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A young woman wearing a yellow hard hat, safety glasses, and a high-visibility vest is working in a factory. She is holding a walkie-talkie to her mouth and a tablet computer. The background is a blurred industrial environment with lights and machinery.

# FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN HIGH-TECH ENTERPRISES



*Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency*

## The FEMINA Project

FEMINA partners believe that increased female participation can make high-tech SMEs more competitive. This belief, based on academic studies and practical experience, must become part of mainstream policy.

The gender gap is still visible in high-tech sectors across EU-28: women represented 29% of entrepreneurs in 2014 and 32.5% of employees in high-tech manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services in 2015. This is not a question of social inclusion. It is about economic growth: studies show that the women's specific skills can help to diversify and consolidate enterprises; that closing the gender gap could generate an EU GDP increase of 13%.

In this context, FEMINA partners cooperate at interregional level to reach their overall aim: to ensure that selected policy instruments are integrated with measures to promote female engagement in their high-tech sectors, with a focus on sectors in their RIS3.

FEMINA considers how to identify, implement, monitor and evaluate policy measures that break down barriers to female high-tech entrepreneurship, to employment and career progression in high-tech SMEs and to the gender dimension of innovation in funding schemes for high-tech start-ups and SMEs.

Policy improvements are foreseen through specific projects funded to address these barriers, through improved policy management (e.g. gender criteria in monitoring) and through strategic focus, whereby partners work to include female participation in high-tech as a fundamental principle of their policies for SME competitiveness.

FEMINA's main outputs are Action Plans, detailing these desired changes, which partners and selected stakeholders will implement and monitor over a 2-year period. The results of this implementation will benefit SMEs and the territory. An increase in female participation in high-tech entrepreneurship, employment and leadership should establish a culture of gender parity in these sectors, with impact on inclusive growth and regional competitiveness.

## ADRBI Action Plan

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# 1. Introduction

FEMINA partners believe that increased female participation can make high-tech SMEs more competitive. This belief, based on academic studies and practical experience, should become part of mainstream policy. The partnership undertakes a series of actions for identifying, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policy measures that remove obstacles to high-tech entrepreneurship for women, employment and career progression among SMEs high technology, also addressing the gender dimension of innovation in financing schemes for start-ups and SMEs. In this context, FEMINA partners cooperate at interregional level to reach their overall aim: to ensure that selected policy instruments are integrated with measures to promote female engagement in their high-tech sectors, with a focus on sectors in their RIS3.

Bucharest Ilfov Regional Development Agency (ADR-BI) was established by Law 315/2004, which states that regional development policy aims for balanced and sustainable economic development, SME competitiveness and reduced socio-economic gap between Romania and other EU states. ADR-BI is responsible for the elaboration of the Regional Development Plan. Is the Intermediate Body for the Regional Operational Program (ROP) 2007-2013 and ROP 2014-2020 at regional level, also the Implementing Agency for the Phare - Economic and Social Cohesion Program, as well as for certain financing programs of the Romanian Government. Therefore, ADR-BI has knowledge of working with SMEs that can be shared with partners, in addition to policy development and monitoring expertise.

Participation in the FEMINA initiative enabled Bucharest Ilfov Regional Development Agency and key stakeholders to work towards the alignment of the regional practices regarding encouraging gender equality – particularly in high-tech enterprises – in Bucharest-Ilfov Region to a benchmarked standard agreed by all project partners. The Bucharest partner and its stakeholders also learned from more experienced regions about budgets and finance models needed by this type of development. Progress in partner regions regarding gender gap in high technology SMEs certainly contributed to the learning process for an improved state of play within the Bucharest – Ilfov Region. This learning process informed on the design of some concrete measures to be introduced – from case to case – in the area of governance/management or of structural change to the later stages of the Regional Operational Programme. These are focused on maximizing the opportunities for high-tech companies and those of the value chain (SMEs) to contribute to female participation by adopting new work practice and/or developing related new products/services.

## 2. General information

Project: Femina - Female participation in high – tech enterprises

Partner organization: P6 - Bucharest Ilfov Regional Development Agency

Country: Romania

Nuts2: Bucharest - Ilfov

Contact person: Daniel Popescu

Email address: daniel.popescu@adrbi.ro

Phone number: +004 0213159659

## 3. Policy context

The initially proposed reference policy instrument for Bucharest Ilfov Regional Development Agency (ADR-BI) action plan was The Regional Operational Program Investment in Growth and Jobs ERDF 2014-2020 in Bucharest-Ilfov Region.

Regional Operational Program (ROP) has been until recently managed by the Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration as Managing Authority and the priority investment axes have already been drawn up for the current implementation period. ROP includes gender equality as a horizontal principle. However, there is no direct connection between this principle and its potential to promote competitiveness in high tech.

