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*Sharing solutions for better
regional policies*



ACTION PLAN

HARGHITA COUNTY COUNCIL

2020



E-COOL

Interreg Europe



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Introduction

Harghita County is situated in the middle of Romania towards the eastern border of Transylvania, in the central part of the Eastern Carpathians. The county is predominantly, 60%, a mountainous area with approximately.

Due to the territorial and economic structure, Harghita County has a predominantly rural character (lack of large cities, mountainous areas, low population density) and therefore the dependence of the economy on the agricultural sector is high.

Usually when we talk about Harghita county we have in mind 4 areas of the county that are in the area of influence of the 4 main towns in the county. This is how we talk about the Miercurea Ciuc, Odorheiu-Secuiesc, Gheorgheni and Toplița area.

The capital city is Miercurea Ciuc, the number of its inhabitants is: 38.966.

However, if we look at the level of development of each area, we notice that they are in a certain discrepancy with each other due to several social and economic factors.

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic began to be felt in Romania starting with March, 2020, the SME sector being one of the most affected sectors. The business environment registered dramatic decrease in matter of entrepreneurial initiatives, the startup of companies reaching very low levels compared to last years' registrations.

New challenges appeared next to the old ones that became urgent to find solutions to and recover SMEs and the economy as a whole.

In our Action Plan we further propose possible actions and solutions for supporting entrepreneurial skills education for young people and ultimately recovery of SMEs in Harghita in the post-crisis period.

1. Regional problem addressed

Between 2009 - 2019 in Harghita County there is a sustained economic growth.

However, this sustained growth of the economy is based on consumption and not on investment, a dynamic that generates imbalances and limits the development potential in the medium and long term.

Romania is confronted with important challenges on the labor market, both in the area of employment and poverty. The level of unemployment is relatively high compared to previous years. The country is facing the problems of the emigration of young people in order to work abroad.

Problems that are addressed:

- Improving human capital through higher employment and better social inclusion and education policies
- Supporting employability actions like individual counselling, work-based training, and encouraging entrepreneurship
- Supporting self-employment actions, entrepreneurship and business creation
- Better matching education with labor market needs, ensuring relevance of the training offer.

The average number of micro-enterprises per 1000 inhabitants is less than half the value recorded at EU level: according to available statistical data (2011), there were 18.4 micro-enterprises per 1,000 inhabitants, below 50% of the EU average. Given that Harghita is a preponderantly rural region, the charts are lower than in most of the neighboring counties, and the few SMEs are concentrated in the small towns. See maps below.

According to a poll conducted in 2016 by the Harghita County Council among graduate students, the entrepreneurial spirit among young people is very low: 44,4% do not plan at all to start a business. It is necessary to capitalize on the entrepreneurial potential of regional economies. The quality of education needs to be improved, and also measures for supporting self-employment actions, entrepreneurship and business creation are needed among youth. The schools need support for entrepreneurship education, as well as vocational education and training in general.

There is also a skills mismatch reported by several employers, so there is a need for actions in this field, mainly in the case of vocational training. One can find four university faculties in the county, but all of them have HQ in major cities (Cluj, Budapest), but they represent a certain growth factor if spin offs and innovation partnership can be boosted.

Challenges to tackle

- Low productivity of SMEs
- Poor qualification of employees
- Lack of innovative investments and initiatives
- Lack of entrepreneurial culture in rural areas and not only
- Lack of motivation of all parties
- Inadequate legal framework
- Critical mass of the workforce
- Poor collaboration between various economic actors
- Low qualification and /or knowledge of the young when entering labour market
- Lack of context-based business education in schools

Priorities included in the county's development strategy

- Adapting education to the requirements of the labor market
- Creating a system of internships for young people
- Digitization of education
- Increasing the level of professional training of graduates and the active population
- Development of research, innovation and technology transfer capacity
- Opening the education and training system for groups with particular risks
- Support for start-ups and spin-offs and family businesses

The main priorities in increasing economic competitiveness are:

- Stimulating research - innovation
- Human resources development
- Supporting creative initiatives
- Dissemination of new technologies
- Support for start-ups and spin-offs

Following the brainstorming sessions with the stakeholders, actions to be taken were outlined concerning economic growth of the county. SMEs are considered as a key factor for growth, innovation, employment and social integration. Flexibility and adaptability of the SME sector are essential features for overcoming periods of crisis being extremely relevant for the current situation. Our approach is in full accordance with the development strategy of the county regarding the economic sector in Harghita for the period of 2021 - 2030.

