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FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN HIGH-TECH ENTERPRISES

ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑΚΟ ΤΑΜΕΙΟ ΑΝΑΠΤΥΞΗΣ | ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ ΣΤΕΡΕΑΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ

ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΚΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ



ATHENS UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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.

Authors:

Regional Development Fund of Sterea Ellada:

Charalampos Kasaras

Aris Gourgiotis

Vicky Karavangeli

AUEB-RC:

Associate Professor Eleni Apospori

Dr. Christos S. Tsanos

Dr. Konstantinos G. Zografos

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Introduction

FEMINA is an Interreg Europe project focusing on ways 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 on 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 the development, implementation and monitoring of regional policies) and through strategic focus, whereby partners work to include female participation in high-tech as a fundamental principle of their policies for SME competitiveness.

The Region of Sterea Ellada, is represented in the consortium by the Regional Development Fund of Sterea Ellada. The Regional Development Fund's main mission is the management of financing pertaining to the Public Investment Programme, the management of government financing and the administration of appropriations regarding European Commission Programmes. Its role also extends to the imposition, assessment and collection of charges, fees, dues, levies and contributions on behalf of the Fund upon the Regional Council's approval.

Within FEMINA, the Regional Development Fund of Sterea Ellada envisages the refinement of the Region's strategy regarding entrepreneurship, in a way that captures value from a differentiated production base with a strong local focus. This differentiated production base refers to motivation and provision of support and incentives to potential female entrepreneurs in the high-tech sector or to women who wish to be employed in the high-tech sectors identified in the Region's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3). This is envisaged mainly through the implementation of new actions that invest in female entrepreneurship and enhance the gender dimension of innovation. The objective of these projects will be to assist the beneficiaries (female entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs as well as women wishing to enter the labour market) to achieve competitiveness and sustainability objectives.

The interregional cooperation, peer learning and exchange processes performed throughout the FEMINA project benefited the Region of Sterea Ellada in investigating and identifying ways for measurable and permanent change in the regional entrepreneurship policy towards supporting female entrepreneurship and employment in high-tech sectors. The Region seeks to specify the impact of female entrepreneurship on regional competitiveness. Through the present Action Plan, the Region aims to incorporate female entrepreneurship and employment in high-tech sectors in the selected policy instrument and the consequent development of new projects.

The present Action Plan also benefitted greatly from collaboration of the Regional Development Fund with the Athens University of Economics and Business– Research Center (AUEB-RC) team. The AUEB-RC team provided the Region, throughout the project, with scientific/advisory support for the successful development and implementation of all project activities.

The following figure illustrates FEMINA’s methodology from understanding barriers and enablers to female participation in high tech industry, to identifying solutions and developing the Action Plan.

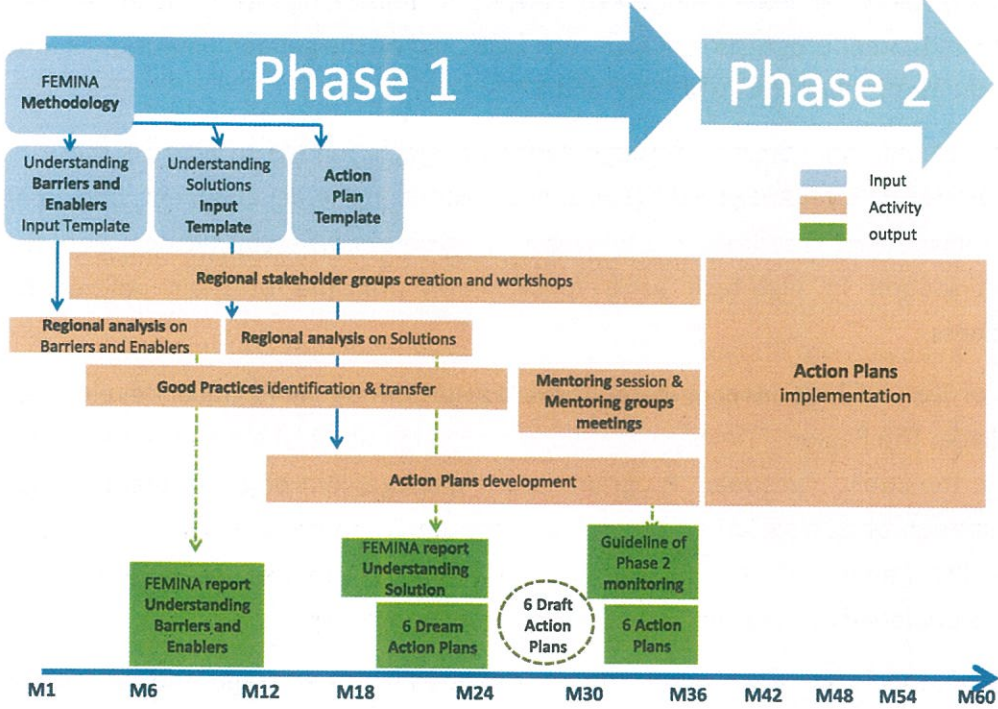


Figure 1: FEMINA methodology

The methodology illustrated in Figure 1 illustrates the activities undertaken by project partners that lead to the development of the Action Plans (Phase 1) and their implementation (Phase 2). In the context of this methodology, the AUEB-RC team cooperated with the RSE in the regional analysis of the barriers and enablers on female entrepreneurship and employment, the regional analysis of available solutions (i.e. Good Practices), the transfer of GPs to the RSE, and in the development of the Action Plan. Through its participation in the Local Stakeholder Group meetings and the FEMINA Mentoring Group meetings, AUEB-RC helped integrate the viewpoints of the local stakeholders and the comments of the FEMINA Mentoring Group in the content of the Action Plan.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows: Section 2 presents general information on the identity and contact details of the Regional Development Fund of Sterea Ellada. Section 3 presents the policy context of Sterea Ellada, within which the Action Plan is developed. Section 4 describes the policy need that is being addressed by the Action Plan. Section 5 lists the two Actions included in the Action Plan and Section 6 describes these actions in greater detail in terms of the policy need addressed by each Action, policy improvement introduced and the Action time plan. Finally, Section 7 presents horizontal elements pertinent to both Actions, such as stakeholders involved, costs and funding sources for both actions, risks and mitigating measures, and monitoring indicators.

