

PROJECT “DIALOG FOR INNOVATION AND LOCAL GROWTH”

ACTION PLAN

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUTSRY VRATSA

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1. Key Action

*** The content of this document is based on collected useful experience and good practices from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Vratsa as project partner in the project DIALOG, co-funded by INTERREG Europe. The proposals have been identified as good practices from other partner countries and regions in the project and based on the needs of innovative enterprises in Bulgaria with focus on social innovation.**

I – General information

Project	DIALOG – Dialog for Innovation And Local Growth
Partner organisation	Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Vratsa
Other partner organisations involved (if relevant)	N/A
Country	Bulgaria
NUTS2 region	BG31 Northwestern Region (Severozapaden)
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1. About project DIALOG

The overall objective of the DIALOG project is to improve the effectiveness of innovative policies through the involvement of all the local stakeholders, and in particular of the citizens, in the design and in the implementation stages of the policies.

The specific objectives are:

1. By interregional exchange practices (i.e. Italy-Bulgaria Pilot Action SOCIAL-D), improving the learning ability on how to reinforce the active participation of the social partners and citizens during all policy implementation stages in order to improve the competitiveness of the productive system through technological innovation;
2. Consolidating and developing the leading role of local institutions in the implementation and activation of development processes based on ICT and automation sustainable technologies aimed at the general well-being of a territory from a holistic point of view.
3. Increasing social consensus on investments for the local development based on the intensive use of digital and automation technologies in order to create an innovative ecosystem and improve social and occupational impacts.

2. About this Action Plan

Action Plan is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the cooperation will be implemented in order to improve the policy instrument that is addressed within the region. It specified the nature of the actions to be implemented, their timeframe, the players involved, the costs (if any), and funding sources (if any).

This Action Plan gives direct recommendations for measures for implementation of policies related to the needs of Vratsa in innovation issues (both technological and social). The intervention sectors of the Action Plan of CCI Vratsa will be Social Dialogue, Research and Innovation and Welfare and Social Cohesion. The plan consists of detailed description of 1 key action and guidance for its practical integration to the policy instrument addressed.

The Action Plan aims to impact:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
<input type="checkbox"/>	European Territorial Cooperation programme
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other regional development policy instrument

3. Summary

CCI - Vratsa envisages the improvement of the Policy instrument through Improved governance. That means that the MA and Policy Responsible Organisation can modify the thematic calls organizing and in the process of evaluation and monitoring of awarded projects to improve the effectiveness of measures. New approaches adopted towards the social innovation issues and promotion of innovations in business were learned during the first phase of the project – exchange of GPs between partners regions. The process of monitoring and support for beneficiaries involving stakeholders who have gained knowledge during the interregional learning process is also possible.

The main issue of the DIALOG project which aims, in coherence with the INTERREG EUROPE's main perspective, to use the interregional approach of networking that is, exchanging and transferring practices and policy experiences. This will be necessary in order to identify good practices and new social innovation models which can be an effective lever to enhance the performance/effectiveness of the local policy instruments financed by Structural Funds OP for improving innovation practices in the territory of the DIALOG partners.

The Italy-Bulgaria Pilot Action, called "SOCIAL Dialogue for local development" was implemented aiming at transferring and testing the Trentino Digital Platform (good practice) in the Bulgarian context in order to promote an open and participative social dialogue that supports regional policy instruments. The project, among the investment priorities of the 4 call

of the Interreg Europe programme within the priority axis1, intends to contribute to the achievement of the investment priority 1b, in particular in terms of promoting social innovation in social partners and citizens participation. The interregional cooperation, through identification, discussing, modeling and circulation of best practices, will offer all the partners new ways to strengthen the role, skills and participation capability of social partners and citizens in the definition and implementation of policy instruments within the innovative investments.