According to Emergency Ordinance no. 122/2020 (on some measures to ensure the efficiency of the decision-making process of non-reimbursable external funds for regional development in Romania), ADR-BI will be the next Managing Authority for the Regional Operational Program (ROP) 2021-2027 for Bucharest-Ilfov region. The process of taking over this role by ADRBI is on-going and involves a complex approach in terms of the new attributions and responsibilities.

The European Regional Development Fund has already launched Regional Operational Program since 2014, the activities have therefore been planned by Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration well before the start of the FEMINA project. Therefore, ERDF program is fairly advanced with most of the expenditure having taken place but in 2021 a new ERDF program will be launched. The action plan intends therefore to have a lasting impact and not to be limited to a single ERDF program.

Considering this overall framework, even if ADR BI was originally targeting the Regional Operational Programme Investment in Growth and Jobs ERDF 2014-2020 (Bucharest-Ilfov), this has proved not to be feasible any longer. Considering the fact that ADR-BI is in the process of becoming Managing Authority for ROP 2021-2027, it is highly probable to obtain the support and endorsement of the action plan from the Agency Leadership.

FEMINA project considers how to identify, implement, monitor and evaluate policy measures that break down barriers to female high-tech entrepreneurship, to employment and career progression in high-tech SMEs and to the gender dimension of innovation in funding schemes for high-tech start-ups and SMEs. Therefore, we consider approaching the gender dimension in reaching the new policy instrument to establish the gender parity with impact on inclusive growth and regional competitiveness.

As a first step, We intend to reach the new policy instrument ROP 2021-2027 by including specific actions prioritizing region's competitiveness through innovation, digitalization and agile enterprises approaching the gender dimension theme of the Femina project and including the gender criteria on **the above** objectives:

- Business infrastructure for SMEs;
- Business support for spin-off, spin-out and start-up enterprises;
- Entrepreneurship competencies development;
- SMEs digitalization.

Concerning the relationship with the new reference policy instrument ROP 2021-2027, the Regional Operational Programme includes as a priority “A competitive region through innovation, digitization and dynamic enterprises”

Furthermore, the stage of the new ROP 2021-2027 is still a draft version being under negotiation with the responsible bodies. It is intended that the general guidelines and farther more the specific guidelines to be finalized in 2022 and the first calls to be launched after this step is accomplished. However, there is a high degree of uncertainty, and therefore we consider that a concrete action to influence the new ROP as much as possible under the current circumstances is the development of a boosting toolkit for female participation in high – tech SMEs – as a predecessor document of the specific programme guidelines.

## **4. Action**

### ***Developing a boosting toolkit for female participation in high – tech SMEs***

This action involves the developing of a boosting toolkit that concentrates a set of measures, actions and guiding lines to be taken by high-tech SMEs that refers to:

- Giving to women the same opportunities as men in the workplace;
- Eliminating of implicit prejudices related to women's employment decisions in the field of technology;
- Identifying role models and female mentors in the technology sector;
- Promoting female inclusion and encouraging participation in management positions;

Lesson learnt on the occasion of FEMINA events, exchange of experiences, exchange

of good practices, virtual meetings and knowledge sharing through project channels (email, social media, etc.), provided precious experiences to be shared with local high-tech SMEs related to supporting women inclusion and women access in management positions.

With FEMINA project as a background and believing that even the smallest changes have the potential to trigger major improvements in the future policy context, the aim of this action is to develop the boosting toolkit that includes concrete steps/measures to be taken by high – tech SMEs to supporting female inclusion and female access in management positions (leading to increased number of female managers in high-tech SMEs). It aims to guide and inspire SMEs to use women's potential as an economic force/vector.

Each of the topics outlined above will be covered in subsequent modules of the toolkit together with measures, actions and guiding lines to promote female participation in high-tech SMEs. The toolkit will work as a promotion guide, which can be considered by high-tech SMEs as a awareness guide that links to the organization strategy and sustainability. Each organization is in a unique position relative to its business strategies, current culture, progress and barriers related to inclusive female talent development. For these reasons organizations should conduct an assessment internally to determine where the priority challenges and opportunities lie and, therefore, which best practice solutions are indicated to be taken into account from the toolkit.

The expected results is to influence as many high-tech SMEs as possible to take into account the set of measures, actions and guiding line included in the toolkit when planning their strategy.

This action will indirectly contribute to improving the policy instrument addressed by better understanding of the opportunities in terms of economic growth, the development and sustainability of high-tech SMEs in Bucharest Ilfov region. The information from the good practices included in the toolkit can be extremely useful to Romanian high tech SMEs and the potential of transferability is considerable high.

The dissemination of the toolkit will also raise awareness among SMEs concerning the benefits of female potential and its economic advantages.

An important expected results is to influence as many high-tech SMEs as possible to take into account the set of measures, actions and guiding lines included in the toolkit when planning their strategy.

