



Innova-FI
Interreg Europe

BIELSKO-BIAŁA I POLAND

ACTION PLAN

How to use Financial Instruments
to enhance regional development



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

BUSINESS AND CULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

GENERAL INFORMATION

ACTION PLAN

PARTNER ORGANISATION
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY IN BIELSKO-BIAŁA

OTHER PARTNER ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED
MARSHAL OFFICE OF SILESIA VOIVODESHIP

COUNTRY
POLAND

NUTS2 REGION
PL25, SILESIA

CONTACT
PATRYCJA WĘGRZYN
PWEGRZYN@ARRSA.PL
+48 504 410 806

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019-2021 the Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala participated in an intensive knowledge sharing initiative – Innova-FI co-financed by the European Union within the Interreg Europe program.

Throughout the time span of the project, the Agency and its regional partners got to know numerous best practices related to improvement in utilizing the financial instruments for the sake of the innovativeness of the regional economy.

Some of them proved to be of the utmost importance for the region of Silesia. The regional partners used the insights into:

- participative and subordinate loans (Spain),
 - crowdfunding platform (Lithuania),
 - networking business angels and other investors (Portugal, Spain, Lithuania),
 - start-up incubation and acceleration (Slovenia, Italy);
- to develop own actions targeting better use of financial instruments.

Hereby the partnership presents

the Action Plan containing three actions, i.e.:

1. Bielsko-Biala Bid Bond Sureties Fund,
2. Silesian Forum of Business Angels and Investors,
3. Silesian Start-up Booster.

The first action aims at making the Bielsko-Biala Bid Bond Sureties Fund the regional sureties fund of the first choice for micro-companies and SMEs in need of surety to participate in public procurement related to Regional Development and Cohesion Policy (2014-2020, 2021-2027) or the Just Transition Policy. The second action is dedicated to establishing a vivid network of equity investors so that Silesia could become one of the top five Polish regions with sound equity investment opportunities for technological start-ups. Within the third action a regional acceleration program will be established, to inspire young people and research teams to give life to their technology-based business ideas with the support of equity investments. All three actions

contribute to the Regional Innovation Strategy of Silesia and better use of the European funding for innovation.

The detailed descriptions of the actions are provided in the document. They are followed by guidelines concerning communication, monitoring and evaluation of the impact. Before the profiles of the actions, the reader will find a brief description of the policy context in Silesia.

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SUPPORT LETTER



WICEMARSZAŁEK
WOJEWÓDZTWA ŚLĄSKIEGO

Wojciech Kaluza

Urząd Marszałkowski
Województwa Śląskiego
ul. Ligonia 46
40-037 Katowice

TELEFON +48 32 20 78 285

wojciech.kaluza@slaskie.pl
slaskie.pl
powstania.slaskie.pl

Katowice, dnia 5 stycznia 2022 r.

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RR-RIF.KW-00001/22

Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A.

Dotyczy Projektu Innova-FI
(Interreg Europe Project PG105374)

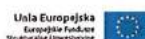
Szanowni Państwo,

Zarząd Województwa Śląskiego jako Instytucja Zarządzająca Regionalnym Programem Operacyjnym Województwa Śląskiego od początku wyrażał aprobatę dla Inicjatywy Agencji Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. w Bielsku-Białej polegającej na realizacji projektu w ramach Interreg Europe pn. "Innova-FI: Financial Instruments for Innovations".

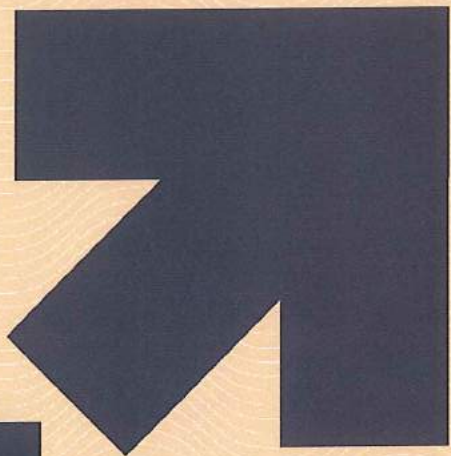
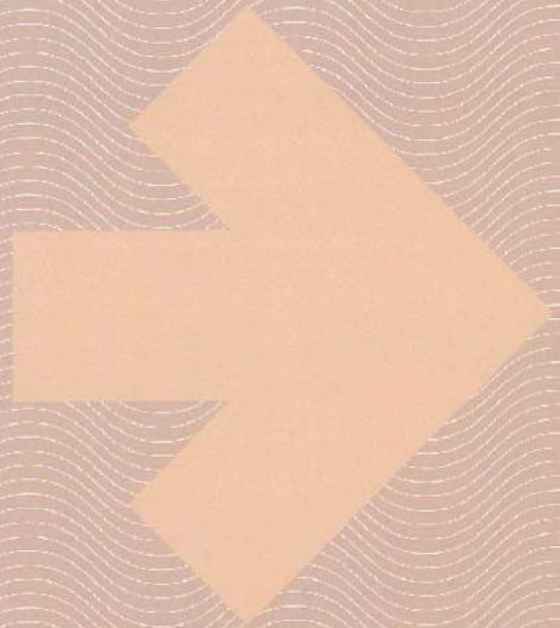
Konsekwencją było także oddelegowanie przedstawiciela do prac w Lokalnej Grupie Interesariuszy, stworzonej przy projekcie i udział w 6 spotkaniach Lokalnej Grupy Interesariuszy (31.05.2019 r., 18.02.2020 r., 19.08.2020 r., 03.12.2020 r., 06.05.2021 r., 08.06.2021 r.) organizowanych przez partnera lokalnego oraz 4 wydarzeniach międzyregionalnych (15-17.07.2019 r. w Wilnie, 15.09.2020 r. na Słowenii (on-line), 08-09.03.2021 r. w Bielsku-Białej (on-line) i 28-30.09.2021 r. w Salonikach) organizowanych przez partnerstwo. W ramach tej współpracy mogliśmy dzielić się wiedzą i doświadczeniem, śledzić kolejne etapy projektu oraz aktywnie wpływać na jego kształt.