The Pilot action “SOCIAL-D” and Action plan are connected, and the design of participatory process is the base and derive for foreseen digital platform. The PA is dedicated to the social and health support and provision of services aimed at the elderly on local level, and the Action plan is dedicated to the specific needs of the SMEs and business support. Additionally, there will be a specific section in the Digital platform for supporting services for start-ups and SMEs of the Action plan for social companies. Measures and results for capacity building and areas for cooperation of the different stakeholders taken from the Pilot action and put into Action plan are the following: measures to disseminate information on existing social dialogue initiatives in order to attract more users and stakeholders; organization of meetings/forums for representatives of public authorities, service providers, SMEs, entrepreneurs, etc. aimed at promoting dialogue and fruitful cooperation; development and creation of internet-based databases and relevant legislation.

The area of application in the Pilot Action “SOCIAL-D” is: *Social and health support and provision of services aimed at the elderly on the territory of the Municipality of Vratsa; persons with permanent disabilities and limited mobility; persons at risk of falling into social isolation (especially in the villages of the Municipality of Vratsa); persons who, for health reasons and/or difficult to access environment, are unable to leave their homes alone.* Features of the platform for welfare: Improved interaction of social and health service demand and supply systems; Combined local support systems; Working groups between key actors at local level. Through the platform, end-users will gain skills to manage their self-care and home care and improve their social environment. The foreseen web-based platform will be accessible to any older person registered with the municipality, with or without special needs, after creating a personal account profile.

Next steps of Pilot action “SOCIAL-D”:

- ✓ In order to increase public recognition of the role and contribution of social and health service providers in achieving social inclusion for vulnerable people, news of providers' contributions and outcomes will be publicized. To this end, all available information channels (websites, Facebook pages, etc.) will be used;
- ✓ A service map will be created on the future web platform, which will provide clear and comprehensive information on the specificities and support provided by each social and health service, as well as information on the organisation that manages it;
- ✓ Once a year, CCI-Vratsa will organize a forum to discuss partnership outcomes, successful models and challenges;
- ✓ The ecosystem will present elements of diversity that open up to the creation of a large portfolio of aggregated value propositions;
- ✓ Searching funding and partnership for the Development, purchase and management of a web-based Digital Platform in the field of social and health assistance and service

provision targeting the elderly in the territory of the Municipality of Vratsa. The platform will contribute to better integration of the elderly and prevent their social exclusion.

These tools will be used for networking and dialogue between the first and second level of social systems in Vratsa.

Recommendations in present action plan are based on the following project activities performed during Phase 1 of project's duration (1/08/2019 – 31/07/2022):

3.1. Peer-review

3.1.1. First “web-peer review”, hosted by the Autonomous Province of Trento was held on 5.05.2020.

3.1.2. On 23.06.2020 was held Second peer-review, organized by Canton Ticino.

3.1.3. The Third “web-peer review”, hosted by the European Social Fund Flanders was held on 11.09.2020.

3.1.4. On 26.11.2020 was held Fourth peer-review, organized by Lower Saxon Ministry for Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development Hannover.

3.1.5. The team of CCI Vratsa organized and implemented on 10.12.2020 the Bulgarian Peer-review. During the event were presented successful case-studies in the field of Civil society development, good governance, social entrepreneurial activities, etc.

3.1.6. On 26.01.2021, was held Sixth Peer Review, organized by Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha.

On the basis of implemented on-line Peer-review was defined a Benchmarking between the different cases. It considered the level of involvement of the partnership adopted - both during the design phase and the implementation phase. The analysis used the information contained in the "forms for the identification of case studies / potential good practices" and in the in-depth qualitative study focused on how the social dialogue took place within each selected case carried out by the Lead partner with the support of the scientific group.

3.2. Meetings with local stakeholders from Bulgaria

The team of CCI Vratsa identified and analyzed 10 relevant case studies as regards the involvement of social partners, citizens associations in the definition/implementation of policies, good practices of social enterprises, which had been represented to Stakeholders meeting on 29.01.2020. The studies had been evaluated and were selected 2 of them.

The active participation in identification of good practices by topics, made our stakeholders to be proactive and we facilitated the contacts with stakeholders from partners' regions.

