, establishes a network with the different levels (subregional, national and supranational). Based on an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of our context, the three essential facilitating technologies are biosciences, nanosciences and advanced manufacturing and the five priority markets: transport and mobility, digital world, industry of science, aging and health, and energy. The RIS3 Strategy, prioritises four opportunity areas: Food, urban habitat, ecosystems, cultural and creative industries, closely related and impacted by the tourism sector.

OBJECTIVE OF THE ACTION PLAN

The Basque Country is one of the most important industrial concentrations in Spain; industry generates 29.9% of the GDP in market prices and services are 63%. The region is populated by SMEs and mainly small

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[1] http://www.basquetour.eus/quienes-somos.htm

[2] http://www.euskadi.eus/plan-turismo-2020/web01-a2turism/es/

[3] https://programa.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/objectives/300

[4] https://bideoak2.euskadi.eus/debates/turismo_vasco2020/Plan_Director_de_Turismo_2020.pdf

[5] https://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/news/43105-gobierno-vasco-dado-visto-bueno-plan-estrategico-turismo-comercio-consumo-2017-2020?track=1

[6] Estrategia de Turismo Vasco 2030. Plan de marketing del Turismo Vasco 2017-2020. Gobierno vasco. Departamento de Turismo Comercio y Consumo.

[7] https://www.spri.eus/es/ris3-euskadi/

ones, which make it difficult for them to answer to the challenges, especially the digital ones. Therefore, we have selected this Policy Instrument as it focuses on SMEs, particularly small in a strategic sector, Tourism.

Tourisms is a strategic sector for SMEs in the region, and where innovation and adoption of new technologies is needed as a factor of SMEs competitiveness. The sector contributes to the 5.9% GDP and represents approximately 7% of the employment in the Basque Country. The tourist has increased during last years, especially regarding international tourists. Tourism is the EU's third largest socio-economic activity, representing around 10% of the EU's GDP. The sector plays a crucial role in generating growth and jobs, but still holds untapped potential – especially in the area of **smart tourism**. **Innovation, accessibility, and sustainability are the future of this sector, and the European Commission aims to keep European tourism ahead of the curve**. Within this framework, in Euskadi aims at positioning in the Smart Tourism, so that SMEs need to be prepared for it.

This Action Plan has been defined to support the developments of the Policy Instrument. Main objective is to boost the "modernisation" of SMEs, moving the SMEs towards the "smart tourism practice" and supporting the SMEs to face the digital challenge. These actions will all impact the **competitiveness** of the regional SMEs**.** Smart tourism responds to new challenges and demands in a fast-changing sector, including the evolution of digital tools, products and services, support to creative industries, local talent and heritage and no many similar experiences were found at consortium level.

The Action plan takes into consideration the policy framework defined, as well as the competitive advantage of the Basque region in this field**:** "**A unique and memorable tourist experience in a destination of excellence that offers one of the best cuisines in the world**". To reach so, Euskadi will need to get ready for it and prepare its companies/SMES to face these challenges: **The actions suggested have been inspired by the learning resulting from the activities of ESSPO project, task forces meetings and the resulting Good Practices identified within the framework of the ESSPO project partners, as described. However, it is important to highlight, that Smart Tourism is a nascent concept to approach SMEs competitiveness not fully integrated in all regions yet** as it requires from a mature policy. **These actions are coherent with the policy and strategic framework described.**

LEARNING FROM ESSPO

The participation in **ESSPO project** has permitted to **learn from others, exchange experiences** with other project partners and gain very valuable knowledge. On this basis we have developed and to enrich this **Action Plan**. The process followed since the project was launched has started with a **Peer review** and an **in-depth SWOT analysis,** which have been of high interest for the evolution of the policy instrument and which logic is also reflected in this Action Plan.

We followed the ideas discussed in ESSPO from the very beginning, especially, that **it is necessary to focus on precisely defined target group**, as SMEs are heterogeneous group with different needs, that cannot be met in an universal tool. Sectoral approach is one of the options to avoid this. This is the reason why we have focused on the **target group of SMEs on tourism**.

