

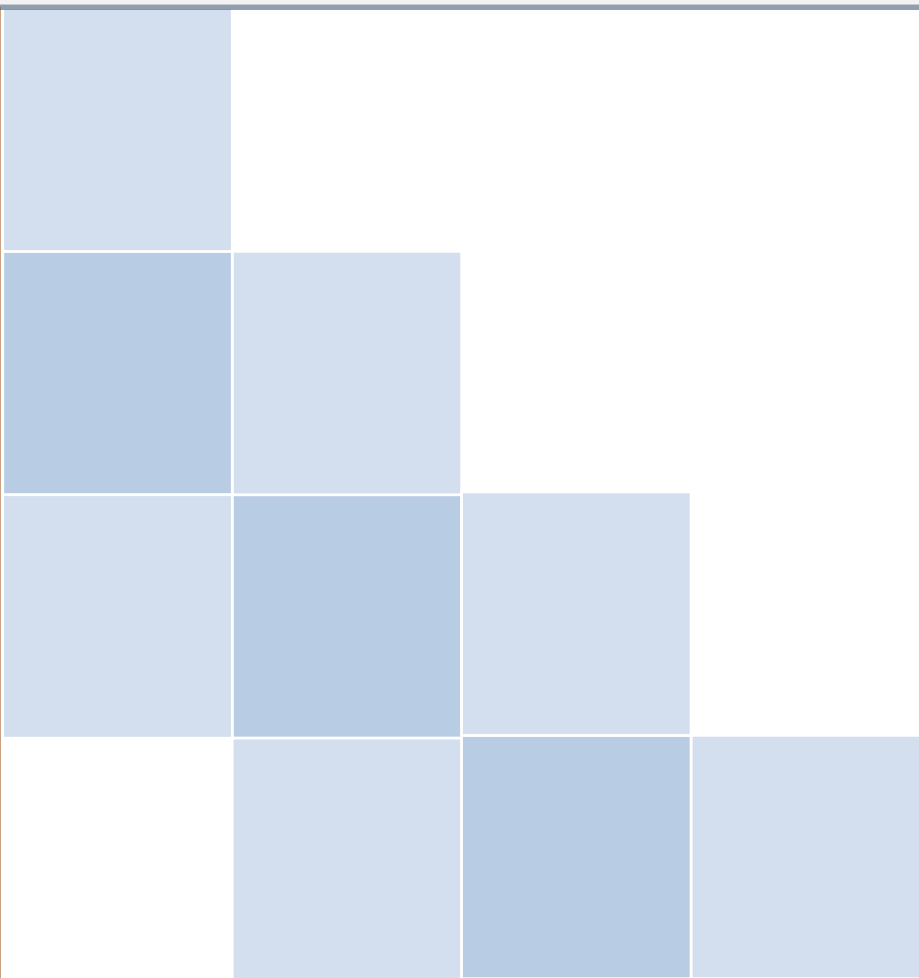


**Interreg
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CENTRAL MACEDONIA



Profile **Region of Central Macedonia**

Functions and territorial coverage

The Region of Central Macedonia is one of the thirteen administrative regions of Greece. It has a population of almost 1.9 million (census 2011), which makes it the second most populous region in the country. Central Macedonia was established with the administrative reform of 1987. Its powers were refined and extended in 2010 with the Kallikratis plan. Along with East Macedonia and Thrace, the region is supervised by the decentralized administration of Macedonia and Thrace, which is based in Thessaloniki.

Policy instrument

Regional Operational Programme of Central Macedonia 2014-2020

Territorial Context and Major Challenges for Central Macedonia

Central Macedonia is divided into seven regional units (previously called prefectures): Halkidiki, Imathia, Kilkis, Pella, Pieria, Serres and

Thessaloniki. These are further subdivided into altogether 38 municipalities.