3.3 Good practices

- CASES STUDIES OF THE PROVINCIA AUTONOMA DI TRENTO (ITALY):

1. Strategy of the Inner Area of Tesino: national policy with a strong local dimension that aims at promoting and developing the inner Areas;
2. DCooP project: digital Cooperative Platform for the development and management of local networks of territorial welfare with a collaborative matrix.
3. Trentino Solidarity Fund: targeted to all private employers, not included in the national regulation regarding wage subsidies or bilateral solidarity funds, and promotes the financing of educational programmes for professional reconversion and/or requalification and common checks for workers interested in a reduction of the working hours or a temporary suspension of the working activity.
4. Trentino Study Visit: project, which proposes trips to Italian middle and secondary schools to discover what sustainable development means.

- CASE STUDIES OF TESSIN CANTON EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT DEPARTMENT AND VET DIVISION (SWITZERLAND):

1. City of crafts of the Italian-speaking Switzerland: the project offers guidance and vocational training services gathered in a single space.
2. Fondounimpresa: the point of reference in the field of promotion of self-entrepreneurship in Tessin. It offers training courses in business management, accountability, legal concepts and marketing but also guidance activities for start-ups and counselling on specific topics.
3. The Arianna project: it aims at developing prospects for people living in outermost regions, above all in the Southern Alps, so that they can do a work.

- CASE STUDIES OF ESF FLANDERS (BELGIUM):

1. Stad in Werking (Gsiw): open partnership 'Ghent, city at work', and a strong community where partners meet to develop projects (at political level and on the field).
2. Right2Score: initiative which promotes sport and physical activities to activate and involve challenging target groups difficult to be reached/activated.
3. Social partners on the digital fasttrack: with aim to exchange of knowledge, good practices and know-how on digitization and the role of the social partners in this transition.
4. Maresa Le Roux, Coordinator International Cooperation of the Liberal Trade Union of Belgium: with aim to raise awareness among local trade union members and their elected representatives, making them aware that their companies use SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) in their annual communication and sustainability reports.

- CASE STUDIES OF LOWER SAXON MINISTRY FOR FEDERAL AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT (GERMANY)

1. ESF Policy guideline social innovation of the Lower Saxon Ministry for Federal and European affairs and regional development: instrument which was programmed as one Investment priority which contains the guideline social innovation.
2. Strategy for European Funding 2021 – 2027: addresses the European Funding system in Lower Saxony concerning the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRD), European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for the upcoming funding period (2021-2027).
3. Regional Innovation Strategy for smart specialisation in Lower Saxony 2021 – 2027: the strategy addresses the European Funding system in Lower Saxony, mainly concerning the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRD) Political Objective 1 "A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and economic "transformation".

- CASE STUDIES OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF VRATSA (BULGARIA):

1. The Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law: support for the drafting and implementation of legislation and policies with the aim to advance the civil society, civil participation and good governance in Bulgaria.
2. The Foundation "Project Northwest": provides support and encouragement to the development of people and communities in Northwestern Bulgaria at risk of social exclusion, develops volunteering, civic activism and social entrepreneurship and applies the philosophy of solidarity at the local level, supporting the elderly population by providing social services to improve their social and health status.
3. Foundation "Kauzi": the objective of the initiative was to create sustainable platform for support of start-ups led by non-privileged groups (such as women from distant or rural areas, young people, young people with disabilities, etc.) by socially responsible small companies which make their donations "in kind". Pilot initiative B4b hub, started as a with target group of women entrepreneurs from North-West region of Bulgaria.
4. Association "New Road": support of social integration and personal realization of disadvantaged groups, development and strengthening the non-profit sector in the public life of the country.