The E-COOL Action Plan for Harghita county will contribute to achieving the main objectives stated in the Harghita County Development Strategy which is: *Increasing the competitiveness of the economy, increasing the quality of life, increasing the living standards of the population, sustainable and rational management of resources (material, financial, human, natural), reducing existing disparities between urban and rural areas.*

2. Policy instrument addressed

The Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2014-2020 addressed the development needs of regions, amongst others regarding SME competitiveness in all sectors. Priority 2 of the Regional Operational Programme targeted improving the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises. The main activities supported by this investment priority of the Priority Axis no. 2 – Improving the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises are:

- construction / upgrading and expansion of the production / service space of micro-enterprises, including endowment with tangible and intangible assets;
- creating / upgrading / expanding business incubators / accelerators, including the development of related services.

The Investment Priority of the ROP - Priority Axis 2 is “Promoting entrepreneurial mindset, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and stimulating the creation of new firms, including through business incubators”.

Unfortunately, under the previous Operational Programme 2007-2013 no relevant measures to introduce education methodologies for entrepreneurial mindset in secondary education system were included. Currently, and from the point of view of the future societal and labour market needs it is necessary to introduce specific measures under the ROP regarding education methodologies for entrepreneurial mindset in secondary education system.

The planning of the next ROP is on its way. There is a huge change, namely from 2021 the ROP is designed for the region itself (NUTS 2 region: 7 Centru with six member counties, NUTS code: RO12), so Harghita County Council can have an input to how these priorities are set. In this respect we shall try adding necessary elements during the consultation and decision making process to the regional ROP to allocate sources to start-ups and spin-offs, and also to prioritize schools where entrepreneurial actions are in place or where they have such initiatives¹.

In the current draft version of the Regional Operational Programme of Centru Region for the 2021-2027 programming period there are dedicated measures for supporting the implementation of actions proposed in the action plan:

- Action “Facilitate the work of teachers on entrepreneurial assets” might be supported by sources to be made available under the 2 Axis of the Regional Operational Programme: “A more educated region”,
- Action “Practical Skills for Entrepreneurial Students” could receive support from the European Regional Development Fund via the Regional Operational Programme’s same axis as the previous,

¹ The ROPs for the 2021-2027 period are undergoing revision – state of play on the 17th of September.

- The action titled “On-line Platform for SMEs and Future Entrepreneurs” shall be proposed for cofinancing from the Regional Operational Programme using the support to be allocated for the 6th axis, named “A digitalized region”.

The partner involved in addressing policy instruments is Harghita County Council, and as such, has direct impact on the design of the Regional Operational Programme of Centru Region for the 2021-2027 programming period, while HCC is ready to make necessary steps to put forward relevant opinions regarding other operational programmes to be designed at national level, in order to streamline financing for relevant projects also from ESIF+ related operational programmes – but the main focus is the ERFA, planned in Romania at regional level, where HCC is directly involved in decision making and policy formulation, actively representing the needs and interests of the NUTS 3 region covered.

During the previous programming period the national level ROP did not cover such investments, so HCC carried out necessary activities in order to improve the future ROP of the NUTS 2 region, in order to secure the financing for such initiatives – it goes without saying, that the policy instrument has a larger impact than Harghita NUTS 3 region, as beneficiaries from the other five NUTS 3 regions covered by the NUTS 2 ROP will also be eligible for funding for similar measures proposed.

3. How this policy instrument will be improved

HCC is one of the founding members of the Regional Development Agency Centru (RDAC) – the intermediate body of the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020, and with a role of Managing Authority in the 2021-2027 period. The president of HCC is a member of Regional Development Council (RDC) – public decision-making body which has only local elected persons like presidents of CCs, mayors of cities, towns and villages.