General information

project: FEMINA: Female participation in high-tech enterprises

partner organisation: Regional Development Fund of Sterea Ellada on behalf of Region of Sterea Ellada

country: Greece

nuts2: EL64

contact person: Charalampos Kasaras

email address: ch.kasaras@fthiotida.pste.gov.gr

phone number: +30 2231354721

Policy context

Region of Sterea Ellada, is represented in the consortium by the Regional Development Fund, as an entity responsible for the design, management and monitoring of the **Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for 2014-2020**. It is the owner of the respective policy instrument and all other instruments mentioned in the ROP and it has overall control over programme specification and allocation of financial resources, taking into consideration European and national legislation. The ROP for 2014-2020 consists of priority axes associated with the actions that Region of Sterea Ellada wants to implement.

Priority Axis 03 - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, is the Sterea Ellada ROP Priority Axis connected with the actions proposed in the FEMINA project. The thematic and specific objectives and investment priorities related to Priority Axis 03 are detailed below:

Thematic Objective 03: Enhancing the competitiveness of small-medium enterprises, the agricultural sector, the fisheries and aquaculture sector,

Investment Priority 3a: Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and supporting the creation of new businesses, including through business incubators

Specific objective 3a1: Growth of innovative enterprises (in RIS3 sectors)

Investment Priority 3c: Supporting the creation and the extension of advanced capacities for products and service development within RIS3 industries

Policy Need for the Region of Sterea Ellada

The Region of Sterea Ellada is lagging in major entrepreneurship performance indicators. The prolonged financial crisis along with the economic emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of significant capital reserves have resulted in a decrease of businesses and investments and deceleration in the establishment of new SMEs. This context affects negatively the role and contribution of entrepreneurship in regional development and affects all sectors, including high-tech. The contribution of female entrepreneurship in regional development is also limited. This is affected by a number of barriers (identified and described in greater detail in the “Understanding Barriers and Enablers”¹ report for the Region of Sterea Ellada). These barriers include:

- i) the lack of practical know-how and vocational training on starting and maintaining a business,
- ii) difficulty of access to financing sources for starting a business,
- iii) the lack of specially skilled female employees that will staff high-tech businesses, and
- iv) the lack of structures and mechanisms in the Region to support the access of women to high-tech sector, involve highly trained and educated women in SME activities and retain them within the regional SME workforces.

Based on the above description, there is a need to develop a specific policy intervention that aims to support female entrepreneurship and employment in the high-tech sector by addressing some of the abovementioned barriers.

Changes in the economic environment due to the recession highlighted the Region’s structural weaknesses. The economy has changed in terms of production base, employment, investments intensity and entrepreneurship. Instruments 3a and 3c aim to promote entrepreneurship, to support the creation of new businesses and to support the development of advanced capabilities of businesses in RIS3 sectors. Overall, it is expected to enhance the regional economy in terms of growth, sustainability, employment and output.

Despite the issues described above, Sterea Ellada is still considered the “industrial heart” of Greece, while retaining intense national presence in agri-food and tourism sectors. Sterea Ellada’s important tangible and intangible natural, cultural and industrial reserves comprise the spearhead of the Region’s SME competitiveness, investment and sustainable development strategies. In this context, during recent years several structures have been created or upgraded (Center for Regional and Local Innovation, AgriFood Partnership of Central Greece etc.) to assist the Region in achieving its objectives as stated in the policy instrument. Such structures can become the vehicle

¹ Region of Sterea Ellada and Athens University of Economics and Business – Research Centre (2019), “Understanding Barriers and Enablers” report for the Region of Sterea Ellada; developed within the framework of FEMINA.

for transferring and adapting FEMINA's best practices, guidelines and lessons learned into the regional economy.

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination are horizontal principles of the Regional Operation Plan. In this context, Instruments 3a and 3c view gender as a general principle without focusing on the integration of gender in high-tech entrepreneurship and employment. The policy intervention described in this Action Plan goes one step further by introducing the gender dimension in a concrete policy and actions.

Overall, the goal of the Region in FEMINA is to improve the capacity of the Region to promote female entrepreneurship and employment and, as such, to lead to the overall enhancement of the regional economy. Specifically, the Region aims to increase the competitiveness and sustainability of female led entrepreneurship and to strengthen the gender dimension of innovation through the provision of support to female entrepreneurs and women who wish to become employed in high-tech sectors, which may help create the appropriate conditions for the development of innovative products and services.

List of Actions

The Action Plan of the Region includes two Actions:

Action 1: Training to potential female entrepreneurs and to women who want to be employed in the high tech sectors in the Region of Sterea Ellada

This Action aims to provide training and practical know-how to women interested to start or become employed in a high-tech sector company. This will be achieved, through the organisation of training seminars that will provide prospective female entrepreneurs and potential employees with valuable knowledge, practical skills and tools for setting up or being employed in a company in high-tech sectors.

This Action is connected to the Sterea Ellada ROP 2014-2020, Investment Priority 3a "Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating economic exploitation of new ideas and creation of new businesses, including through business incubators" and to Investment Priority 3c "Supporting the creation and extension of advanced capacities for products and service development within RIS3 industries". All training costs will be covered by ROP.

