

Action Plan for the Northern & Western Region of Ireland

RaiSE
Interreg Europe



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



July 2019

Project: RaiSE Project

Partner organisation(s) concerned: Innovation & Management Centre Limited (WestBIC)

Country: Ireland

NUTS2 region: Northern & Western Region

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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:

The Policy Instrument addressed by the RaiSE Project in the Northern and Western Region of Ireland is Priority 3 of the Border Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020, which is called “SME Support Promotion and Capability Development”.

Further details on the policy context and the way the action plan should contribute to improve the policy instrument:

Currently, the Priority is intent on increasing the number of established SMEs within the BMW Region accessing the supports and finance required for sustainability, internationalisation and growth-oriented actions. A further objective is to increase employment in the micro-enterprise sector in the BMW region from 56,969 to 60,630.

The main gap identified was the lack of a national government policy in place for the development and support of social enterprise in Ireland. During the mid-term evaluation of the Regional Operational Programme, and with the subsequent publication of the Irish National Social Enterprise Policy, it was identified that the objectives could be extended to include regional social enterprise.

The main action envisaged was the ongoing liaison with Irish Stakeholders and Irish Government to progress the implementation of the draft policy which has been developed, and its inclusion in the Operational Programme, with an appropriate budget. WestBIC, as part of the RaiSE EU Project, is intent on working with regional policy bodies to ensure the new programme effectively amends the targets to include social enterprises, and also to ensure that social enterprises are included as employment generators from 2021 to 2027.

Details of the actions envisaged

ACTION 1: Secure inclusion of a section on “Support for Social Enterprise” in the new Operational Programme for the Northern & Western Region of Ireland.

1. Relevance to the project

The inspiration for this Action came from RaiSE Project Study Visits to Scotland, where there has been specific focus on strategy for the development of social enterprise in the region. In 2016 the Irish Government established a Social Enterprise Taskforce to carry out detailed research on the needs of the social enterprise sector in Ireland. This taskforce has carried out a mapping exercise and survey of a selection of social enterprises in Ireland. The RaiSE Project worked with the Taskforce to carry out this mapping exercise and survey for all the Northern & Western Region of Ireland. The overall results of this extensive research project have fed into the development of a new national policy on Social Enterprise, a draft of which was published in April 2019. This Policy sets out a roadmap for the development of social enterprise over the period 2019–2022. The Action to include specific measures in the operational programme is complementary to this draft policy and to the Government’s determination that Social Enterprises are supported to grow. This is also in line with an increasing emphasis at EU level of the importance of Social Enterprise.

2. Nature of the action

In this Action, WestBIC will co-ordinate the work of the RaiSE Stakeholder Group to ensure that a section on Support for Social Enterprise with an appropriate budget is included in the next Operational Programme for the Northern and Western Region of Ireland, which reflects the findings of the work of the Stakeholder Group over the past three years and which is in line with the new National Policy on Social Enterprise.

Meetings will be organised over the next two years with relevant stakeholders to review progress on the development of the new Operational Programme and to monitor the implementation of this Action.

Roadmap Proposed:

- I. Ongoing liaison by email and telephone with RaiSE Stakeholders, in particular the Social Enterprise Taskforce.
- II. Ongoing liaison with the NWRA, to be updated on the new Operational Programme, its authors, and how policy can be influenced.
- III. Meeting with RaiSE Stakeholders to co-ordinate lobbying efforts to influence Operational Programme.

The above road map is predicated on the authors of the Operational Programme being appointed and a new Operational Programme being drafted within the RaiSE project period.

3. Stakeholders involved

The current operational programme falls under the remit of the BMW Assembly, now the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA). To date there is no clarification as to who will be responsible for drafting and monitoring the next Operational Programme. Once this is decided, WestBIC will engage with our stakeholders to determine how best to influence the formation of the Operational Programme to ensure the inclusion of specific policies and budget for social enterprises. We expect the relevant stakeholders to be as follows:

- The Social Enterprise Task Force (SEFT) – The Social Enterprise Task Force is a network of key sector stakeholders set up to promote social enterprise and social entrepreneurship and to contribute to the development of appropriate national supportive policies for the development of the sector.
- The Social Finance Foundation – The Social Finance Foundation was established by the Government to address the needs of community organisations and social enterprises for loan funding.
- Pobal – Pobal administer and manage Government and EU funding to address disadvantage and support social inclusion.
- Clann Credo – Clann Credo provides community loan finance at affordable interest and repayment rates.
- North West Regional Assembly – responsible for the current Operational Programme.