- CASE STUDIES OF JUNTA DE COMUNIDADES OF CASTILLA-LA MANCHA (SPAIN)

1. Plan Adelante - strategic plan for business strengthening in Castilla la Mancha.
2. The vocational training council of Castilla-la Mancha: one of the functions assigned to the Council is to draw up and propose for approval by the Governing Council the Regional Vocational Training Plan of Castilla-La Mancha.
3. Farcama (Crafts Fair of Castilla-La Mancha) Governing Association: project which supports the region's crafts sector and to encourage the promotion and marketing of crafts, their companies and activities through the celebration of the Castilla-La Mancha Crafts Fair.
4. The Pact for the Economic Recovery of Castilla-La Mancha 2015-2020: fostering the consolidation and acceleration of economic recovery in the region Castilla-La Mancha.

All practices were discussed with our stakeholders and takeaways were defined.

Based on the findings of these activities CCI Vratsa has prepared this action plan with measures aimed at increasing the promotion of innovative enterprises in Bulgaria with focus on social innovation.

II. Policy context

Name of the policy instruments addressed in the Action Plan.

Programme Innovation and Competitiveness 2021-2027

The Vratsa Chamber of Commerce and Industry defines an action plan aimed at preparing a document detailing how the lessons learned from the collaboration will be applied in order to improve the implementation of the policy instrument Program "Competitiveness and Innovation in Enterprises" 2021-2027 (previous Operational Programme "Innovation and Competitiveness"), within the region of northwestern Bulgaria.

It specifies the nature of the actions to be performed, the players involved, the costs and the sources of funding. This action plan will provide direct recommendations for measures for implementation of policies related to the needs of Vratsa in innovation issues (both technological and social).

The intervention sectors of the Action Plan of CCI Vratsa will be: Promotion of innovative enterprises in Bulgaria with focus on social innovation, Social Dialogue, Research and Innovation, Welfare and Social Cohesion. With Action Plan, we envisage improved management of the proposed policy instrument. This means the organization can make suggestions in the implementation process of foreseen project proposals to improve the effectiveness of the measures. AP will be a useful learning path for identifying measures related to the needs of Vratsa on innovation issues (both technological and social).

The targeted policy instrument in the Application form is as follows:

Operational Program "Innovation and Competitiveness" 2014-2020

Priority Axis 1 "Technological development and innovation" and Priority Axis 2: Entrepreneurship and capacity to support SMEs

During the project implementation we have identified that the Programme "Innovation and Competitiveness" for new programme period 2021 – 2027, namely Programme "Competitiveness and Innovation in Enterprises" 2021-2027 is more suitable for the actions proposed in the current Action Plan, as there will be no foreseen measures under the OPIC 2014-2020 and the implementation period of the initial programme is at its conclusion.

The current draft of the Programme "Competitiveness and Innovation in Enterprises" for the programme period 2021 – 2027 intends support for the development and implementation of in-house innovations, attracting foreign researchers, creation of innovative SMEs and start-ups: Priority 1 "Innovation and growth", Specific objective "Enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation, including through productive investment

For this specific purpose, the following indicative groups of activities are envisaged for implementation within the Policy instrument, that are directly linked to DIALOG project:

1. Support for productive investments in enterprises: support for family businesses, creative industries and crafts.

2. Encouraging entrepreneurial activity - support for the creation of new and development of start-ups.
3. Support for the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, promotion of internationalization and attraction of foreign investments: provision of complex services in support of SMEs.
4. Consultations, training and information for developing business plans, determining the value of products, access to markets and financing, financial instruments, etc. in favor of SMEs on a one-stop shop basis.

Support for SMEs will be organized according to the priority economic activities identified and implemented in the National Strategy for SME's 2021-2027 and according to the needs and potential for specialization in each separate field at NUTS 3 level.

Synergy and complementarity:

Human Resources Development Program 2021-2027 (HRD)

Both the HRD and the OPIC 2021-2027 have measures in the field of entrepreneurship. The main areas of support from the HRD are focused on inclusive entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship with an emphasis on job creation.

The support provided under the OPIC 2021-2027 to promote entrepreneurial activity will be provided through equity financial instruments (acceleration, start-up capital and venture capital) for investments in start-ups. HRD will develop entrepreneurial activity by supporting individuals to start a business, hiring people from start-ups and more. The support will be provided through grants and a financial instrument for microcredit.