Action 2: Provision of personalised support and coaching on how to access funding, to intensify female start-ups and entrepreneurship in high-tech sectors

This Action aims to strengthen female start-up companies / entrepreneurs by providing them with targeted technical support. These measures will provide individualised support on a per applicant basis and indicatively refer to:

- Developing an initial Business Plan

- Identifying financing mechanisms and successfully applying to acquire funding
- Integrating the new business into collective organised structures (i.e. clusters)

This Action is connected to the Sterea Ellada ROP 2014-2020, Investment Priority 3a “Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating economic exploitation of new ideas and creation of new businesses, including through business incubators”. This Investment Priority envisages strengthening the competitiveness of SMEs and the agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture sectors in general. The proposed Action updates the associated Policy Instrument (Investment Priority 3b) by introducing a specific focus on female entrepreneurship, enhancing regional female workers’ and businesses’ innovation capacity and competitiveness through the funding of personalised coaching and consultation for accessing financing tools and the benefits of cluster membership. All consultation costs will be covered by ROP.

Details of the Actions Envisaged

ACTION 1

Title

Training to potential female entrepreneurs and to women who want to be employed in the high tech sectors in the Region of Sterea Ellada

Policy Need Addressed

The Action mainly addresses the need for a policy intervention that addresses the lack of the skills and competences required to involve women in high-tech entrepreneurial activities or employment in high-tech enterprises.

The Region of Sterea Ellada opts for a paradigm shift in the SME workforce by differentiating its production base and promoting female entrepreneurship as a tool to achieve smart sustainable and inclusive growth. Similar changes are envisioned in all dominant industries of the Region as indicated in the regional innovation strategy for smart specialisation (RIS3), such as manufacturing, metal processing, agri-food and tourism.

In doing so, the policy instruments addressed need to be enhanced with training and capacity building programmes specifically targeting existing or potential female employees and entrepreneurs of the Region in RIS3-related high-tech sectors.

This policy need is addressed within the framework of Action 1 "Training to potential female entrepreneurs and to women who want to be employed in the high tech sectors in the Region of Sterea Ellada". This Action proposes training programmes that will improve the capabilities of beneficiaries to set up companies or become employed in the Region's high-tech sectors. The female entrepreneurship and employment in these sectors can lead to the design and development of new, innovative, differentiated and sustainable projects and products, particularly addressing the Region's high-tech sectors.

Overview of the Policy Improvement

<i>Overall Topic</i>	To provide know-how and skills for women interested in taking up entrepreneurial activities or becoming employed in the high tech sector in the Region of Sterea Ellada
<i>Specific Description</i>	<p>This Action aims to provide basic information, know-how and practical skills for women that are interested in starting or being employed in a company in the Region's high-tech sectors, through the organisation of relevant training workshops and seminars.</p> <p>The workshops and seminars will provide prospective female entrepreneurs and prospective female employees with valuable knowledge and training and capacity building tools for setting up a company or becoming employed in a company in the Region's high-tech sector. The seminars will focus on RIS3-related industries, such as</p>

manufacturing, metal processing, agri-food and tourism. The seminars will be organised in cooperation with the Regional Centre for Business Support (RCBS) and regional universities.

More particularly, the workshops will be organised in different courses of a total duration of 20-50 hours. All courses will be held in person with each training class being attended by 5 to 10 people. The daily duration of each training session will not exceed 5 hours. Hence, each training cycle will last approximately two weeks. Participation will be free of charge for the beneficiaries.

The trainers will be primarily employees of RCBS. If needed, experts from local universities or other collaborators of the Region will be involved.

The selection of beneficiaries will be ongoing for the entire duration of the Action and will be based on an open-call procedure with specific cut-off dates, where applicants will express their interest in participating via an online registration process. The registration process will be simple and straightforward (i.e. a simple online form) and will guide all interested beneficiaries in providing the necessary information. The selection of the beneficiaries will follow an approach based on selection criteria that will be publicised along with the call for the expression of interest.

The training seminars will cover a wide range of different thematic areas and competences in two main axes: a) horizontal trainings leading to broader knowledge and practical skills that can be used by all beneficiaries and b) specialised and vertical thematic training sessions. The seminars are envisaged to include the following content, which should cover the needs of both potential entrepreneurs and aspiring employees in high-tech sectors:

- Awareness raising about the needed diversity on the labour market
- Increase motivation and strengthen leadership skills
- Develop marketing, digital and communication skills
- Business startup, management and accounting process
- Principles of corporate law
- Civil liability and other liability profiles
- Strengthen extroversion in tourism and agri-food sectors
- Smart infrastructure and technologies in manufacturing and metal processing – Internet of Things
- Design Thinking
- Smart supply chain management
- Biotechnology and bioinformatics
- Pharmaceutical technologies

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Green ICT design, development and utilisation - E-commerce platforms utilisation - Mobile application development tools and practices <p>Throughout each training cycle, representatives from enterprises, universities and public institutions in high-tech sectors will be invited to give inspiring speeches and provide real-life references that could motivate beneficiaries.</p> <p>This Action is connected to Investment Priority 3a “Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and supporting the creation of new businesses, including through business incubators” and the Investment Priority 3c “Supporting the creation and the extension of advanced capacities for products and service development within RIS3 industries” of the Sterea Ellada ROP. All training costs will be covered by ROP.</p> <p>Until now, the gender dimension of innovation constituted a horizontal dimension in the ROP. The coverage of the training costs by the ROP signifies a more vertical introduction of the gender dimension of innovation in a specific economic sector of the Region (i.e. the high-tech sector).</p> <p>This Action addresses the barriers titled “Lack of practical know-how and vocational training on starting and maintaining entrepreneurial activity”, which highlights the lack of practical guidance on starting up a company, and “Lack of regional structures / mechanisms in place for supporting access of women to high-tech SMEs”. These barriers were identified in the “Understanding Barriers and Enablers” report for RSE, developed by RSE and the AUEB-RC team.</p>
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Background	
<p><i>Regional / Local input, including input from FEMINA Stakeholder Groups</i></p>	<p>The Region of Sterea Ellada and the AUEB-RC team have been in contact and collaboration with the Local Stakeholder Group (LSG) representatives during the various activities of the FEMINA project. As a result of LSG meetings and activities, the Region has managed to co-validate barriers and enablers for female entrepreneurship and employment in high-tech sectors within its intervention area.</p> <p>One of the key issues identified by the LSG was the lack of regional mechanisms required to recruit and retain highly trained and educated workforce, and especially women, in high-tech SMEs characterised by high levels of R&D. Moreover, there was a consensus among LSG members that no structures / mechanisms are in place to support female entrepreneurship and/or access to the high-tech sector in the Region of Sterea Ellada. This is despite the fact that the region constitutes the “industrial heart” of Greece and, as such, is expected to demonstrate a higher concentration of high technology enterprises.</p>

To this end, an Action for the provision of specialised know-how for women interested in taking up entrepreneurial activity or becoming employed in companies in the Region's high-tech sector was proposed. This would cover for the lack of practical guidance on starting up a company and lack of regional structures / mechanisms in place to support female entrepreneurship and employment in the Region's high-tech sector.