4. Timeframe

Indicative Meeting Schedule:

- October 2019.
- March 2020.
- October 2020.
- April 2021.

5. Indicative costs

Costs to include:

- Venue & Catering for four meetings – costs to be established.
- Staff Time and Travel Expenses – costs to be established.

6. Indicative funding sources

All the above costs will be covered by WestBIC's own resources.

ACTION 2: Organise a Programme of Dissemination Activity in the Northern and Western Region of Ireland to disseminate the new Irish National Social Enterprise Policy.

1. Relevance to the project

The need for this activity was reinforced through our participation in the RaiSE Irish Stakeholder Group and the SWOT analysis of the Irish Social Enterprise sector which was undertaken during 2017. This analysis identified gaps across the sector including gaps in knowledge of the sector, supports and related opportunities.

This Action is inspired by the Study Visits to Scotland, Catalonia and Sweden which took place during Phase 1 of the RaiSE Project. These Study Visits highlighted the active engagement between Business Support Organisations and Social Enterprises in these regions and highlighted some activities which could be replicated in the Northern and Western Region of Ireland to increase the dissemination of information on the new Irish National Social Enterprise Policy.

While in Catalonia, we visited ACCIÓ, which was an excellent example of an organisation which actively engaged with the social enterprises in each region. While in Scotland, our Scottish Partners organised the Social Enterprise World Forum which offered an opportunity for Social Enterprises and Support Organisations to learn about global trends and developments in the sector, and to network with regional, national and international peers.

These Study Visits have inspired WestBIC to support dissemination and networking activity to ensure that the social enterprise sector has a representative voice to engage with Government on policy and operational issues.

2. Nature of the action

This Action will include the following activities:

- I. WestBIC will host two regional Social Enterprise Seminars** (one each year) targeting Entrepreneurs, Founders and Managers of Social Enterprises in the Region. The purpose of these seminars will be:
 - To highlight developments in the social enterprise sector including regional, national and international developments.
 - To disseminate information on the progress of the draft National Social Enterprise Policy and its implementation into National and Regional Policy.
 - To provide a networking opportunity for Entrepreneurs, Founders and Managers of Social Enterprises, as well as those Agencies and Organisations providing funding and support services to social enterprises in the region.
 - To provide an opportunity to showcase some of the new and innovative social enterprises in the region.

Indicators:

- Regional Social Enterprise Seminars and Networking Events Hosted (2).
- Number of Social Enterprises Participating in Seminars (100).

II. WestBIC will participate at the Annual Social Enterprise Forum which is to be convened by the Irish National Government as per the current draft Irish National Social Enterprise Policy document (published April 2019).

Indicator: Number of Social Enterprise Forum Meetings Attended (2).

III. WestBIC will disseminate a series of e-newsletters on developments in the Social Enterprise Sector to our database of Social Enterprises in the Region. These e-Newsletters will include the following information:

- Information on the progress of the draft National Social Enterprise Policy and its implementation.
- Information on Networking Events for Entrepreneurs, Founders and Management of Social Enterprises.
- Information on Funding Streams and Development Programmes of benefit to the Social Enterprise Sector.
- Success Stories in the Social Enterprise Sector.

Indicator: Number of e-Newsletters circulated to Social Enterprises in the Region (4).

3. Stakeholders involved

WestBIC will be the key stakeholder in implementing this activity

4. Timeframe

This activity will be carried out after the publication of the National Social Enterprise Strategy and will extend to the end of the RaiSE project timeframe (circa end 2019 to mid 2021)

5. Indicative costs

Staff Time and Travel Expenses – costs to be established.

6. Indicative funding sources

All the above costs will be covered by WestBIC's own resources.