Both programs provide for measures related to the provision of consultations, trainings and other types of services in support of business activity, which complement each other.

Why to improve policy?

Even though the Policy instrument consist of measures targeted to improve sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation, improvements proposed in the current action plan shall target specific needs of the SMEs especially in regions with less developed economic – on the territory of 5 districts of North West part of Bulgaria: Vratsa, Montana, Vidin, Pleven, and Lovech.

Responsible body for the policy instrument: Ministry of Economy

“Directorate-General for European Funds and Competitiveness”

How to improve the policy instrument?

Through improved governance and support.

That means that the MA and Policy Responsible Organisation can modify, after public discussion the thematic calls and in the process of evaluation and monitoring of awarded projects to improve the effectiveness of measures.

Innovative measures for improved management:

- Improving the process of monitoring and managing the implementation of the Policy Instrument;
- Improving communication and coordination between key players.

One option for direct involvement in the process of Policy instrument improvement is the participation in the Consulting process under the Program Innovation and Competitiveness. Currently the new Programme for Innovation and Competitiveness has been drafted and is in final consultation phase. Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is a member of The Thematic Working group for the development of the OPIC for the program period 2021-2027 and actively participate in the above mentioned process.

The following organizations have been identified within the project as stakeholders relevant and able to influence the operational program WHO AND WHY (role):



The stakeholder group in the first phase of the project took an active part in the policy study process in the different regions, through Online peer-reviews, Benchmarking studies and partner meetings.

The main role of stakeholders is to participate in the process of drafting an Action Plan to improve the operational program and after that its implementation.

By realisation and implementation of the DIALOG project, the aim is to improve the management and monitoring process for implementation of the policy instrument. Changes in that policy would cause the improvement of communication and coordination between key actors in system of social dialogue and innovation.

1. Strategic documents

To conduct a comprehensive analysis and present extensive, realistic and adequate actions, the work on this Action Plan includes detailed research that includes as a basis the following strategic documents:



III. Details of the action envisaged.

<p>Key Action:</p>	<p>Design and creation of digital platform for supporting services for start-ups and SMEs (including family business, social business, creative industries)</p>
<p>Context of the proposal</p>	<p>This action was identified to be applicable and transferable as a direct result from a good practice of the LP, namely DCoop Platform, which was represented during online peer-review by Trentino's Federation of cooperation and it is aimed to test the implementation of the concept and architecture of an eco-system model in the field of territorial welfare.</p> <p>Studying in detail this good practice and the regional and national dynamics in terms of how to improve support of start-ups and SMEs, we have identified that the good practice can be transferred through creating of Digital Platform for Supporting services for start-ups and SMEs (including family business, social business, creative industries).</p> <p>Further exploring the options how to best fit this good practice in the national specifics we have identified that the best host organization for such platform and its services is Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vratsa. CCI- Vratsa is not a policy responsible organization, but the organisation has 30 years' experience in working and supporting business.</p> <p>The benefits are improving the Policy Instrument towards more support to underdeveloped regions especially fostering start-ups and facilitating their survival (incl. in situation of COVID-19 conditions).</p>
<p>Why is this Key action needed?</p>	<p>Involving the stakeholders to participate in the building of favorable ecosystem and services to support start-ups and SMEs is crucial. Currently the ecosystem of services for starting entrepreneurs and SMEs is not well developed especially in Northwestern region, but also throughout the rest of the regions. There are identified needs of different type of support in order to boost the entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Good examples exist but need to be formalized and put in a Policy Instrument with specific objectives, target, and resources to make a better impact.</p> <p>Promotion of the digitalization of SMEs, including Digital Services Platform in the Policy Instrument shall boosts the exchange of experience and knowledge and allows access to services to SMEs and start-ups, entrepreneurship culture and entrepreneurs in the municipalities of Northwest part of Bulgaria, as well.</p>

Key action proposal

Building on this good practice the Action we propose and that will improve the implementation and governance of targeted Policy instrument Programme Innovation and Competitiveness in the next programme period 2021 -2027 through Digital platform for supporting services for start-ups and SMEs.