The Regional Development Council approves, inter alia, the strategies of the Centru Region, it approved the Centru Region Development Strategy in the preparatory phase for the 2014-2020 financing period, and also the Project Portfolio of the region. The recommendations and suggestions of HCC can be included in the strategies of the Regional Development Council for the next programming period.

The Regional Operational Program before the release of calls for proposals announces for public consultation the Guides for Applicants - HCC may submit proposals and suggestions in order to make modifications in the Guides for Applicants. HCC has the official power to make proposals to amend the national legislation, and is used to compile legislative or regulatory amendments.

The improvement of this policy instrument by this project will be possible through the **improved governance** of the policy instrument by improvement of the thematic calls at national level thanks to lessons learnt on the topic during the project. **Structural changes** in the way projects will be selected for funding are expected as well.

The improvement of the policy will be possible thanks to this project through the possibility that Harghita County Council and the County Development Agency can propose **amendments to the existing measures or even create new measures in the Regional Operational Programme**, in order to integrate the lessons learnt from the cooperation.

The exchange of experiences and good practices were real lessons learnt that can be adapted to local needs and context. **We expect to boost the local entrepreneur spirit amongst high-school students and to offer an alternative life perspective instead of leaving the region and moving abroad. Promoting entrepreneurial spirit and teaching new skills via technology-enhanced methodology and innovative approaches increases awareness, cooperation and contribution of youth in the field of entrepreneurship.**

For reaching its main goal, improving the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises, HCC participated also at interregional meetings, set up a RSG, prepared an Action Plan for the future as well as secondary schools were

addressed with new methodologies and activities enhancing the entrepreneurial mindset of young people and creating friendlier entrepreneurial environments.

4. Stakeholders involved

The stakeholders involved in the project at county level are:

- 1. The regional IB of the policy instrument addressed: Regional Development Agency Centre*
- 2. SME associations and interest groups such as Entrepreneurs Associations of Harghita County, Association of Entrepreneurs in Csík, Association of SMEs of Udvarhelyszék, Association of Entrepreneurs ARBOR*
- 3. Development Agency of Harghita County and the Association for Harghita County (Hargita Megyéért Association)*

Direct results of the initiative:

HCC addressed policy instrument 4 and will implement 1 regional and local policy instruments inspired by the cooperation throughout the project and tackled by the project.

The Development Agency of Harghita County and the Association for Harghita County prepare and implement rural development programmes and investments and informs interested parties on the related programmes and funding opportunities. It has significant influence on the promotion of entrepreneurship among the population of the county, as the members of the Association are the local councils from the county, and has direct cooperation with the population during its programs and activities.

5. How has the learning from the e-COOL project influenced our proposed policy improvement including specific examples

During the Interregional Seminars and Workshops all the interested parties, stakeholders learnt lessons from each-other and became acquainted with the experiences and best practices presented. Some of these good practices and or the methodology used can be used or can be adapted to local context in Harghita county, too.

The INNICIA project presented by the Andalusian partner from Spain was a good example of how to facilitate the work of teachers on entrepreneurial assets, teaching material, support actions and didactic itinerary. The projects led by the teachers foster entrepreneurship in the process of teaching. The teaching staff participating in the program has the support and advice of facilitators, with a training plan, both face-to-face and distance learning adapted to the possibilities that the education center has. Regional coordination team supervises the program.

From the Spanish partners we have learnt how to facilitate the work of teachers on entrepreneurial assets. Providing the teachers with relevant, context-based teaching material, support them in their didactic work so that the educational projects of schools foster entrepreneurship from a young age in a well-established system. One of the first steps to take in order to improve entrepreneurial education in Harghita County, could be a series of ToT courses for teachers in theoretical high schools and technological schools where the curriculum already contains the subject of entrepreneurship. These courses for teachers should use both face-to-face and online learning methods.

The CZECH partner's good practice fits well with the previous example, namely creating a new position of a coordinator, i.e. the Entrepreneur Coordinator, in each participating school in entrepreneurship-teaching projects. The coordinators received financial support for entrepreneurship training.

