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Interreg Europe
COHES3ION
Action Plan for Calabria Region





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1. General information

Project:	Cohes3ion
Partner organization:	Calabria Region
Country:	Italy
NUTS2 region:	Calabria
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2. Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:

- Investment for Growth and Jobs programme**
- European Territorial Cooperation programme
- Other regional development policy instrument

Name of the policy instrument(s) addressed: ROP Calabria ERDF ESF 2014-2020

2.1 Policy instrument

The **ROP Calabria ERDF ESF** aims to create growth and jobs by boosting innovation and competitiveness, and improving the regional system of R&D. It shares the objectives defined by the Europe 2020 strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The programme will also contribute to promoting Calabria's ability to achieve the key EU and national development priorities in the field of employment and social inclusion by intervening on employment, education and training in a reinforced social dimension.

The Action Plan impacts the ERDF ROP for EUR 1.3 million through 3 actions.

Action 1- *Implementation of the Innovation Support Structure* on Axis 14 of the ERDF ROP Technical Assistance.

Action 2- *Support for participation in national and European platforms and clusters* on Axis 1 of the ERD ROP "Research and Innovation", Action 1.2.1 Provision of services for participation in national and European networks for research and innovation.



Action 3- Acceleration Program on Axis 1 of the ERD ROP “Research and Innovation”, Action 1.4.1 Support for the creation and consolidation of innovative startups with a high intensity of knowledge application and research spin-off initiatives in areas in line with Smart Specialization Strategy

The regional action plan provides the implementation of 3 specific actions that contain:

- analysis of project needs and objectives;
- interventions to be implemented;
- cost framework;
- implementation timeline.

3. Regional context

In 2019, the RIS (Regional Innovation Scoreboard) placed Calabria in 203th place out of 238 European regions (NUTS classification) taken into consideration by the analysis. Today the Calabrian territory is therefore in a rearguard position in the European ranking. Nonetheless, in Calabria in the period 2011-19, performances increased by 7.6% (base year: 2011), demonstrating that in recent years there has been an improvement even though the margins are still very wide.

To date, the Calabrian situation is more weakened by the pandemic crisis. The available indicators indicate a further fall in GDP values for 2020. The speed of recovery will depend in part on the duration of the epidemic and the effectiveness of the emergency measures. However, as was the case even after the crises of the 2008-2014, the structural factors that characterize the regional economy could adversely affect it and, above all, affect its productivity and investment levels (cf. Annual report, "The economy of Calabria" n.18 June 2020).

The proposed actions aim to help the Calabria Region improve development performance through governance and an approach to multilevel activities.



4. Action 1: S3 Support Structure

4.1 Background

The Calabria Smart Specialization Strategy starts with the programming cycle of the **ROP ERDF ESF Calabria 2007-2013** which had a positive impact, determining the Region to progress in the Innovation Union Scoreboard, thanks to huge investments and new brokerage structures created.

In 2011, the Regional Administration activated 4 lines of intervention on OT1 and, pending the establishment of the Regional Innovation Agency, entrusted the project to Fincalabra Spa.

The CalabriaInnova strategic project was launched in 2012 to support the innovation processes managed by Fincalabra Spa which still supports the Calabria Region on regional innovation policies. The project promoted the development of the **Regional Innovation Network**, supporting the actors already active in the region with its services and multiplying the opportunities for collaboration and exchange between research and business as hoped for S3.

The Network has gradually developed starting from memoranda of understanding (activated with several individual nodes) which guaranteed support regarding services, methodologies, and operational tools, with the ultimate aim of making them shared and standardized by all actors different title involved. The policies in favor of research and innovation were managed, in continuity with the previous programming, also with the 2014-2020 programming in order to guarantee the various subjects involved (companies, universities, research bodies, etc.) provision of quality services.

To date, Fincalabra Spa, through CalabriaInnova, is committed to:

- Support the innovation processes of Calabrian companies, favoring the transfer of technologies and knowledge developed by the Research system to the business world.
- Strengthen and upgrade the PA's need for innovation through support for Precommercial Public Procurement and Innovation Procurement actions.
- Support the generation of innovative solutions to specific problems of social relevance, also through the use of open innovation environments such as Living Labs.
- Support the formation of public-private partnerships for technology transfer (example Poles of Innovation).
- Encourage participation in direct European programs for research and innovation (APRE Calabria Desk).
- Support collaborative research and development activities for the implementation of new sustainable technologies, and more generally of new products and services.



- Promote the startup of new entrepreneurial initiatives by adopting tools that have become increasingly consolidated over the years (TalentLab).