How do we propose to implement the incorporation of this action and the link to the Policy instrument?

The Digital Platform for Supporting Services for Start-ups and SMEs will be created within one of biggest BSOs – Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vratsa. The funding for the Digital Platform shall come from Programme Innovation and Competitiveness 2021 – 2027, via a dedicated measure “Creating Digital Platforms for Supporting Services” with a call for projects.

The other option for creating Digital platform is connecting with Specific objective 1.5. Support for SMEs under the Economic Transformation Program, of The Plan for Integrated development of the Municipality of Vratsa for the period 2021 – 2027, namely European digital innovation center / hub Vratsa.

We have started communication with Municipality of Vratsa.

By implementing this action, we plan to create Digital platform for supporting services for start-ups and SMEs, also in other planning region and thus to multiply the projects results beyond North-West Planning region. The main objective of the Digital Platform, as per the good practice, is to support existing local initiatives and to create a single point for services for start-ups and business.

The platform shall serve as a digital tool, which includes online training and guidance, communication with experts, and concrete actions towards developing a business plan.

The platform will announce the information for foreseen calls of Programme Innovation and Competitiveness 2021 -2027.

This Action is new to the Bulgarian environment in the way it is situated and implemented. The benefits are clear - improving the Policy Instrument towards more support to underdeveloped regions and facilitating their survival (incl. situations like COVID-19).

Activities to be implemented:

1. Design and layout of the Digital platform for supporting services for start-ups and SMEs.
2. Public discussion with local business and entrepreneurs concerning information and content of platform.
3. Direct marketing actions for Digital platform promotion.

	<p>4. Incorporation of a specific section in the platform for social companies and creative industries.</p> <p>5. Implementation of Public meetings between Managing authorities, regional authorities and business (2 meetings).</p> <p>6. Media campaign.</p> <p>Expected results are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More available services for start-ups and SMEs; - More quality of entrepreneur ideas; - Improving the entrepreneurial culture in the regions; - Provision of quality advisory services - Developed Digital platform with access to wide scope of services and assess the quality of the services - Improved process of monitoring of the implementation of future calls 												
Stakeholders involved	Ministry of Economy, Municipalities from Northwestern part of Bulgaria, SMEs support organizations, business												
Timeframe	2022 – 2023												
Costs	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>1. Design and layout of the Digital platform for supporting services for start-ups and SMEs.</td> <td>4 000.00 Euro</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Public discussions with local business and entrepreneurs concerning kind of the information and content of platform.</td> <td>3 000.00 Euro</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Direct marketing actions for Digital platform promotion.</td> <td>4 500.00 Euro</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Incorporation of a specific section in the platform for social companies and creative industries.</td> <td>500.00 Euro</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Implementation of Public meetings between Managing authorities, regional authorities and business (2 meetings).</td> <td>3 000.00 Euro</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6. Media campaign.</td> <td>2 000.00 Euro</td> </tr> </table>	1. Design and layout of the Digital platform for supporting services for start-ups and SMEs.	4 000.00 Euro	2. Public discussions with local business and entrepreneurs concerning kind of the information and content of platform.	3 000.00 Euro	3. Direct marketing actions for Digital platform promotion.	4 500.00 Euro	4. Incorporation of a specific section in the platform for social companies and creative industries.	500.00 Euro	5. Implementation of Public meetings between Managing authorities, regional authorities and business (2 meetings).	3 000.00 Euro	6. Media campaign.	2 000.00 Euro
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Funding	Programme “Innovations and Competitiveness” 2021-2027 and other financing resources.
Expected Impact	Improving towards more support to underdeveloped regions especially fostering SMEs and start-ups and facilitating their survival.
Next steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Initiate meetings with responsible institutions and stakeholders on the target funding framework. 2) Defining a specific framework, conditions for application and conditions of implementation of the targeted financing measure. 3) Preparation of the frame of the Digital platform and the list of services provided.
KPI's	Number of SMEs participated; Number of services provided.