The results gained have been very inspiring in all the process. More in detail:

1. THE SWOT ANALYSIS:

A SWOT analysis was elaborated, that has been a very valuable tool for the development of further actions and has resulted from an in-depth analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The benchmarking with other similar experiences was marked as an opportunity.

2. PEER REVIEW[8]:

The ESSPO partner **NFID and the expert Jean-Pierre Léac**, Head of NFID Innovation Unit in Lille was in charge of the Peer Review, that took place on **12 and 13th January 2017**. Several stakeholders were visited and interviewed by the expert, who revised the Programme according to the recommendations of ESSPO **Project Guidebook** for Peer Review Exercise after the visit to Lille on November 29th and 30th 2016. Conclusions from the Peer Review were very satisfactory, highlighting that the Programme **helps enterprises and SMEs in particular to face the digital challenge**. Main outcomes in 2016 show: 182 company participations in 19 touristic destinations; 780 visits to companies; 27 training workshops (114 companies trained) and 160 companies labelled. The overall satisfaction rises to 8,2.

The **digital maturity model** was specially assessed, consisting on a series of **best practices** which, if implemented, will enable companies to improve their use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The Peer Review was very satisfactory and the following recommendations for improvement were identified:

- Training sessions should be more personnalised;
- Technologies evolve very fast and the program needs sometimes an update;
- New trends should be adressed;
- More meetings for exchange of experiences should be organised;
- Team building sessions between participants;
- Share ressouces for very small companies could be explored such as for instance hiring a shared community manager.

3. PARTNERS EXCHANGE/ ESSPO TASK FORCE PROJECT MEETINGS

Through all **ESSPO meetings** there has been an important learning, resulting from the presentations held on the specific meetings, as well as especially out from the discussions with project partners and experts attending those meetings and task forces. On top of these, the meetings have been a good platform to know about other practices and learn. The **ESSPO meeting task forces** organised permitted to identify more specific practices that resulted in concrete inputs for this Action Plan. Specially the following meetings have impacted our learning:

- **Hamelin, 23-25 October 2017, Germany:** Specific Good Practices on SMEs on this sector were identified as well as relevant learning from the based on a holistic approach to innovation management, IMP³rove Academy [9] that contributes to the sustainable growth of people, organisations, regions, and countries alike.
- **Segovia, 16 & 17 May 2018:** Specific Good Practices on SMEs competitiveness for the tourism sector were identified from Partner 4-ADE from Castilla y León region, especially focusing Smart Tourism.
- **Exchange of experiences with partner 2- EURADA** European Association of Development Agencies. During the **task force meetings** other practices related on how to improve SMEs competitiveness from

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[8] Peer Review revised the 2018 programme on Good Practices on ICT for SMEs of the sector
[9] https://www.improve-innovation.eu/

the tourism sector identified by EURADA were also shared from experts out from ESSPO consortium. Very inspiring ones for Basque Country, such as the tourism experience from Lapland Region in Finland; including its policy mix approach.

On top of this, we have shared **many challenges** that were formulated by other partners even they worked in different circumstances, such as:

- How to effectively reach concrete SMEs that belong to the specific target groups (what should be communication channels, messages)? – Wielkopolska (partner 1), Bulgaria (partners 5 & 6);
- How to mobilise the targeted SMEs to participate in the programmes? And How to analyse the data about the specific segments of businesses and transfer the knowledge of their needs into appropriate support services and schemes (origin: Bulgaria – partners 5 & 6) but needed also in Wielkopolska-partner 1)
- How to encourage the companies and stakeholders from the same value chain to better cooperate, reaching a win-win situation (Gabrovo- partner 5)
- What marketing policy local authorities can use for economic development and competitiveness of SMEs in international market? (Gabrovo- partner 5)
- How to tackle the problem of lack of human resources in SMEs to be devoted for innovation? (Weserbergland- partner 9); not only the sectoral specialists, but also internationally experienced business people such as marketers & salespeople (Tartu- partner 7)
- How to improve marketing and selling skills of SMEs, so that they can plan and implement innovation considering the market they plan to introduce their innovation, the customer needs and the way to acquire the clients (Wielkopolska- partner 1, also Gabrovo- partner 5)

4. THE GOOD PRACTICES IDENTIFIED

The Good Practices have been a good learning and input for the policy instrument. Preliminary those practices related to the use of innovation and ICT tools for SMEs, from the tourism sector are the ones that are of highest interest, including innovative practices focusing the concept of Smart Tourism.