Pian Działań stworzony w ramach projektu Interreg Europe Innova-FI przez Agencję Rozwoju Regionalnego w Bielsku-Białej, posiada duży potencjał merytoryczny i stanowi ważne narzędzie do prac, a jego wdrożenie byłoby wartością dodaną dla rozwoju miasta, a także całego regionu.

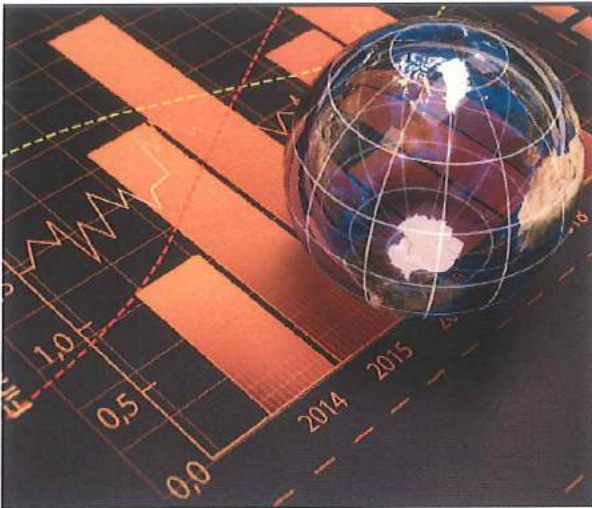
Z poważaniem



POLICY CONTEXT



The Innova-FI project touches on the issues of design, efficiency and effectiveness of financial instruments supporting the development of innovation in SMEs. The Śląskie Voivodeship is one of the participating regions that have planned for Innova-FI actions.



The Innova-FI project touches on the issues of design, efficiency and effectiveness of financial instruments supporting the development of innovation in SMEs. The Śląskie Voivodeship (NUTS 2: Śląskie Voivodeship, PL22; hereinafter referred to as "Silesia") is one of the participating regions that have planned for Innova-FI actions. They will impact the overall ability of the SMEs to utilize policy instruments (financing investments and R&D works; acceleration programs) available in the region throughout national and regional support schemes.

Silesia is the most urbanized and industrialized region of Poland. It is a key player in the Polish economy, ranking second in terms of GDP generated. Nevertheless, in terms of GDP per capita, Silesia is the fourth region in Poland. The regional economic potential results from the significant concentration of enterprises from various sectors,

including the manufacturing industry, advanced production systems, technologies of a medium and high level of advancement, as well as knowledge-intensive services and business services. Over the past 30 years, many new economic activities have emerged as a result of industrial change. However, Silesia remains the leading mining region in Europe and an important producer of coal-based energy. There are several universities and research and development institutions in the region, including the Silesian University of Technology, the University of Silesia, the Medical University of Silesia and the University of Economics, which play an important role in the development of innovation and modern technologies in the region.

The ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship support in Silesia has been consistently developed since 2002 by the regional authority (Marshal's Office of the Śląskie Voivodeship) and its partners such as higher education institutions and research & development institutes, business support organisations, clusters, the Network of Regional Specialized Observatories as well as institutions financing the development of enterprises and offering other financial instruments.

The contemporary innovation policy of the region dates back to the beginning of the twenty-first century with the development and implementation of the first Regional Innovation Strategy for 2003-2013. The existing framework for the innovation policy was developed as part of the programming process for the period of 2014-2020 when the regional authorities and their partners made a decision (based on the results of the regional

technological foresight) to establish two pillars of this policy, i.e. the Technology Development Program of Silesia (2010-2020 edition, 2019-2030 edition) and the Regional Innovation Strategy (2003-2013 edition, 2013-2020 edition and 2020-2030 edition – currently presented as a final draft).

The latest edition of the Regional Innovation Strategy, which is about to be approved, sets the main goal as Smart Silesia – innovative and intelligent economic transformation ensuring the competitive advantage of the region in the international arena. Two of the four operational goals directly contain activities related to building a support system and financing the creation and implementation of innovations in the region. The activities mentioned include, but are not limited to:

D.1.1. Dynamizing development processes in smart specializations,

D.1.2. Implementation of innovations in enterprises,

D.1.3. Strengthening the research infrastructure for the regional science-business partnership,

D.3.1. Comprehensive support for start-ups,

The need to strengthen the entities providing equity finance at the seed stage and subsequent investment rounds, both from public-private and private funds, is indicated especially in the latter. As part of providing venture capital, it is assumed that the existing and new funds will be financed, to offer the investment tickets of PLN 1

million, PLN 2-4 million, PLN 4-15 million. These funds should develop partnerships with start-up animators/facilitators to build a coherent message and prepare the most interesting ideas in the pre-incubation phase. In this process, an important role is to be played by science and technology parks, incubators and accelerators and their networks, which comprehensively provide new companies with access to infrastructure, knowledge, capital as well as research- and business-related contacts within their ecosystems. Moreover, bearing in mind the important role of large enterprises in the regional economy, it is important to involve these companies in scale-up projects ensuring the implementation of innovative solutions of start-ups from the region on a larger scale.

The above-mentioned strategic documents, i.e. the Technology Development Program and the Regional Innovation Strategy indicate thematic areas to be prioritized in the region in the coming years. The technological areas pinpointed in the Technology Development Program are:

- technologies for medicine,
- technologies for the power industry,
- technologies for environmental protection,
- information and telecommunications technologies,



- production and processing of materials,
- logistics and transport,
- machine and automobile industry,
- aviation technologies and the space industry,
- nanomaterials and nanotechnologies,
- technologies for the raw materials industry.

Whereas the Regional Innovation Strategy for 2020-2030 focuses on 5 smart specializations of Silesia which are:

- I. power industry,
- II. medicine,
- III. information and communication
- IV. technologies,
- V. emerging industries,
- VI. green economy.

The region's Innovation policy is mainly financed under regional and national operational programs, to which the Polish government has allocated European funds since 2007. Therefore, since then, issues related to innovations and SME support have always been included in the Regional Operational Programs and the dedicated Operational Program at the national level. Complementary, some instruments have been financed from the state budget.