Transfer of FEMINA Solutions (GP) and other input from interregional exchange in FEMINA

Description of Solution (GP title / other input)	Elements to be transferred for my policy improvement	Exchange process (How did I learn about the solution? When did I get the input? etc.)
Donne in Quota (Arezzo Innovazione)	<p>Activities that are related to the training of women on management and accounting aspects that will help better understand financial statements, and on the leadership and motivation skills required by a company owner.</p> <p>The initiative also helps women to understand the trend of corporate well-being, as part of the offered know-how for taking up entrepreneurial activity in high tech sectors.</p> <p>The overall concept of this GP, as well as some of the topics of the training courses, such as "Business management and accounting" and "Principles of corporate law", will be transferred to Action 1 and adjusted to the background and particular aims of the Region.</p>	<p>Region of Sterea Ellada learned about this GP in the interregional exchange session of Convention 2 held in Lamia and was chosen by local stakeholders in a subsequent LSG meeting discussion, as an interesting GP that could be used in the regional Action Plan.</p> <p>Further input and more technical details were acquired throughout the FEMINA mentoring group meetings on 11/11/2020 and 17/11/2020.</p>
Explorer (Region Cantabria)	<p>Activities that support the promotion of youth entrepreneurship and its technological initiatives, so as to provide expertise and tutoring from a wide expert's network.</p> <p>Selected themes of the Good Practice and more particularly those related to cutting-edge</p>	<p>Region of Sterea Ellada learned about this GP after analysing the compiled pool of GPs highlighted by all FEMINA partners. Details of the GP were discussed with LSG members in the third LSG meeting and the GP was signified as a good point</p>

	<p>technologies (i.e. Design Thinking) will be transferred to Action 1.</p>	<p>of reference for the regional Action Plan.</p> <p>Further input and more technical details were acquired throughout the FEMINA mentoring group meetings on 11/11/2020 and 17/11/2020.</p>
Empowa (Region Attica)	<p>Training activities and advisory services given to women who are potential entrepreneurs and face lack of finance, information and business partnering networks.</p> <p>The methodology used by the Good Practice for a) designing courses for topics such as entrepreneurship and business management, b) identifying highly-innovative SMEs led by women and c) providing mentoring services will be transferred to Action 1.</p>	<p>Region of Sterea Ellada selected and presented this GP in Interregional exchange session Convention 2 held in Lamia. The Region was in close contact with the Empowa Project Coordinator (i.e. the National Documentation Centre) via emails and phone calls, during the third and fourth semesters of FEMINA.</p> <p>Further input and more technical details were acquired throughout the FEMINA mentoring group meetings on 11/11/2020 and 17/11/2020.</p>



Figure 2: LSG in action

Specific Activities and Timeframe

<p>Ongoing throughout Phase 1</p>	<p>The Regional Development Fund project team identified within the second semester of the project that the Business Support Center of the Region, which is entirely funded by the ROP and focuses on regional entrepreneurship support, could be utilized for the proper implementation of the Action Plan.</p> <p>The possibility for the Action Plan implementation costs to be integrated in the operational budget of the Business Support Center was discussed, in order to efficiently address possible administrative complications in allocating ERDF funds to new projects.</p> <p>Accordingly, meetings with the Governor's office and the Business Support Center Director in the third and fourth semester of the project, indicated that the proposed approach was both valid and eligible, as well as feasible and efficient.</p> <p>Moreover, Region of Sterea Ellada organised and carried out meetings of the Local Stakeholder Group on 28/05/2019, 15/11/2019, 25/05/2020 and 30/11/2020. During these meetings, participants discussed the needs of the Region and Good Practices and respective actions that they would like to see transferred and implemented during the project.</p> <p>The LSG meetings were pivotal in validating barriers and enablers for women entrepreneurship and employment in high-tech sectors, initially selecting the Good Practices to be transferred, adapting them to the regional context and finally drafting and maturing the Regional Action Plan.</p> <p>The meetings of the FEMINA Mentoring Group (11/11/2020 and 17/11/2020) also constituted milestones for the development of the policy improvement. They provided detailed input on the GPs of interest, answered specific questions regarding their transferability and applicability in the context of the Region of Sterea Ellada and contributed to the refinement and finalisation of the content of the Action.</p>
<p>6/2021 – 8/2021 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Region of Sterea Ellada will finalise all internal procedures required to allocate ERDF funding to this Action.</p> <p>With the 1873/13-3-2017 Decision, the Special Managing Authority for the Operational Programme of the Region of Sterea Ellada, has included the Regional Business Support Center in the ROP and defined its respective operational budget. Any specialization of the operational budget in definite actions and services is communicated by the Region to the Managing Authority, without the need of a new Decision.</p> <p>It should be noted that the underlying discussions and preparatory work has already been initiated towards integrating all necessary funding needs in the Regional Centre for Business Support operational budget for fiscal years 2021 and 2022.</p>