The idea of Entrepreneurship coordinator in technological schools and schools where students study basic entrepreneurial and economic skills can be transferred to our region. The idea of organizing each year a conference on entrepreneurship for students is also a short-term action opportunity for our region. Motivating teachers is also an important aspect of the work, especially for their extra work -hours input.

The Italian GIA's pilot action's overall objective is to facilitate contact between young innovators and local businesses. It is primarily based on the idea to stimulate and promote an active role of both companies and young people for them to meet. Bottom-up innovative solutions are supported and investment in new promising business. Companies are invited to present innovation needs, while young people are offered the opportunity to share their innovative ideas.

The Italian business simulation idea and proactive training for upper-secondary school students led us to project ideas that could be implemented both as curricular and extracurricular school activities throughout the school-year.

At the First Webinar on promotion on entrepreneurship mindset (10/06/2020) we learnt about the Young Enterprise: Company Programme from Devon City Council and the Student Company Programme from JAL Latvia. Good practices that teach setting up a company, creating products, finding potential clients in a practical approach we believe are the methods with the greatest impact on students learning in entrepreneurship.

Practical steps of how to start your own business are very useful for anyone who wants to enter the SME world. Young participants to such programmes are more responsive to new skills, so understanding the process from A to Z and learning how to create your own business plan, team work and decision taking etc. have to be all practical in order the students to get a glimpse of the real business world. Cooperation and exchanging ideas are very important at every step as well as practical examples and work / projects are key aspects in entrepreneurship teaching.

In many aspects the Polish partner's context is the most similar to Harghita county's. Both countries, Poland and Romania, faces a high emigration of work force to the EU countries. Both highly skilled and low skilled work force leave to country permanently or temporarily in the hope of a better life. Therefore, raising awareness of the possibilities of running one's own business activity in their home country is essential. Creating favorable conditions for the development of entrepreneurship in the city of Opole (and the Opole region), with particular emphasis on the high technology sector, aiming to develop a knowledge-based economy, create effective links between science and business, and stimulate innovative entrepreneurship in an open environment of partner cooperation between science, business and local government is the Polish approach.

The good practice brought by the Polish partner to the project emphasizes the importance of understanding the complexity of entrepreneurship and the necessity of offering the students legal, accounting, IT and marketing support. Students' simulation business created at school level will be a stable ground for real SMEs that are very important in economic development of our region. Creating a supportive, business-friendly environment and offering professional services and facilities for spin-off, spin-out and start-up companies in their early stages is one of Harghita County's development strategy. Future incubator centres will conduct trainings and provide consulting and pro-innovation services that effectively contribute to the development of companies and research projects.

At the Second Interregional Seminar 27/11/2019 from the Dutch partner we learnt that bringing together people from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds together result innovative and very creative ideas. We also learnt that in the future we should aim at strengthening the cooperation between education and governmental bodies.

When teaching children of the 21st century, motivation of the target group can be challenging. Including exciting adventures throughout the learning process can be of great impact on stimulating curiosity and developing creativity, thinking critically, and arriving at solutions to problems through experimentation. The Croatian STEaM educational program is a good example of how to develop confidence and security in the use of computers and digital media, electronic sources and databases, robotics, programming, 3D modelling tools and include them in the curriculum adapted to different degrees of digital knowledge of children.

6. How will the policy improvement be funded

The policy improvement will be funded:

1. Through European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and (European Social Fund) ESF+ funds.

The ERDF focuses its investments on areas that are considered priorities in for the period 2021-2027 in Harghita county as well as allows concentration to specific territorial characteristics in order to reduce economic, environmental and social problems. Because the ESF+ is considered a main tool for promoting employment and social inclusion by investing in people's skills improvement the impact on the economy will be visible both on short and long term.

All the thematic objectives tackled by the E-COOL project can be supported from ERDF and ESF+:

- Strengthening research, technological development and innovation
- Enhancing access to, and use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT)
- Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility
- Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning
- Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration

2. Through Private – Public Partnerships funds.

Partnerships between SMEs and the local or regional government provide advantages to both parties. Private-sector can help provide better public services with technology and innovation resulting in improved operational efficiency. The public sector's strength lays within providing incentives for the private sector to deliver projects on time and within budget.