In 2014-2020, the main sources of financing for the development of innovation in SMEs at the national level were:

- i. The grants and subsidies awarded by the National Center for Research and Development under the Smart Growth Operational Programme, including the popular measure known as the "Fast Track".
- ii. Capital support offered through seed funds combined with a grant from the National Center for Research and Development under the Bridge Alfa scheme, the main goal of which is to co-finance together with Seed capital Funds the research and development projects in the early stages of development (proof-of-principle and proof-of-concept phase). Bridge Alfa increases the supply of business-based R&D projects attractive to investors, venture capital or private equity. The grant from the National Centre for Research and Development covers 80% of the budget of the R&D agenda, while the capital from private investors fills in the remaining 20%. Two funds co-financed

from the Bridge Alfa program are located in Silesia. Nevertheless, the activities of none of the Polish Bridge Alfa funds are territorially limited.

iii. Advisory and subsidy support provided by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development under the Smart Growth Operational Programme, including in particular the "Scale Up" measure. The main goal of the "Scale Up" is to accelerate the development of Polish start-ups by having their solutions tested by medium and large companies, thereby widening the range of their operations.

In parallel, the development of innovation in SMEs at the regional level was financed in 2014-2020 mainly from the Regional Operational Program, which provided for subsidies to support the development of research infrastructure, conducting R&D projects and investments in fixed assets necessary to launch innovative products and services. Priority was given to the projects in regional smart specializations.

These activities in a similar scope will be continued in 2021-2027. It is also planned to keep the current demarcation between the activities financed under the national and regional operational programs. Anyway, the details are yet not finally agreed.

Moreover, the regional authority has lately (in 2019, registered 2020) established the Silesian Development Fund. It is a financial institution aiming to build a sustainable, long-term financing system for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in Silesia. Primarily the Fund is targeting equity investments and innovative loans (including loans securing co-financing in subsidy programs). The Fund is also to deliver the surety instrument concerning: loans, leasing and bid bonds. The offered support is to be of a revolving nature, to ensure the reinvestment of funds in the regional economy. Currently, the Fund implements the equity component, providing its own financing in the range of PLN 0.5-3.0 million, with the possibility of co-investments of other investors for increasing the value of projects carried out.

Silesia also awaits a significant share of financing from a Just Transition Fund. The draft Regional Plan of Just Transition in Silesia 2030 specifies the following areas of intervention concerning innovation in SMEs:

- support to the research and development

enterprises in Silesia. Primarily the Fund is targeting equity investments and innovative loans (including loans securing co-financing in subsidy programs). The Fund is also to deliver the surety instrument concerning: loans, leasing and bid bonds. The offered support is to be of a revolving nature, to ensure the reinvestment of funds in the regional economy. Currently, the Fund implements the equity component, providing its own financing in the range of PLN 0.5-3.0 million, with the possibility of co-investments of other investors for increasing the value of projects carried out.

Silesia also awaits a significant share of financing from a Just Transition Fund. The draft Regional Plan of Just Transition in Silesia 2030 specifies the following areas of intervention concerning innovation in SMEs:

- support to the research and development potential of the region (R&D infrastructure, industrial and scientific consortia),
- strengthening the technology transfer centres (including technology parks, demonstrators of new technologies),

- development of innovative enterprises (implementation of R&D results and application of innovations to contribute to the increase of competitiveness and creation of new, stable jobs).

This Action Plan aims at supporting the sustainability of the 2014-2020 financial instruments and at ensuring a smooth transition to the implementation of 2021-2027 programs.



Bielsko-Biała Bid Bond Sureties Fund

This action aims at delivering prompt and flexible surety instrument for micro-, small- and medium-sized companies willing to participate in public procurement procedures, especially those related to the European co-financing.

THE BACKGROUND

Bielsko-Biala has quite a long history of institutions offering micro-loans, guarantees and sureties for businesses in the area. It is assessed that since the early 2000s over 40 million Polish zlotys of support was offered as micro-financial instruments and to maintain over 4 thousand jobs.

In 2020 all instruments were integrated into the structure of the Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala to mainstream this financial instrument in the business support policy of the region. It is especially important from the perspective of business entities that prefer to submit the bid bond surety (instead of cash) in public procurement procedures. The sureties might be issued up to the amount of 750,000 Polish zlotys.

The use of the bid bond sureties enables micro-companies and SMEs to increase their involvement in public procurement connected to co-financing received from the Investment for Growth and Jobs programme, European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and other regional development policy instruments. In the nearest future, the same will apply to related to the Regional Development and Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 and the Just Transition Policy.

While preparing the action, the partnership used the experiences of delivering the Participative and Subordinate Loans i.a. by Generalitat Valenciana (Spain) and of communicating the loan-based instruments with the society (on the example of the Lithuanian crowdlending platform operator

and instruments). The exchange of know-how was possible thanks to Innova-FI (on-site and virtual) workshops and visits.

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ACTION

The Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala will re-design service provision concerning the Bielsko-Biala Bid Bond Sureties Fund, to make it better recognized in the region. The action will consist of two work packages.



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A1.WP1. Improving the user experience

Covid-19 lockdowns have radically moved the business to more digitalized solutions. The role of the front office and communication, as well as documents exchange patterns, has changed. Therefore the Fund needs to switch to a secure, reliable and easy to use digital platform that would allow seamless submission of the application as well as completion of the surety issue. This conversion shall be accompanied by physical space

arrangements of the Fund's office. It should reflect the "digital nature" of the process. As such should not be the "submission point" nor the "paperwork centre" but a friendly place for consultations and advisory.

A1.WP2. Promotion of the Fund

The Fund will disseminate its success stories and promote the concept of obtaining the bid bond sureties. Media and internet appearances will be purchased within the work package.

PLAYERS INVOLVED

Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala operates mainly in the southern part of the region and for many years already is the main business support organization of the local government in the city of Bielsko-Biala. RDA's programmes related to business incubation; loans, guarantees and sureties; as well as to equity investments are anchored in the area and well perceived.

Micro-, small- and medium-sized companies

operating (having a headquarter or branch office or investment location) in the region are addressed by the action unless they are excluded from state aid.