These actions have shown that the territory, if requested, responds to the stimuli offered by the Region in support of innovation.

In the 2014-2020 programming, a participatory governance system was envisaged in which Fincalabra Spa should have managed the operational level. The planned activities concerned: the technical support to S3 Sector, the animation of the Thematic Platforms, the monitoring system to stimulate the processes of aggregation of the supply and demand for research and innovation, the qualification and training of the innovator operators. However, to date, this has not yet been done and the activities are allocated to the departments with misalignment of information and coordination difficulties.

Financial resources, in fact, have very often been allocated in a poorly synergistic way, allocating them to autonomous projects coming either from the demand side (companies) or from the supply side (universities and research centers), without taking into account two systems, the users of research and its producers. In addition, the Intermediate Evaluation carried out by the Regional Nucleus of Public Investments revealed some critical issues in line with those analyzed by the *Survey on the RIS3 experience*. In 2020, therefore, the governance monitoring functions were entrusted to the “**Monitoring, Information Systems, Communication - S3**” Sector, which is part of the “Unitary Planning” Department of the Calabria Region. In this scenario, it is useful to ensure the effective performance of the activities of competence, to define a Support Structure for the Sector that analyzes innovation policies and monitors the implementation of the S3 at regional level with monitoring systems.

4.2 Learnings from Cohes3ion Partners

Thanks to the Cohes3ion INTERREG project we were able to learn about the governance models of the S3 of the other partners in order to define the organization and activities of a Support Structure. Of particular interest were the cases presented by the partners North-West Regional Development Agency (Romania), Stockholm Business Alliance (Sweden), and Azaro Fundazioa (Spain).

- The case of the North-West Regional Development Agency (NW RDA) was very useful for the definition of the governance structure, the understanding of support activities for the development of local communities, the management and implementation of territorial cooperation projects and the carried out as an Intermediate Body for the Regional Operational Program. With the Romanian partners there was a direct exchange via email and a call dedicated to the exchange of information useful for the implementation of our model. The case study was particularly interesting also because it is one of the two Romanian pilot regions



supported by the European Commission (EC) as part of the *RIS3 Support for Lagging Regions* project, initiated by DG REGIO and implemented by the European Commission's Joint Research Center (JRC). The NW RDA therefore conducted the activity for the development and implementation of RIS3 NW, structured a multilevel governance system, identifying possible links with sub-regional levels (provincial and municipal) and contributing to the implementation of sub-regional strategies aimed at S3. Another point of interest of the partner from Romania concerns the INNO open innovation platform, an online platform developed by the Department for Regional Investments and the Innovative Financial Instruments of the Northwest Regional Development Agency, which offers tools to respond promptly and efficiently to the needs of users. In Calabria, the development of a similar platform could also be taken as a reference, able to create an online ecosystem and synergies between the demand and supply of innovation.

- The partner from Sweden presented the case of **Stockholm Business Alliance**, a partnership of 56 municipalities which aims to attract foreign investments in the area. It is a good example of multi-level collaboration that puts the priorities of the territory at the center, and interesting is the "Customer Satisfaction Index" to monitor and update the services provided. The definition and subsequent implementation of a customer satisfaction index would also be important in Calabria to monitor the degree of satisfaction of local businesses with respect to the services offered by the municipalities and the Region.
- The Spanish partner presented the case of the **Azaro Fundazioa** (Spain). They defined a sub-regional governance model aligned with the regional S3 model, identifying milestones (2014-2020) and supporting the active participation of all stakeholders through participatory governance based on the 4-helix model.

4.3 Action description

The objective of Action 1 is the creation and definition of a Support Structure for the "Monitoring, Information Systems, Communication - S3" sector capable of ensuring effective governance of research and innovation policies. The **Support Structure for S3** can constitute a concrete and operational step forward to create synergic actions. The opportunity to develop an effective strategy requires stronger governance and not the simple issuing of tenders and investments by the Region. The issue of S3 governance therefore represents a challenge for the future especially for the Calabria Region, since in addition to programming, the governance structure must also coordinate the implementation phase.

It is important to establish the **Support Structure for the "Monitoring, Information Systems, Communication - S3" sector** aimed at promoting and supporting:



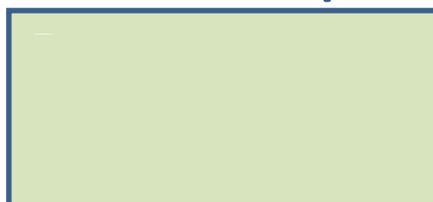
- effective multilevel S3 governance;
- a system for monitoring the actions of OT1 – Research and Innovation Axis;
- the dimensional and qualitative growth of research infrastructures and technology transfer;
- the implementation of development and technology transfer projects;
- the acquisition of innovation services by companies;
- the promotion of complex Research & Development projects to foster collaboration between companies and research organizations and to qualify the public administration;
- the enhancement of research activities and the promotion of new innovative companies.