Exchange of experiences and practices with partner 4- ADE from Castilla y Leon

The process has been very inspiring as it is a region that promotes tourism having a well know artistic patrimony. The ***Plan Estratégico de Turismo de Castilla y León 2019-2023*** [10] contributes to the improvement of the competitiveness of the SMEs "***advancing towards the tourism sustainability and excellence***". New responsible policies in tourism are defined accompanied by the digitisation of the sector.

The **project CRECEER**[11] that aims at **promoting business cooperation in rural cross-border environments between companies and entities in the agri-food (gourmet) and tourism sectors**, through the improvement of the quality and design of their products and services, as well as the **incorporation of ICTs in the SMEs business models**, creating cooperation networks between companies, especially SMEs in these sectors and offering a common and specific identification of those areas, which will value their endogenous resources. CRECEER wants to promote business cooperation, quality, innovation and commercialisation of these products and services, and its exit to foreign markets, to improve SMEs competitiveness in these areas near the border area and to boost the economy of those areas.

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[10] https://www.turismocastillayleon.com/es/espacio-profesionales/planes-estrategicos/plan-estrategico-turismo-castilla-leon-2019-2023

[11] http://www.creceer.org/el-proyecto/descripcion/

Castilla y León is also part together with Basque Country region of the **Intelligent Tourist Destinations (ITD) project**, an international project, that focus at **implementing a new model for improving SMEs competitiveness and tourism development based on governance and co-responsibility**. This initiative, arising from the National and Integral Tourism Plan 2012-2015, provides the appropriate mechanisms to facilitate the rapid incorporation of innovations in destinations.

Exchange of experiences and practices with partner 2- EURADA

Some other experiences and regional good practices have been also identified with the support of **EURADA** that are especially relevant for this Action Plan. These are:

- *Centre Region Val de Loire* **- France Tourisme Lab**[12] is the national network of tourism incubators and accelerators that aims to boost the spirit of innovation, promote initiatives and increase the visibility of innovative companies and SMEs. New approaches to integrating technology and ICTs with tourism have been applied resulting from **"Intelligence des Patrimoines",** model with three working priorities (research, training, economic development), linked to the regional S3 priorities. Piloted since the early 2010, this initiative has now developed and matured beyond its initial test stage and has gone on to create spin off initiatives such as **Smart Tourisme Lab**[13]. This lab aims to contribute to the development of start-ups in the field of creative, cultural and tourist industries and is part of the dynamic creation of innovative companies which is a priority of the State, the Region and the city.
- Another source of inspiration are the **European Capitals of Smart Tourism winners**. The European Commission launched the first **EU-wide competition for the selection of two 2019 European Capitals of Smart Tourism**. **Helsinki and Lyon won in 2019**[14].

Exchange of experiences and practices with partner 9- **District of Hameln Pyrmont** was also very inspiring.

Different GP were also identified concerning the **marketing approach** discussed in **Segovia meeting** in 2 different aspects:

- Taken by programmes to mobilise SMEs to participate in the programme – thus the GP of **IVACE from Valencia**, we have learned that the programme itself need to be treated as product and brand and should be promoted in the same way as if it was sale of commercial product. The promotion campaigns must be based on to the quality and reliability of the program (as a product) and lead to trustful relationship between the agency and the SMEs. The programme (product) is easier to be better marketed if it is linked with new trends such industry 4.0, circular economy, smart cities, smart businesses, etc.
- As important (often neglected) subject of innovation support for SMEs. They have not enough resources (especially human) and skills to introduce the innovation on the market in an effective way. Thus, the **GP of Lapland** was identified as an approach in which the agency is collaborating with SMEs in the sector in joint marketing and promotion initiatives. This GP reveals that the local/regional agencies can collaborate with SMEs in promotion of the territory as a tourist destination linking it with promotion of SMEs in tourist sector, which spills over on related sectors – locally based micro and small producers, and service providers. A labelling system of a joint brand is linked with promotion campaigns and web service helping to find local providers. It is also refers to values and life styles of

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[12] https://www.entreprises.gouv.fr/tourisme/france-tourisme-lab
[13] https://intelligencedespatrimoines.fr/smart-tourisme-lab/
[14] https://smarttourismcapital.eu/best-practices/

customer – responsible, eco, locality. Similar approach has been taken in smart destination and smart companies.