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TIMEFRAME, COSTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

The Bid Bond Sureties Fund is operational and according to legal regulations is an extraordinary fund within the asset structure of the Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala. The valuation of the fund equals 1,000,000 Polish zlotys.

The work packages defined within the action will be implemented in 2021 and 2022 with the own resources of the Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala.



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OUTLOOK

In 2025 the Bielsko-Biala Bid Bond Sureties Fund is the regional sureties fund of the first choice for micro-companies and SMEs in need of surety to participate in public procurement related to Regional Development and Cohesion Policy (2014-2020, 2021-2027) or the Just Transition Policy.

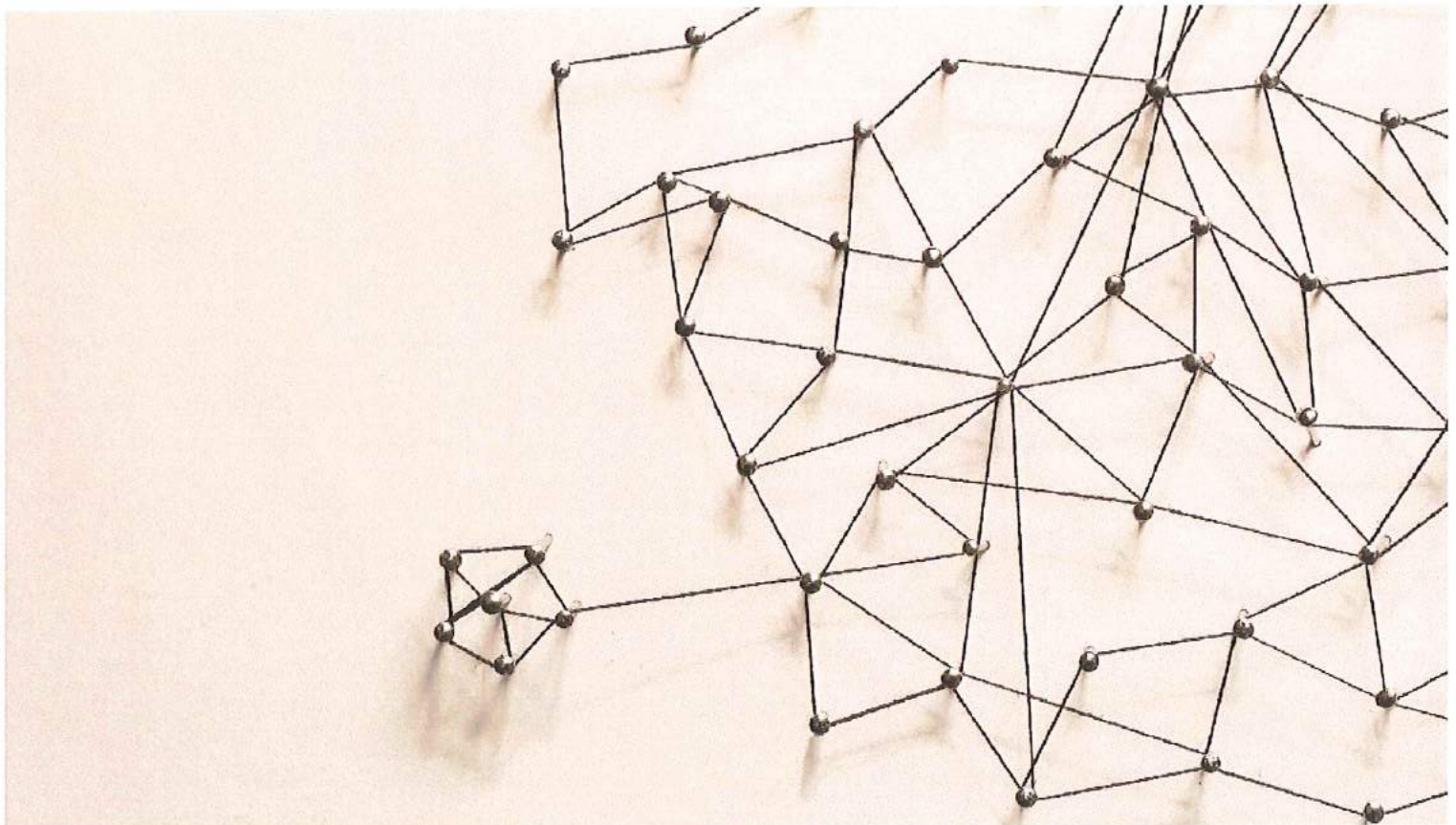
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Silesian Forum of Business Angels and Investors

This action aims at improved communication within the investment community in the region.

THE BACKGROUND

Whereas different organizations and individuals have been involved in seed and venture investments, in general, the investment arena of the region is fairly dispersed which may result in a lower capacity of the actors to scout for promising projects in the area. The action will enable better use of the geographical proximity to increase a range of opportunities for start-ups to access the capital and for investors to strengthen their pipelines and portfolios. .



In Silesia, there is a relatively weak (compared to the economic power of the region), system of supporting the innovative enterprises, based upon equity instruments.

The main actors of Silesia financial ecosystem are:

The Silesian Development Fund

The Silesian Development Fund is an entity established by the regional authority, primarily focused on equity investments and innovative loans for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in Silesia.

Seed capital funds (under the Bridge Alfa program by the National Center for Research and Development)

Two funds established under the Bridge Alfa operate in Silesia. They are Akcelerator Technologiczny Gliwice based in Gliwice and Invento Capital based in Katowice. Bridge Alfa funds run capital investments in innovative R&D projects in the early stages of development, where the risk of investment failure is the highest. The funds provide the company with capital of up to 1 million Polish zlotys, which includes an investment from private capital and a grant from the National Center for Research and Development. The combination of private capital with public money increases the value of the investment and at the same time reduces the risk of private investors, who can therefore invest in a larger number of projects. Within the process, the funds search for innovative projects and conduct due diligence analyses to select ideas with the highest commercialization

potential and sound outlook for finding capital in the next investment rounds.