<p>9/2021 – 10/2021 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Region of Sterea Ellada will design and run training and dissemination material design and development. The material will focus on the indicative themes and topics illustrated above.</p> <p>The produced material will support the underlying dissemination activities, which include online advertising (via the involved stakeholders' websites and social media accounts) as well as on-field dissemination actions using in-print banners, leaflets, brochures etc.</p> <p>The respective training material will take the form of presentations including text and illustrations as well as lectures formatted as short videos combined with formative quizzes.</p> <p>All training courses and dissemination material will be designed and produced by the Regional Centre for Business Support with the in-house support of other units of the Regional Administration lead by the Regional Development Fund. RCBS will primarily utilise and adapt existing material from past or ongoing relative initiatives. Where necessary, the Region will reach out to its existing network of external collaborators and partners for particular subtasks, such as printing out communication material.</p> <p>In parallel, at this stage the beneficiaries' selection process and criteria will be defined. The selection of the beneficiaries will follow an approach based on selection criteria that will be publicised along with the call for the expression of interest.</p>
<p>11/2021 – 11/2022 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Dissemination campaigns for informing beneficiaries and local stakeholders about female entrepreneurship opportunities in high-tech sectors and success stories on a regional, national and international level.</p> <p>The campaigns should work as a dissemination tool for presenting the training sessions of the Action. The campaigns will be open to the public with key information being also published online. A central aspect of the promotion campaigns will be to establish a low threshold for first contact, opening the opportunity for women to be activated at least for an informal chat and thus securing a minimum level of engagement with beneficiaries.</p> <p>Also, at this stage the Action will seek to engage and activate representatives from enterprises, universities and public institutions in high-tech sectors, who will be invited to give aspiring speeches and provide real-life references that could motivate beneficiaries during each training cycle.</p> <p>3 on-field events in total are foreseen, alongside a continuous online campaign.</p>
<p>11/2021 – 11/2022 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Selection of 20 participants approximately to be engaged in each of the training sessions, based on the beneficiaries' selection methodology illustrated above and an expression of interest process. The process will be initiated by the Region and disseminated through the campaigns of the previous activity. The registration process will be simple and</p>

	<p>straightforward and will guide all interested beneficiaries in providing the necessary information.</p> <p>The selection will be ongoing for the entire duration of the Action and will be based on an open-call procedure with specific cut-off dates prior to the execution of each training cycle, that is the activity will be executed 5 times in total. Each call for expression of interest will be open for 1 month approximately and the selection results will be communicated to the public within 15 days after each call deadline.</p> <p>5 cut-off dates will be planned.</p>
<p>12/2021 – 12/2022 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Training seminars taking place for the selected beneficiaries of the Action after the closure of each open call. In this context, the training activity will comprise of 5 training cycles.</p> <p>Seminars will have the form of in-person workshops, where participants will gain insights on for setting up or becoming active members of a company in high-tech sectors according to the themes and topics illustrated above.</p> <p>The workshops will be organised in different courses of a total duration of 20-50 hours. Each training class being attended by 5 to 10 people. The daily duration of each training session will not exceed 5 hours. Hence each training cycle will last approximately two weeks. The participation will be free for beneficiaries.</p> <p>5 training seminars cycles are planned in total.</p>
<p>9/2021 – 5/2023 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>The Action will apply a continuous monitoring procedure, for the organisation and monitoring of the operational and financial implementation of all underlying tasks. Assessment of the impact of Action implementation will produce initial findings on the sustainability, extensibility and transferability of the model in the context of the existing social and economic situation in Greece. The activity will investigate the feasibility of making the Action a permanent initiative, in the context of the Regional Operational Programme of the next programming period (2021-2027).</p> <p>To this end, the Action will perform a quantitative and qualitative evaluation to uncover the perceptions of the different participating groups and individuals on the impact / benefits of this Action. Short-term impacts that can be monitored may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of acquisition of new skills and knowledge for beneficiaries (learning performance) • Level of engagement with training content by beneficiaries (learning experience) • Fulfilment of beneficiaries' expectations from the Action • Perceived employability enhancement for beneficiaries

- Improvement of motivation and confidence status of the participating beneficiaries

The following GANTT chart illustrates the timing of each activity in the framework of Action 1.