7. Actions to be implemented. Best Practices identified within the project.

Economical context: Romania is confronted with important challenges on the labor market, both in the area of employment and poverty. The level of unemployment is high, and the country is facing the problems of the emigration of young people in order to work abroad. The average number of micro-enterprises per 1000 inhabitants is less than half the value recorded at EU level: according to available statistical data (2011), there were 18.4 micro-enterprises per 1,000 inhabitants, 50% below of the EU average. According to a poll conducted in 2016 by the Harghita County Council among graduate students, the entrepreneurial spirit among young people is very low: 44,4% does not plan at all to create a business.

Policy Instrument Addressed: Improving the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises

The improvement of the policy will be possible thanks to this project due to the role of Harghita County Council and the Regional Development Agency Centre who can propose modifications to the existing measures or even create new measures in the Regional Operational Programme, in order to integrate the lessons learnt from the cooperation.

The actions presented below are in synergy with the key programmes included in the Development Strategy of Harghita County for 2020 - 2030". and in order to harmonize the objectives of the development strategy with the 2021-2027 programming period, we have taken into account areas of intervention in the draft common regulation, applicable to both the ERDF and the ESF+.

Through our actions included in the Action Plan we will improve the policy instrument addressed by:

Better matching education with labor market needs, ensuring relevance of the training offer.

Supporting employability actions like individual counselling, work-based training, and encouraging entrepreneurship.

Supporting self-employment actions, entrepreneurship and business creation

Improving human capital through higher employment and better social inclusion and education policies

Action Number: 1

Action Title: Facilitate the work of teachers on entrepreneurial assets

How will we improve this policy instrument?

- Better matching education with labour market needs, ensuring relevance of the training offer.

What have we learnt?

- From the Spanish Partner's INNICIA PROGRAM: We learnt that good quality education starts with well-prepared teachers and market needs - oriented curriculum that is relevant for the target group. We have also learnt how to facilitate the work of teachers on entrepreneurial assets: providing the teachers with teaching material, support them in their actions and teaching process so that the educational projects of schools foster entrepreneurship in all stages and teachings.
- From the Czech partner's Playpark Brno project: We learned and are aware of the important role of an Entrepreneurship coordinator in technological schools and secondary schools where entrepreneurship is taught. When adapting the idea into our context we are also focusing on motivating teachers is key aspect of their quality work, especially if this is extra work -hours input.

What will be done? Steps of the Action.

Upskilling / training of trainers (ToT) tailored to their needs and teaching context and empowering them with entrepreneurial skills

We consider that one of the most important things in economic development in general is proper, **market-needs oriented education** from a very young age adapted to the target groups' age and **psychological and cognitive characteristics**. For educating a skillful generation we need **well trained trainers, teachers, mentors**.

E-Cool learnings led us to **Action1** which will change the quality of teaching entrepreneurship in schools of Harghita County.

An accredited **ToT course** that offers **credit points** to teachers to recognize their learning and value their successful course completion will be a **premiere** in our educational system. The trainees of these courses will become the **entrepreneurship coordinators** in the schools they work and will **cascade** the **knowledge** and **skills** to their fellow teachers as well as to students.

This action requires several other **steps** which include:

- identifying skills gaps in entrepreneurial skills education
- changing teaching methods using a more practical approach
- facilitating and encouraging cooperation between schools and entrepreneurs
- strong cooperation with the County School Inspectorate

Responsibility for Action 1:	Development Agency of Harghita County in cooperation with Harghita Business Center Odorhei, County School Inspectoraté
Resources needed:	local and EU Funds via OP
Timeline for Action 1:	2021-2023

Expected impact / results:

Measurable impacts which will be agreed by the working group will include:

- Partnership agreement on shared methodology between schools and training organisations
- Creating a tailor-made, **accredited 80-hour ToT course** for entrepreneurial skills teachers
- Combining resources when appropriate to provide better coordinated support
- **Ready-to-be-used teaching materials** for teachers
- **60 teachers, trainers, mentors** of entrepreneurship involved in the program throughout the county
- Increased **number of schools involved** in the program
- **Three 80-hour ToT** courses delivered
- Better cooperation between schools and entrepreneurs
- Better understanding the SMEs' "world" from the school benches
- Increased efficiency in teaching entrepreneurship to students
- Awareness of the quickly changing economic situation and the necessity of adapting quickly to the new challenges
- New teaching skills acquired by the participant teachers
- Evaluation of the first course based on participant feedback in order to make slight changes if necessary

Estimated budget: 35.000 euro, including curriculum design, recruiting the teachers and the first round of the course.