Venture and seed capital funds (operating as a follow-up of accelerators created within the Operational Program Innovative Economy 2007-2013)

Four entities in the region perform investment activities based on funds obtained from returns on investments made in 2010-2015 by conducting investment activities under business accelerators created from the Innovative Economy Operational Program 2007-2013.



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These entities are Science and Technology Park "Euro-Centrum" in Katowice, Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala, Technology Park of Aviation, Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Kaniow and the Science and Technology Park "Technopark Gliwice" in Gliwice.

These entities, similarly to Bridge Alfa funds, make investments at the seed capital and start-up level. In their case, the innovation of the project is of key importance, but there is no requirement to carry out R&D works. Financing of the project is up to the amount of EUR 200,000, intended mainly for the commercialization of the idea. These funds are also willing to make co-investments with other investors, such as Business Angels.

Local and regional loan funds

For many years, regional and local guarantee and loan funds have been operating in the region. Currently, the active entities in this area are Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala, Local Development Agency in Sosnowiec, Silesian Surety Fund, Bielsko-Biala Centre for Entrepreneurship, Silesian Fund, Upper Silesian Agency for Entrepreneurship and Development in Gliwice and Ruda Slaska Development Agency "Inwestor". These entities grant loans up to several hundred thousand Polish zlotys, including loans for operating activities.

Miscellanea

As of today, no other VC, Private Equity or Corporate VC equity funds have been identified that would have their headquarters in the region. There are also no operating business angel's networks. Entrepreneurs from Silesia often look for financing

outside the region, where the availability of VC funds is much bigger. Warsaw is such a centre, but a large number of funds also operate in Krakow and Wroclaw.

In 2006 the Silesian Network of Business Angels "Silban" was created as a part of the implementation of the first Regional Innovation Strategy of Silesia. However, this initiative was not properly promoted at the time and could not be maintained in the long term.

The lack of capital funds, in particular those financing projects more mature than seed or start-up, has negative consequences for potential investors too. Having no partners in the area, they are forced to search for funds and allocate their resources outside the region. Moreover, the small and dispersed network of equity funds in the region means that potential private investors who have funds for investments do not have sufficient access to a large number of projects that would be analyzed by professional teams conducting due diligence on innovative projects.

While preparing the action, the partnership used the experiences of Portugal Ventures (on working with ignition partners), BigBAN from Spain (on running the business angels network) and Co-Investment Fund II from Lithuania (on networking business angels and risk capital fund management companies). The exchange of know-how was possible thanks to Innova-FI (on-site and virtual) workshops and visits.

ACTION

The Silesian Forum of Business Angels and Investors will bring together start-ups and numerous actors in the regional investment area. The action will consist of seven work packages and will be implemented in partnership with the relevant players from regional financial ecosystem



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A2.WP1. Mapping the business angels and investors

The partnership will use the knowledge gathered during the Innova-FI implementation to continue the further mapping of institutional seed and VC/PE investors as well as business angels. Information about their areas of interest, portfolio and ticket range will be collected and afterwards updated. The data will be used for the sound implementation of all the WPs. Certain information will be presented in the regional seed/VC/PE portal (A2.WP6).

A2.WP2. Forum animators

The partnership will appoint 2-3 forum animators who create a small but efficient team responsible for day-to-day contacts and sound information flow. The animators will directly work with business angels and fund representatives to gather insights into their current activities and discuss needs concerning partner search, process facilitation or establishing thematic workshops and workgroups.

The animators will directly work with business angels and fund representatives to gather insights into their current activities and discuss needs concerning partner search, process facilitation or establishing thematic workshops and workgroups. They will also prepare content for the regional seed/VC/PE portal (A2.WP6) and establish tight relations with technology transfer offices at the universities and research institutes in the region to better understand their modes of operation and map the project pipelines.

A2.WP3. Partner search

The partnership will organize partner search workshops and meetings to support start-ups in accessing R&D partners and industry-related investors. The workshops will enable regional technological small businesses and potential entrepreneurs to inspire themselves, present initial concepts, receive feedback and lower the costs and risks of accessing the pool of experts for future developments.

A2.WP4. Thematic groups

The partnership will set up workgroups focused on certain thematic, non-competitive areas of interest. Primarily it may start with themes related to selected issues in smart specializations to further expand to the other subjects. Within the thematic groups, the investors will receive better insights into technological and market trends, while R&D and business representatives will find out which commercialization aspects are crucial for the investment community.

A2.WP5. Demo-days and networking events

The partnership will organize events dedicated to start-up presentations within the regional

investment community. The events will encompass pitch sessions for ideas relevant for seed financing as well as thematic arenas for already established businesses to attract the next series of financing. Investors present at the events will naturally network with companies as well as with other business angels, seed funds and venture funds to build their pipelines.

A2.WP6. Regional seed/VC/PE portal

The partnership will launch the website service (incl. associated social media channels) on the regional investment ecosystem. Apart from the news and guidance sections, the website will contain profiles of investors available in the region and navigate the users to their websites and social media channels. The portal will source the other media services with news releases from the community to increase awareness concerning the Silesian start-ups and investors.

A2.WP7. Info-point

The partnership will encourage start-ups and investors to allow the project team to share contact data and non-competitive information concerning business development with the externals – so that the Forum team and office would become an information point of the first choice for entities searching for information and tailored contacts to technological start-ups, business angels, seed funds and VC/PE funds in the region. In this work package, the animators (A2.WP2) will use their knowledge to initiate new business links and boost the performance of companies and secure follow-up investments.

PLAYERS INVOLVED

The action will be implemented by the Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala in relation to the activities of the Silesian Development Fund. To secure territorial coverage in Silesia, institutions from the northern and western parts of the region (Czestochowa subregion and Rybnik subregion) will be encouraged to join the partnership.

The founding partner will establish the Forum and hire the animators as well as any other participating staff. There will be one main office for the Forum, but the animators will work from their locations for better access to businesses, business angels and funds in their proximity. Regional authority (Marshal's Office of the Śląskie Voivodeship) will be involved in the action as a policy representative to enable smooth feedback and support publicity of the undertaken activities.

Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala operates mainly in the southern part of the region and for many years already is the main business support organization of the local government in the city of Bielsko-Biala. RDA's programmes related to business incubation; loans, guarantees and sureties; as well as to equity investments are anchored in the area and well perceived.

Silesian Development Fund was established in 2019 by the regional government to increase the use of financial instruments in the regional economy. The Fund has already got a track record. For the future, its task is to set up instruments based on loans, guarantees, sureties, equity instruments, as well as sureties for loans, leases, factoring and bid bonds.

The implementation will be both targeted and supported by the funds active in the region (see 2.1).

The partnership will use its links with the other actors of the regional innovation ecosystem to better integrate the action with the other activities going on in the area. Chambers of commerce and industry will be addressed as well as cluster organizations, technology transfer offices and the Network of Regional Specialized Observatories (SO RIS).

Chambers prioritized for the action: Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bielsko-Biala; Regional Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Gliwice; Regional Chamber of Commerce in Katowice; Chamber of Crafts and Small and Medium Enterprises; Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Rybnik Industrial District; Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Tarnowskie Gory; Regional Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Tychy; Zagłębie Chamber of Commerce; Regional Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Czestochowa; The Metallurgical Chamber of Industry and Commerce; Mining Chamber of Industry and Commerce; Chamber of Commerce

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in Czestochowa; The Metallurgical Chamber of Industry and Commerce; Mining Chamber of Industry and Commerce; Chamber of Commerce of Non-Ferrous Metals and Recycling; Silesian Chamber of Construction; Chamber of Commerce of Exporters and Importers; Upper Silesian Economic Society.

Clusters prioritized for the action: MedSilesia, Silesia Automotive & Advanced Manufacturing, Silesian Aviation Cluster, ICT cluster E-poludnie, Silesian ICT Cluster, Sinotaic – Silesian IoT Cluster, Silesian Design Cluster, Silesian Nano Cluster.

The Network of Regional Specialized Observatories (SO RIS) has been organized by the regional government and its partners to integrate the actors of the innovation ecosystem around the

regional areas of specialization. The following Observatories have been operating at the moment in the region: SO Technologies for Medicine, SO Technologies for Energetics, SO Information and Telecommunications Technologies, SO Technologies for Environmental Protection, SO Production and Materials Processing, SP Machinery, SO Nanomaterials and Nanotechnologies, SO Transportation.

All technology transfer offices at the universities and research institutes in the region will be involved in the activity.

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TIMEFRAME, COSTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

The implementation of the action will be started in 2023. Most of the mapping (A2.WP1) will be done in a preparatory phase so that the action could become operational in the first months of 2023 with animators playing an active role in encouraging the stakeholders to the Initiative. Meetings and workshops (A2.WP3-5) should start in Autumn 2023 at the latest.

The action will be financed from the 2021-2027 instruments, i.e. Regional Development and Cohesion Policy – objective 1 (Smarter Europe, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses) or alternatively / partly from Interreg strands.

In the case of cohesion policy, the action fits

into the proposed European Funds for Silesia Operational Program, priority 1 (Smart Silesia), measure 3. (Strengthening sustainable growth and competitiveness of the SMEs and new job opportunities, incl. manufacturing investments).

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OUTLOOK

In 2025 the Silesian Forum of Business Angels and Investors is a vivid network of equity investors having complementary business in the region of Silesia. Several events organized by the Forum bring together ideas and money. Technological start-ups benefit from the proximity and personal interactions with investors while the latter has a better insight into the regional economy and use this perspective to strengthen their pipelines and portfolios. As a result, Silesia is perceived to be one of the top five Polish regions with sound equity investment opportunities.

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Silesian Start-up Booster

This action aims at better understanding of the issues concerning technology commercialization and the role of equity investments in this process.

THE BACKGROUND

The general awareness and availability of the specialized knowledge are the pre-conditions to catalyse business ideas that can be consequently developed and co-financed by business angels as well as seed and VC funds. The action will build a regional pool of entrepreneurial concepts mastered for the win-win setup for both idea holders and equity investments.

There are numerous business support organizations in Silesia that help start-ups and scale-ups through advisory services. However, the nature of their business (and in many cases the project-based approach) does not always lead to efficient solutions and hardly ever build effective and well established long-term initiatives for technological entrepreneurs. The activities in this area so far have not led to the creation of a start-up ecosystem. In general, there are no renowned services or programs that would allow start-ups to: professionalize their approach; validate ideas and business models; perform research and development at an early stage (PoP, PoC).

Venture and seed capital funds (operating as The Science and Technology Park "Technopark Gliwice" in Gliwice might be an example of a business support organization, which for many years has been providing services in the fields of business models development, entrepreneurship training as well as business consulting and coaching. Projects implemented in recent years include: "Setup" (postgraduate training aimed

at the development of the entrepreneurial capabilities and sharing business experiences) and "InnoWomEnt" (devoted to the exchange of international experiences related to women's entrepreneurship). "Technopark Gliwice" also runs a series of meetings devoted to the practical aspects of start-ups known as Start-it-up. Similar

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projects and seminars are also being organized by the other business support organizations in the region but their overall impact is quite limited.

Acceleration programs are also carried out by seed capital funds operating in the region. Nevertheless, their activity is focused mainly on the projects aligned with the investment strategy and related to the potential equity transactions of these funds. However, Invento Capital offers a wider range of activities in this area. As a part of the acceleration program, it offers pre-seed investments from 25,000 to 250,000 Polish zlotys, training in the field of product and service design, support in organization and implementation of the research and commercialization process, expert mentoring, networking, access to research laboratories and scientific facilities, as well as access to international partners and investors.

Programs supporting the creation and development of start-ups are also implemented by universities in the region. The profile and impact of these actions are similar to the other business support organizations in Silesia. In relatively recent history the Silesian universities were networked through the concepts of the Academic Incubators of Entrepreneurship and the "START" project. While the first offered a safe environment for running first business transactions, the latter was aimed

at building entrepreneurial competencies among students. Nevertheless, none of the regional initiatives is currently continued.