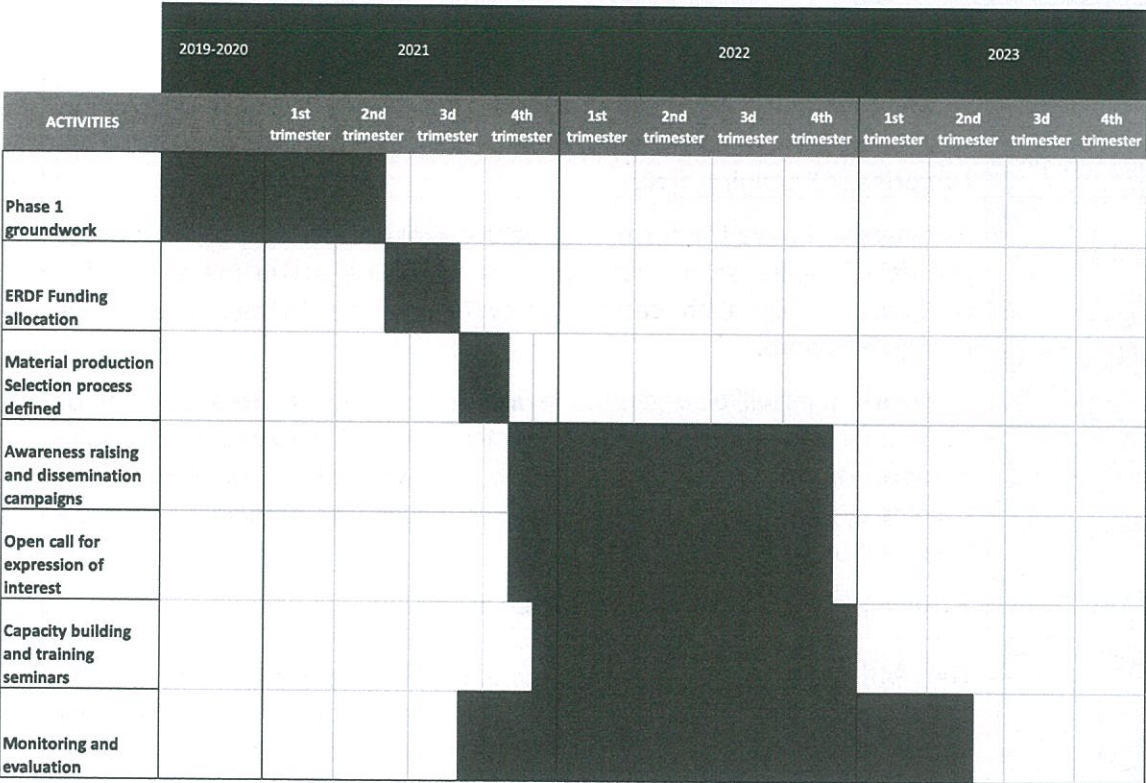


Figure 3: Action 1 GANTT chart

ACTION 2

Title

Provision of personalised support and coaching on how to access to funding, to intensify female start-ups and entrepreneurship in high-tech sectors

Policy Need Addressed

The Action mainly addresses the need for a policy change towards the targeted and structured support of female entrepreneurs in the Region and their safe and viable guidance to funding and financing opportunities. In more detail, the Region seeks to change the strategic focus of the policy instruments, according to an updated and upgraded entrepreneurship strategy that explicitly addresses female funding opportunities within high technology sectors.

The Region has identified an eminent need for the enhancement of the competitiveness of female entrepreneurship and female innovation and its structured implementation through the personalised support for regional SMEs operating according to those principles.

The identified policy need is addressed within the framework of Action 2 “Provision of personalised support and coaching on access to funding, intensifying female start-up entrepreneurship in high-tech sectors”, through **targeted individualised counselling sessions and technical support activities**. The activities will focus on key funding issues, such as building a successful business plan, attracting investors, accessing grants and acquiring bank loans.

Overview of the Policy Improvement that this Action refers to

Overall Topic	Support of female entrepreneurship through the provision of individualised support and funding coaching within appropriate business support structures
Specific Description	<p>This Action aims to strengthen female start-up companies / entrepreneurs by providing them with targeted technical support. The Action will focus primarily on personalised coaching on accessing public or private funding. Additionally, the Action will guide beneficiaries for becoming active business cluster members.</p> <p>The activities will be organised in cooperation with the Regional Centre for Business Support, universities and possibly interested clusters.</p> <p>Indicatively, the Action will provide support on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing an initial Business Plan;• Identifying financing mechanisms and successfully applying to acquire funding;

- Understanding the benefits of integrating high tech oriented SMEs in collective organised structures (i.e. business clusters) ;

- Integrating high tech oriented SMEs into relevant business clusters.

The support measures will take the form of personalised consultations on a per applicant basis, provided by selected entrepreneurship and funding experts. The consultants will be primarily employees of RCBS. If needed, experts from regional business associations and clusters or other collaborators of the Region will be involved.

More particularly, personalised consultation will be delivered in different sessions according to the needs and preferences of each applicant. On average the consultation process will include 3 different sessions per beneficiary and not more than 4. All consultations will be held in person, while the total duration of each session will not exceed 4 hours. Each consultation package will last approximately 3 days for each applicant. Also, the consultation services will be free of charge for the beneficiaries. The costs of the consultation services will be covered by the ROP.

The selection of beneficiaries will be ongoing for the entire duration of the Action and will be based on open-calls for the expression of interest with specific cut-off dates. Applicants will be requested to express their interest in participating via an online registration process. The registration process will be simple and straightforward (i.e. a simple online form) and will guide all interested beneficiaries in providing the necessary information and will include the eligibility criteria for the applicants. Due to the nature of the SMEs that will be targeted by this action, the selection of the beneficiaries will be based on a set of criteria that will evaluate the business maturity and technical competences of the applicants. The main target groups of this Action are:

- High-tech-oriented SMEs registered in the Business Register
- Female self-employed workers and freelancers
- Female potential entrepreneurs.

Throughout each training cycle, representatives from business clusters and financing institutions in high-tech sectors will be invited to participate in the consultations and connect with the beneficiaries.

This Action is connected to **Investment Priority 3a** "Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and supporting the creation of new businesses, including through business nurseries" of the Sterea Ellada ROP. This Investment Priority envisages **strengthening the competitiveness** of SMEs and the agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture sectors in general. The proposed Action updates the associated Policy Instrument (Investment Priority 3b) by introducing a specific focus on female entrepreneurship,

	<p>enhancing the regional female workers' and businesses' innovation capacity and competitiveness through the funding of personalised coaching and consultation for accessing financing tools and the benefits of cluster membership. All consultation costs will be covered by ROP.</p> <p>This Action addresses the barrier titled "Difficulty of access to financing sources", which highlights the lack of financing sources in the region, the difficulty to access them, as well as the lack of information regarding their availability. This barrier was identified in the "Understanding Barriers and Enablers" report for RSE, developed by RSE and the AUEB-RC team.</p>
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Background		
Regional / Local input, including input from FEMINA Stakeholder Groups	<p>The Region of Sterea Ellada and the AUEB-RC team have been in contact and collaboration with the Local Stakeholder Group (LSG) representatives during the various activities of the FEMINA project. As a result of LSG meetings and activities, the Region has managed to co-validate barriers and enablers for female entrepreneurship and employment in high-tech sectors within its intervention area.</p> <p>One of the most interesting findings has been the difficulty to access funding sources to initiate or enhance entrepreneurial activity in high tech sectors, which is a common issue both for male and female entrepreneurs (or potential ones). This barrier refers both to actual lack of financing sources or difficulty to access them, and the lack of information regarding their availability.</p> <p>In order to address the particular barrier, which refers to a lasting regional challenge having roots in the prolonged financial crisis of the previous decade, an Action related to the support to female entrepreneurship through the provision of financial incentives and appropriate business support structures was proposed.</p>	
Transfer of FEMINA Solutions (GP) and other input from interregional exchange in FEMINA		
Description of Solution (GP title / other input)	Elements to be transferred for my policy improvement	Exchange process (How did I learn about the solution? When did I get the input? etc.)
Protocol of agreement for the development and the growth of female enterprises and female entrepreneurs (Arezzo Innovazione)	Activities that are related to access in funding sources along three different axes: - investments for the enhancement of entrepreneurial activity	Region of Sterea Ellada learned about this GP in the interregional exchange session of Convention 2 held in Lamia and was chosen by local stakeholders in a subsequent LSG meeting discussion, as an interesting GP that could be