All actions will be developed in coherence with the Smart Specialization Strategy of the Calabria Region. Bringing together in a single structure the management of activities related to Research & Innovation (Regional Network of Innovation and entrepreneurial discovery) allows to better supervise the planning and monitoring processes, also based on the database of information that these processes generate.

The Support Structure must be conceived as a flexible structure, with the presence of specialized professional figures with transversal skills. At governance level S3, the Innovation Support Structure will fill the role and functions entrusted to the technical structure as explained in the following figure.

The organizational model proposed by the Support Structure will coordinate 3 operational units:

1. Regional network of entrepreneurial innovation and discovery;
2. Monitoring S3;
3. National and European programs.



The Innovation Support Structure will be a *One-Stop-Shop*, that is a single point of access to a wide range of services: information, assistance, and training for business development.

The **strategic functions** will have to:

- coordinate the Regional Network for Research and Innovation in Calabria represented by the Universities and Research Centers present in the region, by trade associations, by the Regional Chamber system;
- coordinate the governance and monitoring of S3 Calabria with the related strategic assessment;
- coordinate the Thematic Technological Platforms, also carrying out support activities for operation (observation of international trends, scenario analysis, etc.) and promoting multilevel governance by involving local authorities in identifying the needs of the territory;
- monitor the results of the Regional Network, using tools for analyzing and measuring the results of research and innovation in Calabria to assess the impact of regional policies and define future strategic directions;
- define a stakeholder engagement plan and coordinate the Thematic Platforms and other initiatives concerning the entrepreneurial discovery process.



The **operational functions** delegated to the *Innovation Support Structure* should:

- identify the demand for innovation of businesses;
- favor the meeting between research supply and demand, promoting opportunities for meeting;
- develop the monitoring model and report which illustrates the progress of the S3;
- activate the communication activities of the S3 both internally and externally;
- develop innovation projects;
- manage the catalog of regional competences;
- support the creation of innovative companies;
- develop research enhancement projects and Proof of Concept programs;
- promote the internationalization of the research system and businesses;
- support the participation in European and national calls (Horizon Europe, INTERREG, research infrastructures, internal areas, etc.);

The action will impact the policy instrument since it should:

- improve the definition of the public tenders based on real stakeholders needs;
- improve the rapidity and efficacy of the regional actions;
- coordinate and make synergistic the regional innovation actors.

This system will be established as active part of the regional governance linked to the policy instrument ROP ERDP Calabria 2014-2020.

4.4 Stakeholders involved

- Universities and research centers
- Chambers of Commerce
- Trade business associations
- Innovation poles
- Local authorities and others.

4.5 Timeframe

2022-2023



4.6 Costs

600.000 – 800.0000 euros per year

4.7 Funding sources

ROP ERDP Calabria 2014-2020

OT 14 “Technical assistance”

Action 14.1.2 FINCALABRA Activity Plan

4.8 Challenge

- Involvement of stakeholders in the definition of the Regional Innovation Network.
- Authorization and approval by regional policy.



5. Action 2: Promotion to national and European platforms and clusters

5.1 Background

According to an analysis conducted in July 2019 by the Agency for the Promotion of European Research (APRE) on participation in Horizon 2020, Italy is among the top five states that obtain the greatest financial contribution, and among the top four in terms of participation number.

Nonetheless, Italy shows a success rate value below the European average, a consideration that opens up a reflection on the quality of participation.

Therefore, maximum attention is required from the structures responsible for assisting researchers through information, training, motivation and support for participation.

Calabria, in particular, presents a general difficulty in successfully participating in European projects and is among the worst win rates (only 3.1%) and over 40% of the contribution goes to the academic world.

The difficulty of always ensuring high quality standards of the proposals lies, according to the various themes of H2020, in a limited ability to aggregate (or aggregate into) strong partnerships, in a difficulty in correctly communicating the dimension of impact and innovation, in the limited ability to manage the project, and, more limited, in the quality (excellence) of the proposed contents. Trying to act on these problems certainly means not only putting in place all possible actions to improve the ability to "write" a proposal, but above all requires interventions on the growth of a widespread design culture that places call participants able to express a high ability to structure and present the project.

The creation of financial instruments to support innovative companies is an important element in favoring the birth and development of companies, especially in the current phase of economic and financial crisis and is particularly complex and burdensome for the production system.