Image 1: Map of Region of Central Macedonia, © Region of Central Macedonia

Central Macedonia makes up 26% of the country's primary sector. It contains the country's richest collection of agricultural products including fruits, vegetables and cheese. The agri-food sector is an important economic priority for the region, recognised by the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy of Central Macedonia (RIS3) which defines agri-food, tourism, textile and construction materials as strategic market priorities.

The region's policies aim to boost entrepreneurship at all stages - from the idea formulation to the market capitalisation. A particular focus is placed on the support of social entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurial ecosystem of the region has strong components including research institutes and R&D infrastructures and has diverse innovation and extroversion potentials. The region aims to bring these components closer together in order to support entrepreneurship and innovation and to promote employment.

The region's capital city Thessaloniki hosts three universities and two large research centres. Despite the growth of research and development in the region, projects have mostly focused on externally funded activities and do not address the needs of local companies. Small and medium-sized enterprises in Central Macedonia have limited opportunities to collaborate with research institutes and boost innovation in

their production and marketing services. To address this need, the Region of Central Macedonia established an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support Mechanism, which is funded by the ERDF Operational Programme. One of the components of the mechanism, the so called One Stop Shop Liaison Office, offers services to the research institutions and enterprises from the region. Its main focus is to bring the business and research communities closer together.

The Region of Central Macedonia works intensively to strengthen the private sector and to make better use of the available resources. By doing so, it aims to increase the productivity, the export capacities and the competitiveness of the local businesses and public administrations and to develop a business- and investor-friendly ecosystem. The vision of the Region of Central Macedonia is to become the friendliest region in the country for innovation, entrepreneurship and investments.

Small and medium-sized enterprises in the rural areas of Central Macedonia lack opportunities to establish networks with other businesses within and beyond the region. This limits the enterprises' ability to build collaborations with research and development institutions to modernise their production and develop export capacities. The current RIS3 Strategy of Central Macedonia marginally recog-

nises the importance of rural areas and their potentials for the economic competitiveness of the Region. Regional SMEs can significantly benefit from targeted digital services, offered by a digital incubator or a support web platform, for information on economic and development trends and funding

opportunities. The RUMORE activities in Central Macedonia aim to establish closer collaborations between enterprises and research and development institutions in the region and to boost innovation activities which address local market needs.



Regional Operational Programme of Central Macedonia 2014-2020

The ERDF Regional Operational Programme of Central Macedonia 2014-2020 is the most important funding and developmental tool in the region. It provides comprehensive support to the region for a balanced and sustainable development and has a budget of ca. 1 Billion euro.

The Programme gives emphasis to research and innovation activities which strengthen the competitiveness and extroversion of the local SMEs. So far, ca. 150 Million euro were provided for research, innovation and entrepreneurship actions, which strengthen the productivity system and increase the competitiveness, openness and effective entry of Central Macedonia's enterprises into the global market.

In its RUMORE project activities, the Regional Authority of Central Macedonia focuses on Investment Priority 1b, Priority Axis 1

“Strengthening research, technological development and innovation”. Investment Priority 1b, specific objective 1b2 concerns the “establishment of links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centres and higher education institutes to promote applied research, as well as knowledge and technology transfer in RIS3 sectors”. Under this objective, support mechanisms to facilitate the establishment of those links will be developed.

The Region's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support Mechanism and mainly the One Stop Liaison Office (which are part of the specific objective 1b2) are of a crucial importance due to activities focusing on:

1. Performing a number of collaborating actions (continues entrepreneurial discovery process, co-developing and co-monitoring the strategy and main actions.) in order

to shift the ecosystem towards its main priorities that are agri-food and tourism, both of whom are also rural activities.

2. Support SMEs to boost competitiveness through innovation, by offering a digital data base of every single R&D infrastructure in the area, matching events, interactive

workshops, roadshows to areas away from the city, to boost trust and collaborations.

3. Train and inform SMEs on how to better profit from innovations through boosting clusters, venture investments and generally new business models that try to increase the size of the ventures.