	<p>- investments for the start-up of entrepreneurial activity</p> <p>- investments for the support of crisis-impacted entrepreneurs</p> <p>The GP addresses the challenge of financing sources accessibility and information availability, which refers to a signified regional challenge.</p> <p>Certain aspects of the overall concept will be transferred to Action 2, particularly those referring to financing stakeholders engagement throughout the Action, beneficiaries selection methodology and improving relations between banks institutions, female enterprises and female freelancers</p>	<p>used in the regional Action Plan.</p> <p>Further input and more technical details were acquired throughout the FEMINA mentoring group meetings on 11/11/2020 and 17/11/2020.</p>
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Specific Activities and Timeframe

<p>Ongoing throughout Phase 1 (as per Action 1)</p>	<p>The Regional Development Fund project team identified within the second semester of the project that the Business Support Center of the Region, which is entirely funded by the ROP and focuses on regional entrepreneurship support, could be utilized for the proper implementation of the Action Plan. The possibility for the Action Plan implementation costs to be integrated in the operational budget of the Business Support Center was discussed, in order to efficiently address possible administrative complications in allocating ERDF funds to new projects. Accordingly, meetings with the Governor's office and the Business Support Center Director in the third and fourth semester of the project, indicated that the proposed approach was both valid and eligible, as well as feasible and efficient.</p> <p>Moreover, Region of Sterea Ellada organised and carried out meetings of Local Stakeholder Group on 28/05/2019, 15/11/2019, 25/05/2020 and 30/11/2020. Participants discussed the needs of the Region and actions that they want to implement through project. The LSG meetings were pivotal in validating barriers and enablers for women entrepreneurship and employment in high-tech sectors, initially selecting the Good</p>
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	<p>Practices to be transferred, adapting them to the regional context and finally drafting and maturing the Regional Action Plan.</p> <p>The meetings of the FEMINA Mentoring Group (11/11/2020 and 17/11/2020) also constituted milestones for the development of the policy improvement, as they provided detailed input on the GPs of interest, answered specific questions regarding their transferability and applicability in the context of the Region of Sterea Ellada and contributed to the refinement and finalisation of the content of the Action.</p>
<p>6/2021 – 8/2021 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Region of Sterea Ellada will finalise all internal procedures required to allocate ERDF funding to this Action. The respective activities of Action 1 are also applicable here.</p>
<p>9/2021 – 11/2022 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Selection of 10 participants/entrepreneurs to receive personalised support, based on the beneficiaries' selection methodology illustrated above and an expression of interest process, which will be initiated and disseminated by the Region through the campaigns of Action 1. The registration process will be simple and straightforward and will guide all interested beneficiaries in providing the necessary information.</p> <p>The selection will be ongoing for the entire duration of the Action and will be based on an open-call procedure with specific cut-off dates prior to the completion of each training cycle. This activity will be executed 5 times in total. Each call for expression of interest will be open for 1 month approximately and the decision regarding the selection of the applicants will be communicated to the interested parties and the public within 15 days after the closing date of each call.</p> <p>The main target groups of the Action are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-tech-oriented SMEs registered in the Business Register. • Female self-employed workers and freelancers • Female potential entrepreneurs <p>3 calls for expression of interest are planned</p>
<p>10/2021 – 12/2022 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>Personalised consultations on a per applicant basis by a pool of experts on issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an initial Business Plan • Identifying financing mechanisms and successfully applying to acquire funding • Understanding the benefits of integrating high tech oriented SMEs in collective organised structures (i.e. business clusters) • Integrating high tech oriented SMEs into relevant business clusters. <p>The consultations will take place after each open call finalises. In this context, the activity will comprise of 3 consultation cycles. The</p>

	<p>consultations will be delivered in different sessions according to the needs and preferences of each applicant. On average the consultation process will include 3 different sessions per beneficiary and not more than 4. All consultations will be held in person, while the total duration of each session will not exceed 4 hours. Each consultation package will last approximately 3 days for each applicant. The consultation services will be free for beneficiaries.</p> <p>Approximately, 10 SMEs, entrepreneurs or aspiring entrepreneurs, are expected to receive personalised support.</p>
<p>10/2021 – 12/2022 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>In parallel with the previous activity, the Action will support the integration of new businesses into existing collective organised structures and clusters (such as the Agrifood Partnership of Central Greece). Such structures offer facilities, and, more importantly, business support, know-how, training and mentoring to prospective female entrepreneurs and women who want to work in high-tech sectors.</p> <p>The support measure will comprise of a) an additional consultation session regarding the specifics of regional or national cluster membership and b) a first-contact mediation service where experts from Regional Centre for Business Support will connect clusters with interested SMEs.</p> <p>No additional beneficiaries' selection procedure will take place for the identification of the SMEs interested in receiving the cluster membership support services, as these will be selected from the pool of SMEs already participating in the personalised consultation activity.</p> <p>Approximately, 4 SMEs are expected to be supported in cluster membership activities.</p>
<p>9/2021 – 5/2023 (Phase 2)</p>	<p>The Action will apply a continuous monitoring procedure, for the organisation and monitoring of the operational and financial implementation of all underlying tasks. The assessment of the impact of the implementation of the Action, will produce initial findings on the sustainability, extensibility and transferability of the model. The activity will investigate the feasibility of making the Action a permanent initiative, in the context of the Regional Operational Programme of the next programming period (2021-2027).</p> <p>To this end, the Action will perform a quantitative and qualitative evaluation to uncover the perceptions of different participating groups and individuals on the impact / benefits of this Action. Short-term impacts that can be monitored may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of acquisition of new skills and knowledge for beneficiaries (learning performance) • Level of engagement with consultation content by beneficiaries (learning experience)

- Fulfilment of beneficiaries' expectations
- Financeability enhancement for beneficiaries

The following GANTT chart illustrates the timing of each activity in the framework of Action 2.