Action 2 is coherent and functional to the New Horizon Europe program (with a budget of 95.5 billion euros) which supports research, development and innovation activities in Europe, with the aim of mobilizing investments and contributing to the growth of the EU, in line with the dual green and digital transition.

5.2 Learnings from Cohes3ion Partners

The case studies presented by the Cohes3ion partners have highlighted the need to support companies and researchers in the scouting of funding sources. In particular, two partners highlighted specific actions to support projects for participation in funding opportunities:

- **Tetapolis Science and Technology Park (NW Romania)**, has defined during the incubation process a line dedicated to "Funding and Financials" for support in the evaluation of funding



opportunities and in the implementation and writing of national and European programs by supporting startups and companies in the application of projects.

- **SBRI Center of Excellence** (Wales, UK) has activated a search service for funding opportunities necessary for the development of research and innovation activities and for the growth of the company business.

5.3 Action description

The action aims to offer concrete support for the benefit of regional stakeholders for applying to national and European calls, trying to create multi-level partnerships.

The action is carried out through the following priority activities:

- Information and promotion of scientific research and technological innovation activities;
- Technical assistance for participation in European programs through the regional APRE contact point;
- National and international networking.

The action "Information and promotion of scientific research and technological innovation" aims to promote the provision of services, also using newsletters and websites, in relation to regional, national and European opportunities. The activity also includes the organization of information days, seminars and workshops. In this context, the activities are conducted with the collaboration of the European Research Agency (APRE) and its information, training and assistance services.

The action "Assistance for participation in European programs" provides support and assistance for participation through activities such as: coaching in the preparation of documentation on the Participant Portal, verification of user eligibility, partner search based on the rules of the Grant Agreement, the match between the project proposal and the call, compliance with the Award Criteria and project improvement.

The action of "National and International Networking" is a continuous activity aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of innovation policies, also through collaboration with national and European entities and networks to offer users a wider spectrum of qualified services. The action includes activities such as: identification of business partners, information on activities and opportunities within the EU, organization of local and online events and seminars on issues of interest to businesses, regional research and local public bodies.

Specifically, it will be provided:

- support for preparatory actions for the participation of SMEs, research organizations and local authorities in EU programs for funding research and innovation (Horizon Europe), national platforms and networks of technological specialization;



- support for the active participation of companies, research centers and local authorities in national and European networks and clusters (eg mobility and collateral experimental activities on European technological platforms and national technological clusters) also in partnership;
- promotion and assistance for participation in European and international programs in collaboration with the technology transfer offices of the RRI nodes (Liaison Office/Technology Trasfer Office of the University, Innovation Centers, Innovation desks).

These activities can be pursued through a set of tangible and intangible actions, to be defined and implemented in synergy with the other regional programs, which provide for greater specialization of research operators and a decisive improvement of the services provided, in order to consolidate and enhance the excellence of the regional research system, also in synergy with local public bodies.

The action will impact the policy instrument since it should:

- Increase the participation of Calabrian stakeholders in European calls;
- Increase the quality of project proposals to European calls.

This mechanism will be financed from to the policy instrument ROP ERDP Calabria 2014-2020.

5.4 Stakeholders

- SMEs and startups
- Researchers
- Local public bodies.

5.5 Timeframe

2022-2023

5.6 Costs

200.0000 euros per year

5.7 Funding sources

ROP ERDF Calabria 2014-2020

TO 1 "Research and Innovation", Action 1.2.1 "Provision of services for participation in national and European networks for research and innovation"



5.8 Challenge

- Encourage partnerships with companies, research organizations and local public bodies from other Member States.



6. Action 3: Acceleration Program

6.1 Background

The data reported in the MISE 2020 report indicate that in Calabria in the last two years there has been an increase of about 48% of innovative startups registered in the Business Register. The Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2019 testifies to a + 7.6% progression in the number of innovative startups and in the last year there has been an increase of 314 qualified researchers dedicated to research and innovation in companies.

The data shown show the existence of a lively and receptive ecosystem for creativity and innovation, which in the first instance is attributable to the synergistic impact of system investments (the presence of young and dynamic universities), and also to virtuous programs and actions to support of business startups promoted by regional policies in the last decade. Many of the Calabrian startups and spin-offs are capable of operating in fields with a very high content of knowledge and a strong technological impact.

However, although the data of the regional context reported above can be considered encouraging, the Calabria Region lags behind in comparison with national and European realities.