This action is intended to influence the policy instrument by preparing the steps for the transition from gender neutral to gender mainstreaming and gender targeting, hereafter better understanding of the opportunities in terms of economic growth, the development and sustainability of high-tech SMEs in Bucharest Ilfov region. The information from the good practices included in the toolkit can be extremely useful to Romanian high-tech SMEs and the potential of transferability is considerable high.

This toolkit will also support female entrepreneurship to know the general rules under which they can apply for ROP funding.

*Details of the Actions Envisaged*

Action	Developing a boosting toolkit for female participation in high-tech SMEs
<p>Policy Addressed</p> <p>Need</p>	<p>The policy need that this action intends to address is to improve the way in which measures implemented by ROP actively support female participation in high-tech SMEs.</p> <p>Providing this toolkit, that includes good practices already implemented related to female participation in high-tech SMEs, to potential beneficiaries of ROP creates the premises that future grant applications are better elaborated, with higher chances of financing.</p> <p>In order to address this need in a successful manner it is necessary to prepare the ground both at the level of awareness and the one of implementation knowledge. The toolkit is meant to push forward these limitations by drafting future possible projects' promotion and financing criterias to be implemented within the specific guides. In addition, providing this toolkit – that includes steps to be taken and good practices already implemented related to female participation in high-tech SMEs – to potential beneficiaries of ROP creates the premises that future grant applications are better elaborated, with higher chances of financing.</p> <p>There is a favourable general attitude for changing the behaviour/ spirit among women working in high – tech SMEs, as well as public policies.</p> <p>The public perception of the role of women in society, as well as in business knows one stable growth, and actions taken in this regard are highly likely to achieve viable results.</p> <p>Even if there are obstacles that prevent women in accessing management positions, the development of complete sources of information - consultative offices, top and middle management models education, events dedicated to the promotion and development of the female inclusion, platforms that promote successful women, good practices guide etc. - has the potential to increase substantially the number of young women entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Lesson learnt on the occasion of FEMINA events, exchange of experiences, exchange of good practices, virtual meetings and knowledge sharing through project channels (email, social media, etc.), provided precious experiences to be shared with local SMEs to improve their policy.</p>
<p>Overall Topic</p>	<p>The action refers to promoting female inclusion and encouraging participation in management positions in high-tech SMEs by developing a boosting toolkit that concentrate a set of measures, actions and guidelines. Bucharest – Ilfov Regional Development Agency will develop this toolkit, using lesson learned through the Femina project.</p> <p>The toolkit shall be a path breaker in encouraging all range of organizations to exponentially use women's technical, managerial and entrepreneurial talent.</p>

<p>Specific Description</p>	<p>The implementation of the action as result of the interregional learning process gives ADRBI and project's key stakeholders the background for improving SMEs competitiveness policies, regionally. The action is, in fact, a concrete measure focused on promoting women's potential to use women's potential as an economic force/vector.</p> <p>Therefore, ADR-BI will create the favorable framework for the most influential stakeholders to adhere to measures boosting competitiveness through female participation in high-tech enterprise.</p> <p>The proposed toolkit will define concrete strands of activity and suggest specific measures and initiatives to be supported that will help SMEs sector to harness opportunities linked to the competitiveness, thus contributing to the policy improvement. Following the estimated succes of our endeavour, it is intended at a later stage to reach the policy level by supporting the introduction of specific gender criterias within the financing guidelines.</p> <p>The toolkit will be elaborated by ADRBI and the related costs of development, distribution and raising awareness will be covered by our organization using funds gathered from the local authorities in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, through the Regional Development Fund.</p> <p>The toolkit will be distributed both as printed document and in digital format. We consider very useful to include in the toolkit some general guidelines for accessing European funding, including ERDF funds, available through ROP 2021-2027.</p> <p>In terms of self-defined performance indicators, what it has been assumed by the Application Form ("Adherence of two most influential stakeholders to measures boosting competitiveness through female participation in high-tech enterprises") shall be accomplished and probably even overfulfilled. Since these stakeholders, as we intend, will be members of the Regional Board – so very influential regarding the policy level in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region – this is a supplementary argument regarding the concrete bases established by FEMINA project and the influence upon the policy instrument, due to improved management and partnership capacity.</p>
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<p>Regional / Local input, including input from FEMINA Stakeholder Groups</p>	<p>The work throughout the Femina project, such as good practice transfer workshops, stakeholder meetings where we collected inputs from the stakeholders groups has been the main inspiration for us and had a lot of impact on stakeholders of the region for whom the concept and Femina practice was not familiar</p> <p>As a concrete input that made us think about developing the toolkit, is that during the stakeholder group meetings we encountered an open attitude towards encouraging the female participation in the high-tech sector but we also identified a high level of confusion about how this could be done.</p> <p>In this respect, the toolkit will provide essential information towards solutions in order to decrease the level of confusion our stakeholders are dealing with .</p> <p>The stakeholders also expressed the interest in funding opportunities for the development of their organizations.</p> <p>In this respect, we came up with the idea of including in the toolkit some general guidelines for accessing European funding.</p> <p>The information presented in the toolkit about the general mechanism of European funding and general eligibility criteria can facilitate a better understanding of European financing, including ROP. We consider that the information provided in the toolkit on European funding and also from the exemplified good practices, can lead to better grant applications on ROP.</p>
<p>Transfer of FEMINA Solutions (GP) and other input from interregional exchange in FEMINA</p>	
<p>Description of Solution (GP title / other input)</p>	<p>VHTO, Expertise centre improving gender participation in STEM through “Role models programs” developed a scan/tool for SME’s and entrepreneurs to measure the state of participation of women in the organisation and how to improve it.</p>
<p>Elements to be transferred for my policy improvement</p>	<p>During the organization of Femina interregional exchange session, different successfully good practices were presented by each partner.</p> <p>These good practices were a great starting point for the learning and sharing of knowledge process.</p> <p>The action draws inspiration from PP10 CMO STAMM’s good practice, named “Role models programs” implemented by VHTO, Expertise centre improving the gender participation in STEM.</p> <p>VHTO aims to increase the participation of women and girls in STEM and contributes to breaking (implicit) stereotypes concerning gender &amp; STEM, and to increasing the growth mindset and self-confidence of girls and young women regarding STEM subjects. Recently, VHTO developed a scan/tool for SME’s and entrepreneurs to measure the state of participation of women in the organisation and how to improve it.</p> <p>This action inspired ADRBI to develop a boosting toolkit for high – tech SMEs that supports and promotes a set of measure to be implemented in order to promote female inclusion and encourage participation in management positions.</p>