Action Number: 2

Action Title: Practical Skills for Entrepreneurial Students

How will we improve this policy instrument?

- Better matching education with labour market needs, teaching practical entrepreneurial skills for students

What have we learnt?

- From the Italian partner's (Regional Agency for Technology and Innovation of Puglia region) initiative: We learned that business simulation idea as a practical teaching method has a more powerful impact on students' learning than any theoretical approach. Proactive training for upper-secondary school students raise awareness and curiosity among student towards entrepreneurship and can support carrier orientation counselling.
- From the UK (Young Enterprise, Company Programme) and Latvian (START-PACKAGE ON – YOUTH BUSSINESS MIND) partners: We learnt practical steps of how to start your own business are very useful for anyone who wants to enter the SME world. Young participants are more responsive to new skills, so understanding the process from A to Z and learning how to create your own business plan, team work and decision making have to be all practical in order the students to get a glimpse of the real business world. Cooperation and exchanging ideas are very important at every step as well as practical examples and work / projects are key aspects in entrepreneurship teaching.

What will be done? Steps of the Action.

Upskilling students with practical knowledge

The idea of including entrepreneurship into education in Romania although it was considered an innovative idea decades ago and was welcomed with enthusiasm, the effects and impact on labour market seem to be unmeasurable. The expected positive effects met significant challenges alongside putting in practice the theoretical knowledge. Lack of time and resources, teachers' lack of motivation and practical experience, often changing educational structures, assessment difficulties are some of the challenges that exist when we are talking about entrepreneurship in education.

We consider that one of the most important things in economic development in general is proper, market-needs oriented education adapted to the target groups'

age and psychological and cognitive characteristics. This action will target students of age 17-18.

The main aim of this action is not all about starting new businesses, but about making students more **creative, opportunity-oriented, innovative** and “equipped” with useful **practical skills for life**. The teaching-learning process will be tailored to the target groups’ **age and psychological and cognitive characteristics**.

Harghita County Council’s **Action 2** will be a **short course** prepared and delivered for both upper secondary and vocational school students, age 17-18, on practical **business plan elaboration starting with the idea of a business**. This action requires several other **steps** which include:

- raising awareness amongst school principals about the necessity of improved entrepreneurial education
- inviting schools to participate in the action
- contracting pro-active schools in the program
- delivering courses for participating schools/students
- facilitating and encouraging entering an after-course-competition for students’ business ideas and plans
- inviting entrepreneurs for the evaluation and award “ceremony”
- facilitating those students who are ready to start their business
- monitoring the impact of the action

Responsibility for Action 2:	Association for Harghita County, schools involved in the action, entrepreneurs
Resources needed:	local and EU Funds via OP
Timeline for Action 2:	Academic year 2021-2022 and 2022-2023

Expected impact / results:

Measurable impacts which will be agreed by the working group will include:

- **Number of schools** involved in the program (20)
- **Number of students** taking part in the program (200)
- Number of hours taught by experts (240)
- **Business ideas and business plans put together by students**
- **1 Competition/school year of most creative idea**
- **1 Competition/school year of best business plan**
- Incubation of best idea to put idea in practice
- Practical skills acquired by students
- Improved interest of students about the subject
- Increased number of students participating in competitions

- Stronger connection between universities, local authorities, companies, schools
- Evaluation of the first year based on participant feedback, including teachers, experts and pupil, in order to make slight changes if necessary for next year`s activities

Estimated budget: 45.000 euro, including project design, marketing for schools, materials (mostly online), training, incubation and prizes, events.

Action Number: 3

Action Title: on-line Platform for SMEs and Future Entrepreneurs

How will we improve this policy instrument?