Programs supporting the creation and development of start-ups are in some cases implemented by municipalities. For example, Katowice has been running various initiatives supporting the establishment of new and innovative companies, including support and mentoring programs for young entrepreneurs. Recently, the Rawa INK Municipal Business Incubator has been launched, in which modern spaces for business locations are available. The city has also organized the competition "Katowice - Mine of Start-ups", expanding knowledge in the field of project management, business models, team management, basic business competencies and investment communication. Also, the city of Zabrze has for many years offered support for technological entrepreneurs, among others by organizing the annual "Zabrzanski Business Plan" competition.

In general, there is an insufficient number of well-prepared and constantly implemented acceleration or scale-up programs, within which young founders might receive: mentoring, access to business consulting services, networking opportunities with investors, business partners and customers (e.g. medium and large corporations), as well as the possibility of flexible use of infrastructure (office space, laboratories, etc.)

While preparing the action, the partnership used the experiences of the ABC Accelerator in Slovenia (on acceleration programs and special challenges related to scale-up) and Friuli Innovazione from Italy (on running the incubation phase). The exchange of know-how was possible thanks to Innova-FI (on-



ACTION

The Silesian Start-up Booster will establish a coherent regional agenda for inspiring technological entrepreneurship in secondary and higher education.

The regional government will act through its Silesian Development Fund to network universities and set up a joint approach to start-up promotion. The action will consist of five work packages to be delivered to various locations throughout the region.

A3.WP1. Inspiration and training for secondary schools students

The participating universities will address secondary schools in their proximity with an invitation to share entrepreneurship (or similar) classes with the experts hired by the Booster to deliver inspirational talks with the youth and offer them training on the basics of technological entrepreneurship and equity investments. The partnership will prepare a common pool of resources, with regional case studies, to be used for the work package implementation.

A3.WP2. Business masterclasses in technical education

The partnership will build the dedicated business masterclass curricula for technical secondary schools and technical programs at the universities. These curricula will be integrated into learners' progress in the participating universities and their selected partner secondary schools. The curricula will

contain the basics of business model and business plan development, innovation management and equity investments. The masterclasses will be self-standing teaching modules with a number of contact hours relevant for achieving certain knowledge, skills and competence in technological entrepreneurship. They will be organized (where applicable) in cooperation with program directors and career centres.

A3.WP3. Business advisory for engineering and research teams

The participating universities will review the offers of their technology transfer centres to introduce modernised schemes of business advisory for their research and engineering teams. When the schemes are developed, they will be promoted to the external stakeholders of the universities and their R&D groups will be encouraged to use the advisory in industrial applications. The spin-out / spin-off initiatives catalysed in the work package

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will receive networking and further acceleration within A3.WP4.

A3.WP4. Acceleration program

The partnership will regularly organize editions of a joint acceleration program for start-ups and spin-out / spin-off companies. The beneficiaries will receive an intensive product development boot camp. The boot camp will be practically oriented, with participants working on their business cases and utilizing case studies for personal advancements. An expected business model with a related roadmap/action plan will be elaborated for every business idea selected for acceleration. This will be a valuable take-away, to be challenged by invited experts, representatives of the seed funds and process facilitators. All beneficiaries will be entitled to use free of charge consultancy hours. Depending upon eligibility rules concerning the external financing of the action, the participating universities may offer access to laboratories and open workspaces.

A3.WP5. Living on-line handbook

The partnership will publish the electronic version of the handbook concerning access to granting schemes and equity investments for technological entrepreneurs. The publication will be a living document, which means that it is going to be revised and updated at least quarterly. The readers will be enabled to subscribe for messages on revisions so that they could always enjoy up-to-date knowledge.

access to a large number of projects that would be analyzed by professional teams conducting due diligence on innovative projects.

While preparing the action, the partnership used the experiences of Portugal Ventures (on working with ignition partners), BigBAN from Spain (on running the business angels network) and Co-Investment Fund II from Lithuania (on networking business angels and risk capital fund management companies). The exchange of know-how was possible thanks to Innova-FI (on-site and virtual) workshops and visits.

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PLAYERS INVOLVED

The action will be implemented by the partnership of the Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala and universities located throughout the region. The coordination will be done by the Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala while the universities will become hubs for implementation with students and staff involved in the action.

The universities will also provide for activities with secondary schools in their proximity. Regional authority (Marshal's Office of the Śląskie Voivodeship) will be involved in the action as a policy representative to enable smooth feedback and support publicity of the undertaken activities. Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala operates mainly in the southern part of the region and for many years already is the main business

support organization of the local government in the city of Bielsko-Biala. RDA's programmes related to business incubation; loans, guarantees and sureties; as well as to equity investments are anchored in the area and well perceived.

Universities prioritized for the action: Silesian University of Technology, Czestochowa University of Technology, University of Silesia in Katowice, University of Bielsko-Biala, Jan Dlugosz University in Czestochowa, University of Economics in Katowice, WSB University, Katowice Business University, State Vocational College in Raciborz, Inter-University Campus in Rybnik.

Respectively, nearby their locations, the universities will enable the involvement of the role models and local start-up officers, business support organisations (incl. incubators and territorial development agencies), seed funds and business angels. They will partner with the initiative and/or will be subcontracted to deliver certain elements of the Booster scheme.



TIMEFRAME, COSTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

The implementation of the action will be started in 2023. However, the first months will be devoted to internal works of the partnership (curricula development, handbook writing, preparation of framework conditions for advisory and acceleration schemes etc). First external activities in A3.WP1-3 are expected for the school / academic year 2023/2024. The first edition of the acceleration program should be launched in Spring 2024.

The action will be financed from either of the 2021-2027 instruments, i.e. Regional Development and Cohesion Policy - objective 1 (Smarter Europe, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses) or the Green Europe / Just Transition Policy.

In the case of cohesion policy, the action fits into the proposed European Funds for Silesia Operational Program, priority 1 (Smart Silesia), measure 3. (Strengthening sustainable growth and competitiveness of the SMEs and new job opportunities, incl. manufacturing investments). As for the just transition, the relevant goal in the proposed Territorial Plan for Just Transition is measure A3. (Strong entrepreneurship in the post-mining regions).