ACTIVITIES	2019-2020				2021				2022				2023			
	1st trimester	2nd trimester	3d trimester	4th trimester	1st trimester	2nd trimester	3d trimester	4th trimester	1st trimester	2nd trimester	3d trimester	4th trimester	1st trimester	2nd trimester	3d trimester	4th trimester
Phase 1 groundwork	■	■														
ERDF Funding allocation			■													
Open call for expression of interest				■	■	■	■	■								
Personalized consultations				■	■	■	■	■								
Cluster membership support				■	■	■	■	■								
Monitoring and evaluation				■	■	■	■	■	■	■						

Figure 4: Action 2 GANTT chart

Action Plan Horizontal Principles

Stakeholders involved	
Name of Organisation / person	Role in Action Plan
Regional Development Fund of Sterea Ellada	The Regional Development Fund will act as the coordinator of the Action Plan, organising, monitoring and evaluating its progress regarding the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of both Actions 1 and 2.
Region of Sterea Ellada	The Region of Sterea Ellada will support the implementation of the Action Plan on an institutional level, while representing the main stakeholder for engaging beneficiaries and other stakeholders.
Regional Centre for Business Support	The Regional Centre for Business Support will provide all information campaigns and training sessions of Action 1. A group of entrepreneurship experts employed by the Centre will also be engaged in the personalised consultation sessions in Action 2.
Athens University of Economics and Business – Research Centre team	The AUEB-RC team will be involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan.
University of Thessaly	The University of Thessaly will activate experts for selected phases of the Actions, mainly in the form of invited training and specialised support on scientific aspects of in high-tech themes.
National Documentation Centre	The National Documentation Centre was the coordinator of the EMPOWA project, which served as a source of inspiration for the Region, especially in regard to Action 2. As such, the Region will seek to engage experts from NDC in those sessions of the Action 2, focusing on funding coaching to support access to funding.

Costs and Funding Sources	
Costs	Funding Sources
Action 1, Training and dissemination material design and development. 5.000€	Regional Operational Programme of Sterea Ellada for 2014-2020
Action 1, Dissemination campaigns	Regional Operational Programme of Sterea Ellada for 2014-2020

5.000€	
Action 1, Training seminars 10.000€	Regional Operational Programme of Sterea Ellada for 2014-2020
Action 2, Personalised support and coaching 30.000€	Regional Operational Programme of Sterea Ellada for 2014-2020

Risk and Contingency Plans		
Description of Risk	Level of probability (High, Medium, Low)	Description of Contingency Plan
<p>Local bodies do not respond to invitations or they are unwilling to undertake the necessary actions.</p> <p>The Risk refers to both Actions.</p>	Medium	<p>Comprehensive information strategy and awareness raising campaign involving policy makers and policy movers.</p> <p>Efficient publicity activities of the relevant events through press releases, etc.</p> <p>Direct and on-going communication with key decision makers and other stakeholders.</p>
<p>Political or socioeconomic developments in Greece may affect the involvement of public organisations and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The Risk refers to both Actions.</p>	Low	<p>Comprehensive information strategy and awareness raising campaign involving policy makers and policy movers.</p> <p>Efficient publicity activities of the relevant events through press releases, etc.</p> <p>Direct and on-going communication with key decision makers and other stakeholders.</p>
<p>Reallocation of funding due to the COVID-19 emergency</p> <p>The Risk refers to both Actions.</p>	Low	<p>The Regional Development Fund will ensure that the allocated ERDF funding won't be affected by the COVID-19 emergency, lobbying in favour of the Action Plan already prior to the Action Plan kick-off date. Also, the soon to be finalized official agreement for the</p>

		inclusion of the relevant costs in the operational budget of the Regional Business Support Center will ensure that the respective funding is guaranteed.
<p>Deviation of activities from original time plan due to administrative delays.</p> <p>The Risk refers to both Actions.</p>	Low	<p>Regional Development Fund members will monitor the timely and quality delivery of outputs.</p> <p>Flexibility in adapting the original plan according to Actions' needs.</p> <p>Forecasted time flexibility for initiation of activities in the time-plan to ensure results and outputs are produced as planned.</p> <p>Involvement of more than one expert in key positions in order to allow complementarity and flexibility.</p>
<p>Limited beneficiaries' interest and participation in activities.</p> <p>The Risk refers to both Actions.</p>	Medium	<p>The partnership will be working continuously on all levels (communications/information/publicity, networks and NGOs, policy-level) to ensure the maximum beneficiary numbers and facilitate the access to groups which necessitate more targeted outreach methods.</p> <p>Partners have already strong referral systems and pools of pending requests</p>

Monitoring		
Self-defined Performance Indicators		
Indicator	Target	Means of Verification
Number of SMEs (new or existing) receiving support for applying female entrepreneurship enhancement measures from Actions 1 and 2	30	Participation lists, Applications logging
Output Indicators		
<i>All indicators refer to both Actions.</i>		
Indicator	Target	Means of Verification



Dissemination campaigns	3	Campaigns documentation
Training seminars cycles	5	Sessions documentation and minutes
Beneficiaries receiving training	100	Participation lists, Expressions of interest logging
SMEs, entrepreneurs or aspiring entrepreneurs receiving personalised support	20	Participation lists, Applications received in cut-off dates
<i>SMEs supported in clustering activities</i>	4	Participation lists, Applications received in cut-off dates



Institution: Regional Development Fund (on behalf of Region of Sterea Ellada)

Name of Signatory: Fanis Spanos

Position: Governor

Date: 28-7-2021

Stamp (if available)

Signature