PART III – DETAILS OF THE ACTIONS ENVISAGED

ACTION 1: PILOTING SMART BUSINESS

THE POLICY LEARNING PROCESS THAT LED TO THE ACTION

***Smart Tourism** is a* concept *widely used nowadays as Tourism is key for economic development for many countries,* regions *and territories worldwide. It also refers to the application of ICT Technologies to the sector to develop innovative services and approaches to improve tourism and its competitiveness.*

Spain has *been* pioneering in launching an international project focusing on Smart Tourism destinations. The Secretary of State for Tourism (SEGITTUR) leads the **Intelligent Tourist Destinations (ITD) project**, an international project, that focus at **implementing a new model for improving competitiveness and tourism development based on governance and co-responsibility for tourism**. This initiative, arising from the National and Integral Tourism Plan 2012-2015, provides the appropriate mechanisms to facilitate the rapid incorporation of innovations in destinations.

Basque Country Region, within the policy framework described under the previous section (policy context) **aims to consolidate Euskadi as a quality destination, from the perspective of sustainable tourism, as well as aiming at generating** competitive advantage. Smart Tourism and especially Smart business concept is a priority for the competitiveness of the territorial and regional SMEs. The **exchange of Good practices with project partner nº 4 ADE** under the framework of **Smart Tourism is of high interest for this Action Plan**[15] **and EURADA, partner nº 2**.

Within this framework learning and exchange of experiences in the field from other regions are of high value to feed in and improve the Policy Instrument, specially focusing SMEs as most of the companies in the Basque Country region within this sector are SMEs.

ESSPO LESSONS LEARNT APPLIED IN THE ACTION

Lesson learnt	Source of the lesson
Smart business	
- Support to entrepreneurship and innovative SMEs in this field - New approaches to integrate technology, accessibility, sustainability, energy efficiency and ICTs in SMEs from tourism - Promote initiatives and increase the visibility of innovative companies and SMEs. - About Smart Tourism as such. - Marketing	**Taskforce meeting** in Segovia 16 & 17 May 2018. **Exchange of experiences** with partner nº 4-ADE Agency of Innovation, Business Financing and Internationalization of Castilla y León, ESSPO SWOT analysis and EURADA practices. **Peer Review**

NATURE OF THE ACTION

Previously the focus was only on SMEs and ICT tools and techniques to improve SMEs competitiveness. Now the focus is planned to be on a wider and integrated concept framed under "Smart Business", specially targeting SMEs and SMEs competitiveness. The idea is to pilot the **Smart Business Concept resulting from the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to the tourist sector** to develop innovative services and approaches for SMEs to improve tourism and its

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[15] https://www.destinosinteligentes.es/destinos/canal-de-castilla/

competitiveness. Learning from Good Practices and exchange of experiences are highly valuable to be further considered and potentially incorporated in the policy planning.

STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION

The following steps are suggested for the implementation:

1. Analysis, definition and update of the actions to **plan the route for embracing the Smart Intelligent destination approach/Smart Business** according to the business/SMEs needs.

2. Generation of new **training materials** to support SMEs needs focusing the Smart Business Concept.

3. Preparation of materials to **disseminate and aware** on the Smart Business concept to SMEs and other stakeholders.

4. **Sharing approaches** with participant stakeholders.

5. **Guidelines for the future** focus of the programme on Smart Business.

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

As for the implementation of this Action 1 the following organisations are involved:

- BASQUETOUR Agency
- SMES
- Different experts: Technology, competitiveness, evaluators
- Cooperation entities (such as local Development agencies)
- Trainers

TIMEFRAME

The expected timing envisaged for action is:

2019-2020

COSTS

NA

FUNDING SOURCES

The main funding sources for this action are own regional resources.