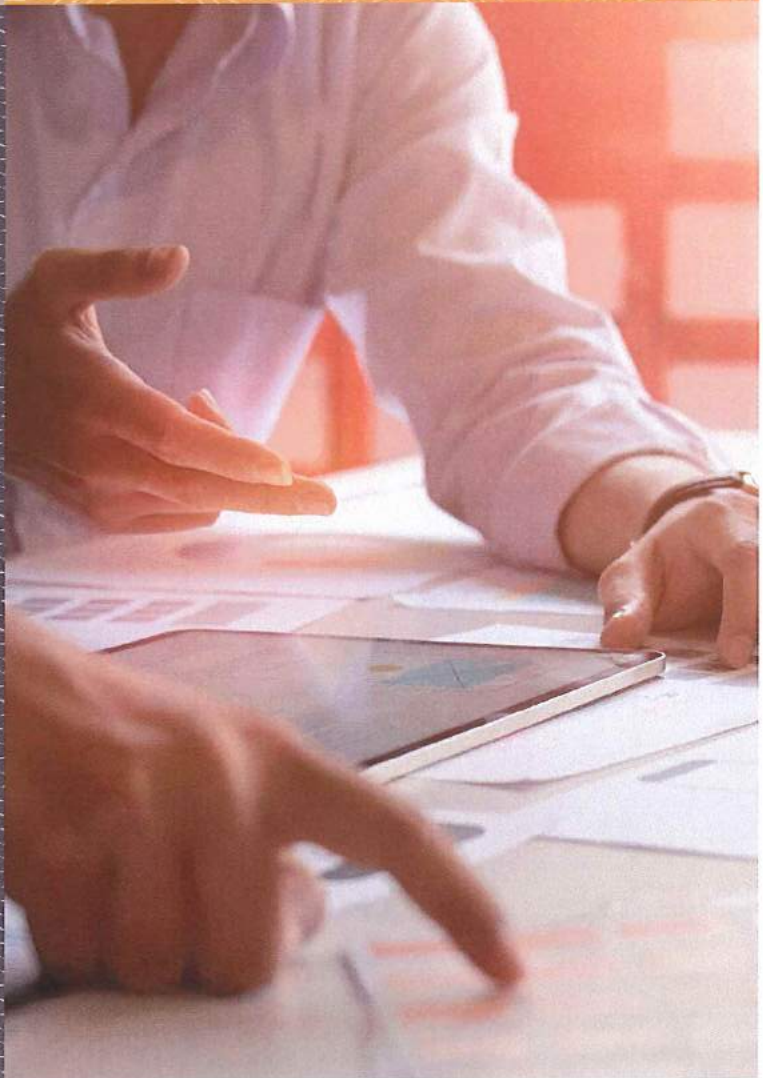
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OUTLOOK

In 2025 the Silesian Start-up Booster is a well established regional acceleration program inspiring young people and research teams to give life to their technology-based business ideas. The wide array of activities within the Booster promote technological entrepreneurship and navigate the idea holders from the conceptual phase to the implementation supported by equity investments. As a result, Silesia, and especially its urban areas, joins the group of Polish locations widely associated with vibrant start-up environments.

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COMMUNIC-
NICATION
PLAN



	Jul21	Aug21	Sep21	Oct21	Nov21	Dec21	Jan22	Feb22	Mar22	Apr22	May22	June22
Action 1												
Inviting the users' group to design workshops		■										
Design workshops, receiving users' feedback – round 1			■									
Receiving users' feedback – round 2 (on proposed changes)					■							
Media appearances							■	■	■	■	■	■
Internet appearances							■	■	■	■	■	■
Action 2												
Inviting the stakeholders – baseline presentation of the action	■											
Development workshop with the stakeholders – round 1			■									
Presenting the draft project description to the stakeholders			■	■								
Development workshop with the stakeholders – round 2				■								
Consensus building and idea promotion targeted at fundraising				■	■	■	■	■				
Submitting bids and applications						■	■	■	■	■	■	
General communication concerning the launch of the action and its implementation												→
Action 3												
Inviting the stakeholders – baseline presentation of the action	■											
Development workshop with the stakeholders – round 1			■									
Presenting the draft project description to the stakeholders			■	■								
Development workshop with the stakeholders – round 2				■								
Consensus building and idea promotion targeted at fundraising				■	■	■	■	■				
Submitting bids and applications						■	■	■	■	■	■	
General communication concerning the launch of the action and its implementation												→



MONITORING
AND IMPACT OF
ACTION PLAN

Regional Development Agency Bielsko-Biala.

A steering committee for implementation of the Action Plan will be created, consisting of a representative of the Agency and the Marshal's Office. The role of the secretariat of the steering committee will be assigned to The Agency. The steering committee will meet twice a year.

Monitoring committees will be established for actions 2 and 3 with leaders of the consortium members (or their representatives) appointed as participants. The role of the secretariat of the monitoring committees will be assigned to the Marshal's Office. The monitoring committees will meet at least three times a year.

Data and conclusions from the monitoring, including recommendations for mitigations, corrections and improvements, will be passed to the teams responsible for the implementation of the actions as well as to the steering committee.

Ongoing evaluation of the Action Plan implementation will be the responsibility of the steering committee, which will share feedback with the monitoring committee and the relevant teams. Ex-post evaluation will be conducted in 2024 by an independent entity with adequate expert experience.

SIGNATURE OF ACTION PLAN

I hereby confirm that Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biała as a partner of the Innova-FI project with this Action Plan has defined priority actions target towards the improvement of policy planning and its instruments that are essential for promoting financial instruments for

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Date:

10.01.2022

Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego
Spółka Akcyjna

Bielsko-Biała

Signature of the Representative:

Mariusz Khusak

Wiceprezes Zarządu
Mariusz Khusak

Stamp of the organisation (if available)

Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A.
w Bielsku-Białej

PROKURENT

mgr inż. Jan Sienkiewicz

070032712

Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego
Spółka Akcyjna

43-382 Bielsko-Biała, ul. Cieszyńska 365
tel./fax +48 (33) 816-91-62; 812-26-75; 818-47-79
NIP 547-016-89-81