



**Improving
Structural
Funds for
better
delivery of
R&D&i policies**

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CCDRc

Project overview



Policy instrument

The policy instrument that CCDRC addresses in the context of the IMPROVE project is the Regional Operational Programme of Centro (Centro 2020), which is specially oriented towards the reinforcement of companies' competitiveness and job creation. Therefore, the objectives of strengthening research, technological development and innovation (Thematic Objective 1) and of enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (Thematic Objective 3) play a very important role in Centro 2020, representing almost 40% of the total budget of the Programme.

In these Thematic Objectives (TO 1 & 3) the Smart Specialisation Strategy of Centro (Centro S3) is especially important because it is used to evaluate the eligibility and/or regional merit of applicant projects. Therefore, the way this Programme is managed (and more specifically TO1 and TO3) is primordial to:

- Assure the efficiency of the implementation of R&D&I policies and instruments aligned with the priorities defined in Centro S3;
- Achieve a better absorption of funds by regional actors;
- Guarantee the pursuit of the objectives defined in Centro S3.

Centro 2020 was established in the Partnership Agreement between Portugal and the EU (Portugal 2020 – PT2020) being, therefore, under its regulatory framework.



Good practices

Centro Region was classified in a study conducted by the JRC as an “intermediary R&I region” for having a high level of R&D intensity combined with a high ESIF dependence and a low capacity to capture H2020 funding. Acknowledging the importance of supporting the internationalisation process of regional stakeholders, CCDRC has developed a roadmap for the internationalisation of R&D&I, composed by a set of different initiatives (some of them already existing) aiming at increasing the regional presence at international level through a coherent and sound action plan.

One of the initiatives is “Boletim Europa” – a weekly kind of newsletter that provides information about open calls from the main programmes managed at European level – with the purpose of supporting stakeholders navigating the complex European landscape, since the information available is well spread and sometimes not easy to find and access. “Boletim Europa” is made available online for public (and free) access.

Besides that, Centro 2020 has funded a set of instruments to support:

- i) the preparation of companies’ applications to H2020;
- ii) projects of companies that applied to the European SME Instrument - Phase 2 and did not get any funding but obtained a Seal of Excellence;
- iii) the creation of partnerships between Portuguese Universities/ research centres/ companies and American universities;
- iv) the development of new collaborative projects, involving Portuguese companies and Polytechnic Institutes and other European Polytechnic Institutes.

All these initiatives can be replicated by any other European region.

Link to the good practices:

- <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/4967/boletim-europa/>
- <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/5590/r-d-i-internationalisation-instruments/>





Specific issues and areas of improvement

The Regional Operational Programme is the privileged instrument to fund the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy. Nevertheless, due to the institutional architecture of the Partnership Agreement the governance model is quite centralised, leaving little room to address the regional priorities.

Support to research, technological development and innovation is coordinated at national level, in the context of two existing networks: the Science Network and the Incentives Scheme Network. Managing authorities from all Operational Programmes concerned take part in these networks and most calls are jointly launched (when a call is launched, each Operational Programme, both regional and national, decide if and how much money they want to put into it, contributing to the overall budget of the call).

Overall, calls are quite standardised, not taking into account concrete regional specificities which creates a gap between the needs felt regionally and the instruments available in the policy-mix.

Additionally, application forms and the system through which applications are submitted are also managed at national level, being concentrated in some agencies. Given these well-established procedures, it is also hard to obtain, in an automatized way, some concrete information from applications to directly feed the S3 monitoring system.

Therefore, in the context of IMPROVE, the region considered relevant to create awareness, at national level, about the challenges faced at regional level to properly implement S3, in what regards the need for more regionalised calls and for a more sound and self-acting monitoring system.



Identified solutions to specific issues

From the Peer Reviews organized by IMPROVE partners, CCDRC identified some good practices that, if implemented in Centro Region, could support the overcoming of some of the challenges faced.

Regarding the need for more regionalised calls, one of the challenges identified, the “University of Tartu Spin-off Programme” was considered a relevant good practice. This Programme aims at strengthening the deep-tech ecosystem of Tartu, providing specific services to support the development of ideas and businesses. In order to strengthen the flow from basic research to market, within the context of this Programme, Proof of Concept (PoC) funding was created in 2019.

In Centro Region, PoC is an instrument that regional stakeholders have been identifying as useful to help filling a gap in their research and innovation investment needs. Regardless the quite centralised Portuguese governance model of the instruments supporting RTDi, taking advantage of the context of IMPROVE project, Centro region was able to discuss this issue in the relevant national networks, engaging all the important stakeholders. After a complex process, the Regional Operational Programme opened a Proof of Concept call, on the 19th of July, 2021.

However, there is still room for universities in the region to develop their own spin-off programmes (or similar) that could act upstream the PoC instrument launched by the ROP.

Having a more sound S3 monitoring system is another critical challenge. CCDRC found the tools managed by Puglia Region very interesting, especially its own S3 monitoring system - which acquires data directly from project applications through the fulfilment of surveys by the applicants. It is therefore worth exploring how this practice from Puglia might provide some insights on how to improve Centro S3 monitoring system for the next programming period.



Main stakeholders involved in the project

To be able to achieve the goals set within IMPROVE project, it was considered relevant to engage, since the beginning and in a regular way, a team from the Regional Operational Programme of Centro and the coordinators of each one of the innovation hubs of Centro S3.

Additionally, in the specific context of the development of the Proof of Concept call, a set of national agencies was also involved, for being instrumental to operationalise and launch such a call. From these, it should be highlighted the participation and contribution from the National Innovation Agency (ANI), for its important role in the Proof of Concept call. ANI will be the responsible for evaluating the criterion related to the quality of the Proof of Concept proposals.

CCDRC also promoted the involvement of key regional stakeholders with whom some in-depth discussions were organised (University of Coimbra, University of Aveiro, Instituto Politécnico de Leiria, Instituto Pedro Nunes, Biocant and BLC3).