ACTION 2:

ENCOURAGING THE INTENSIVE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE IN EUSKADI (BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER)

THE POLICY LEARNING PROCESS THAT LED TO THE ACTION

The Secretary of State for Tourism, through SEGITTUR, is maintaining the competitive edge in **full technological revolution**, which will suppose big changes and mobilisation within **entire tourism system** to support the digitalisation. However, the base of the tourism sector, is composed by SMEs, that lag behind, as does the local public sector. The digital divide of tourism is in the destinations, which is precisely where the tourist experience takes place[16].

Within this framework, BASQUETOUR is working to mobilise SMEs within the sector to reach these challenges posed by new technologies.

Within this framework other experiences from project **partner 4** such as the **project CRECEER[17]** has been also identified as a very relevant practice for the Basque Country Region, as well as the practices provided by **EURADA**, partner nº2, especially the one from the **Centre Region Val de Loire - France Tourisme Lab.** This practice shows the use of new approaches to integrating technology and ICTs in tourism through the 'Intelligence des Patrimonies."

Learning and exchange of experiences in the field from other regions are of high value to improve the strategy, specially focusing SMEs as most of the companies in the Basque Country region within this sector are SMEs as for encouraging the intensive use of new technologies to improve the tourism experience in Euskadi (before, during and after).

ESSPO LESSONS LEARNT APPLIED IN THE ACTION

Lesson learnt	Source of the lesson
Intensive use of new technologies to improve tourism experiences	
• Promote user-generated content for tourist from SMEs. • Improve quality and design of products and services that SME provide. • Improve the tourism experience in general. • Public private collaboration to answer to the digital challenges and new frameworks required.	• Recommendations from the **Peer Review** in Basque Country done by the French partner NFID. The ESSPO partner NFID and the expert Jean-Pierre Léac, Head of NFID Innovation Unit in Lille was in charge of the Peer Review, that took place on 12 and 13th January 2017. • Taskforce meeting in **Segovia 16 & 17 May 2018** • ESSPO **SWOT analysis**. • **Good Practices** shared with partner n2-EURADA, with Partner nº 4-ADE Castilla y León and partner nº 9 District of Hameln Pyrmont

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[16] https://blog.segittur.es/un-ecosistema-impulsor-para-el-salto-al-turismo-inteligente/

[17] http://www.creceer.org/el-proyecto/descripcion/

NATURE OF THE ACTION

The Peer review already showed that the digital maturity model implemented in the region consisting on a series of best practices enabling SMEs to improve their use of ICT Technologies was very satisfactory and the following were the recommendations suggested, as already mentioned:

- Training sessions should be more personnalised;
- Technologies evolve very fast and the program needs sometimes an update;
- New trends should be adressed;
- More meetings for exchange of experiences should be organised;
- Team building sessions between participants;
- Share ressouces for very small companies could be explored such as for instance; hire a shared community manager ?

The **"Good Practices in TICs"** was created in 2011 and has offered already support to 200 SMEs with the aim of improving their competitiveness and reducing their costs through the correct use of technological tools. This Action 2 is in line with the recommendations.

STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION

The following steps are suggested for the implementation:

1. Enhance **public-private collaboration** to support the digital challenges and new frameworks required for SMEs.
- **Awareness** on the benefits of using ICT related technologies for the competitiveness of the SMEs.
- **Guidelines on contents and materials** that could be easily obtained online; digital videos, commercialisation of the experiences through means such as Instagram; etc.
- **Identifying other experiences** from which we could learn. Learning and getting to know other experiences.
- Identification of **Training needs**

STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

As for the implementation of this Action 1 the following organisations are involved:

- Basque Government

- Basquetour

- SMES
- Cooperation entities (such as local Development agencies)

TIMEFRAME

The expected timing envisaged for action is:

2019-2021

COSTS

NA

FUNDING SOURCES

The main funding sources for this action are own regional resources.

COMMITMENT

This Action plan has been developed by …, who commit themselves implement the actions envisioned within their respective capabilities

Date:

Name of the organisation(s):

Signatures of the relevant organisation(s):