The main problem, both in Calabria and in other contexts, always remains the difficulty of transforming startups into scale-ups: that is, consolidating one's business and ensuring exponential growth in income. In order to better structure the action:

- a benchmark analysis was conducted on the services offered by incubators on the national and international scene (also Cohes3ion partners);
- a survey was sent to innovative startups / SMEs (December 2020) present in the region on the needs analysis.

The purpose of the survey was therefore to investigate the real "environmental and context" causes that may affect the development of startups in Calabria and highlight the main obstacles they encounter in their entrepreneurial development path. The questionnaire was sent to all 269 innovative startups and 37 Innovative SMEs present, at the start date of the research (November 2020), in the Business Register and based in the Calabria Region. 84 startups and innovative SMEs answered the questionnaire. From the results of the survey, the critical issues that seem to be most recurrent are 4:

- Difficulty in transforming startups into scale up;
- Difficulty in raising capital;
- Difficulty in accessing international markets;
- Difficulty establishing a network of contacts with potential partners.

Therefore, a further perceived need emerges, represented by the approach to the market and the customer. This is symptomatic of a deeply felt need that goes in the direction of scouting for opportunities, towards the search for subjects potentially interested in the technology developed. In



other words, the photograph that emerges is that of an economic system capable of developing technologies, even highly appreciated, but which then fails to adequately promote the results towards users.

6.2 Learnings from Cohes3ion Partners

From the experience of the partners it is clear that defining actions to support startups has important repercussions on the territory and on the local economy, especially in this period of Covid. In particular, the actions of the partners appeared significant:

- **BIC BIZKAIA** (Spain), business incubator, has defined a multilevel governance structure of the different entities involved, the ecosystem scheme and the activities related to three essential enabling technologies of RIS3 Basque Country.

- **Digital Incubator Tetapolis Science and Technology Park** (NW Romania), illustrated a 9-month incubation program with the provision of specific activities on education, business creation, market assessment, etc. and has structured startup camp sessions with the aim of supporting business projects.

- **SÖDERTÄLJE SCIENCE PARK** (Sweden) organized the Södertälje Science Week and the Production Angels, focusing on the innovative concept of industrialization and the upscaling of new products especially for SMEs and startups.

- **SBRI Center of Excellence** (Wales) has organized a startup support model with services and challenges that have brought effective results even during the Covid period.

Other Coes3ion partners have also indicated support actions for startups with centers of excellence specialized in strategic areas for their territory.

6.3 Action description

The "Acceleration Program" action aims to support a quick scale-up of regional innovative companies in order to favor the enhancement of knowledge and innovation, the consolidation of a favorable context, the development of innovative and creative professions and the attraction of investments and talents.

The acceleration path has as its objective the identification, training, acceleration and market launch of the best business ideas active in the Calabria Region, with a particular focus on projects with a strong impact on the market and which can guarantee positive effects on development. of the territory.

Action 3 therefore has the following objectives to:

1. Define a business vision consistent with the business idea and with the external context in which the startup operates;
2. Define the need in order to identify and validate the target market consistent with the business idea;
3. Map the business model of entrepreneurial initiatives;



4. Validate the market with initiatives aimed at testing the business model;
5. Define a useful Pitch to illustrate the strengths of your business to potential investors.

Specifically, the path to be developed includes:

- Initial definition of the state of the art and the acceleration plan;
- Definition of milestones to be achieved in the months of the journey;
- Business model validation;
- Support on the go-to-market strategy;
- Networking and internationalization.

The acceleration program offers:

- work spaces;
- training on issues related to entrepreneurship through events and lessons on entrepreneurial skills;
- mentoring and coaching for product/service development, business model, technology, communication, marketing, fundraising;
- assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement;
- a final event (Investor Day), during which companies, through a pitch session, present their project and objectives to national and international investors;
- business matching and open innovation initiatives.

The action will impact the policy instrument since it should:

- Increase the business market;
- Increase the partnership.

This mechanism will be financed from to the policy instrument ROP ERDP Calabria 2014-2020.

6.4 Stakeholders

- SMEs and startups
- Researchers
- Local public entities.

Beneficiaries: 5 Startups and / or innovative SMEs

6.5 Timeframe

2022-2023



6.6 Costs

300.000 euro/per call

6.7 Funding sources

ROP ERDF Calabria 2014-2020

OT1 "Research and Innovation" - Action 1.4.1 "Support for the creation and consolidation of innovative, knowledge-intensive start-ups and research spin-off initiatives in areas in line with Smart Specialization Strategies".

6.8 Challenge

- Encourage business growth paths
- Encourage the industrialization of new products/services.

Date: 31/01/2022

Name of the organisation:

Calabria Region

Signatures of the relevant organisation: Ersilia Amatruda