<p>Exchange process (How did I learn about the solution? When did I get the input? etc.)</p>	<p>Femina interregional exchange sessions, semester 2 when all partners presented their regional good practices uploaded on Teams Platform.</p> <p>During the second semester, in 2019, all partners were invited to collect good practices from their own region related to Femina project and to upload them on the Teams Platform, in the good practices marketplace, in order to be voted as most interesting ones. The good practice was shared within the stakeholder group meeting organized by us on 3rd of April 2019. From the actions taken by our partners we learned that beyond good intentions, to succeed in encouraging women's participation in high tech it is necessary to systematically and constantly apply a set of actions to encourage their participation. We also learned that a permanent measurement is also needed for women's participation in such organizations</p>
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*Specific Activities and Timeframe*

<p>Start– End Date 1</p>	<p>Overview of lesson learnt and results achieved – June- October 2021</p>
<p>Start– End Date 2</p>	<p>Developing the boosting toolkit (research activities, adaptation to Romanian entrepreneurial environment needs, testing the measures with the stakeholders and receiving feedback, defining the final shape of the toolkit) – November 2021 may 2022</p>
<p>Start – End Date 3</p>	<p>Printing the toolkit (available also on online format)– may 2022</p>
<p>Start – End Date 4</p>	<p>Disseminating (both printed and online version) the toolkit and follow-up (availability of ADR-BI Femina experts for bilateral meetings and implementation consultancy input for the toolkit) may 2022 – December 2023</p>

*Stakeholders involved*

<p>Name of Organisation / person (where possible)</p>	<p>Role in Action Plan</p>
<p>Bucharest Ilfov Regional Development Agency</p>	<p>Without continuing the actions initiated by Femina project the envisaged impact would definitely diminish. Therefore, further initiatives are needed in order to amplify the positive results obtained by now. In this respect, ADRBI will elaborate and disseminate the boosting toolkit identified throughout the Femina project to create support facilities for the high –tech SMEs. The toolkit will be disseminated directly to high-tech SMEs and representative associations related to high-tech (NGOs, business associations etc.)</p>

Costs	Funding Sources
7000 euros	The funds needed to cover the costs for this action will be gathered from the local authorities in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, through the Regional Development Fund

Description of Risk	Level of probability (High, Medium, Low)	Description of Contingency Plan
not enough support from the media – either television or local radio stations	High	Developing of newsletters, social-media promotion, one-to one meeting with stakeholders
Few direct contacts with beneficiaries	Low	Developing an optimal data base of key stakeholders from high-tech SMEs

*Self-defined Performance Indicators*

Indicator	Target	Means of Verification
Number of boosting toolkit disseminated	300	Number of boosting toolkit disseminated

*Output Indicators*

Indicator	Target	Means of Verification
Number of most influential stakeholders adhering to measures boosting competitiveness through female participation in high-tech enterprises	2	Number of most influential stakeholders adhering to measures boosting competitiveness through female participation in high-tech enterprises