- Providing all support one needs in the startup process of a business

What have we learnt?

- From the Polish Partner (Opole's vocational education for the labour market): The good practice brought by the Polish partner to the project emphasizes the importance of understanding the complexity of entrepreneurship and the necessity of offering the students legal, accounting, IT and marketing support. Creating a supportive, business-friendly environment and providing all information and support for students and stakeholders in the SME world.

What will be done? Steps of the Action.

Creating a supportive, business-friendly on-line environment and offering all information that one might need in their early stages of starting a business.

2020 forced us to confront a new reality. Most in-person actions moved to digital. Schools, libraries, art galleries, businesses, office-work shifted to on-line with all the difficulties and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought. We understood that for an unforeseeable time we must rethink our approaches in many fields including **business development** and **education**.

Therefore, it became urgent to finalize the idea of creating an **online surface for entrepreneurs-to-be, startups or small business** for offering complex up-to-date information and support in their day-to-day activities and challenges.

This **on-line interface** will assist entrepreneurs to be and young people at every step in their business life from the very beginning of how to start the business to **legal, accounting, marketing, sales** etc. aspects that might occur. It will also serve as a discussion forum for the target group.

The **purposes** of this platform will be: **educational, informational, discussions forum for exchanging ideas, thoughts, information**

1. The educational part

This block of the platform will guide the user from the idea of the business to the actual registration of it. Through the path one will be helped to transform the idea into practice, will have a clear understanding of the logistical steps requires, from marketing the business to ways of funding it. This part will include short videos, small “lessons” and official forms someone has to fill in when starting a business. This educational part of the platform will serve as a free on-line course covering all details.

2. The informational part

The block of the platform will assist users regarding legal questions, tax issues, accounting, funding opportunities, professional development training offers permanently updated and flagged, so all news is available in real time.

3. The forum

This part of the platform will function as an exchange of information hub. It will be moderated to assure the professional characteristic of the forum.

This action requires several other important steps which include:

- building and maintaining the platform
- multidisciplinary team management
- designing services for young people who wish to establish own business
- marketing and SEO services
- moderation

Responsibility for Action 3:	Development Agency for Harghita County
Resources needed:	local and EU Funds via OP
Timeline for Action 3:	2021-2023

Expected impact / results:

Measurable impacts which will be agreed by the working group will include:

- number of people who access it
- how much time they spend on the site and which block

- the impact will be reflected on the number of people who start a business
- another measurable impact is the feedback from users which will be the ground for improvement of the platform.

Estimated budget: 125.000 euro, including basic site design, materials and content, web page update, monitoring, marketing and communication and advisory activity for newly founded SMEs.

Conclusions

The Action Plan focuses on issues that can be perceived within the business sector and it concerns human resource development. Some problems can be remedied in the short term from a relatively modest budget, while the positive effects of others can be felt in the long run and require a larger budget and strong partnerships. Each solution proposal takes into account local specifics and needs, trying to solve the tasks in a targeted way, in the shortest possible way. The target groups of the actions are, on the one hand, high school students who are before choosing a career, and, on the other hand, young entrepreneurs or those who want to start a business, for whom creating an entrepreneur-friendly environment and supporting their start-up is of paramount importance.

URGENT and the IMPORTANT actions	TARGET GROUP	TIME FRAME
Action 1: Facilitate the work of teachers on entrepreneurial assets	teachers, students	2021 - 2023
Action 2: Practical Skills for Entrepreneurial Students	students	2021 - 2023
Action 3: on-line Platform for SMEs and Future Entrepreneurs	entrepreneurs to be, SMEs	2020-2023

Harghita County is one of the members of the NUTS 2 region: 7 Centru. Harghita County Council is one of the founding members of the Regional Development Agency Centru (RDAC) – the intermediate body of the Regional Operational Programme and as Managing Authority in the 2021-2027 period.

From 2021 the ROP is designed for the region itself (NUTS 2 level), so Harghita County Council can have a real input to how the priorities of this period are set. In this respect we are going raise awareness and influence the ROP to allocate sources to start-ups and spin-offs, and also to prioritize schools where entrepreneurial actions are in place or where they have such initiatives.

 

