



## **Action Plan of the Interreg Europe Project BRSE**

Border Regions in Europe for Social Entrepreneurship

Euregio Rhine-Waal





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## Preface

From 1 August 2020 until the end of July 2022, the Euregio Rhine-Waal, HAMAG-BICRO, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia, the Slovak Business Agency, Rzeszow Regional Development Agency and the University of Latvia have worked together in the first phase of the BRESE project. BRESE, which stands for “Border Regions in Europe for Social Entrepreneurship”, aims to reduce barriers, improve regional policy instruments and raise awareness for social enterprises in European regions by comparing and sharing approaches and good practices.

Especially at times in which various challenges threaten our societies, our European values and way of life, it is important to set examples for solidarity and unity among the EU member states, proving that we can achieve more if we work together. Working together, however, must not only stay a nice idea on paper, but also has to be put into practice.

This Action Plan proudly presents the results of the interregional learning process between the BRESE project partners from different European regions. It contains concrete measures on how to promote social economy and foster social economy actors in the Dutch-German border region within the framework of the *Interreg A Deutschland-Niederland programme*. The second phase will be coined by putting the proposed actions into practice.

The Euregio Rhine-Waal would like to thank all project partners and regional stakeholders who shared their experiences and best practices with us. It was an inspiring interregional learning process which we hope to continue with the partnership in the future!



## 1. Executive Summary

This action plan is designed for the Dutch-German border region and focuses on the policy instrument INTERREG VI Germany-Netherlands 2021-2027. This policy instrument offers a lot of potential to promote social enterprises in the region, to improve their access to funding and to increase their network with other social enterprises and policy makers on two sides of the border. To achieve this, two actions have been designed:

The first action foresees the organisation of at least one matchmaking event for social enterprises with in phase 2 of the BRESE project. During the matchmaking events, selected social enterprises from the border region pitch their business activity and ideas to a wider audience consisting of actors from the Impact Entrepreneurship ecosystem as well as representatives of municipalities and provinces from the German-Dutch border region. In this way, social enterprises can also expand their network beyond the borders, establish new contacts and develop future collaborations.

The second action intends to give social economy a more prominent role within the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme by explicit mentioning social economy actors as a target group for project funding. This will improve recognition of social economy actors as eligible project partners within the policy instrument which help to achieve the objectives of the programme and the region. In turn, social economy actors will recognize the funding opportunities within the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme which will lead to better access to funding for social enterprises and to increased impact in the region.

## 2. General Information

Project	<i>BRESE</i>
Partner Organisation	<i>Euregio Rhine-Waal</i>
Other partner organisations (involved if relevant)	<i>N/A</i>
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### 3. 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 addressed:

- a) *Interreg V A Germany-Netherlands: Priority axis 1: “Increase of cross-border innovation capacity of the programme area” – investment priority 1b, thematic objective “Increase of product and process innovations in sectors which are relevant for the border region”*

Since 1991 the Dutch-German border region benefits from the European Union’s structural funds within the framework of the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme. This policy instrument aims to promote innovation and development in the region (*innovation*) and to deconstruct the barrier effect of the border (*cohesion*). Within the last 28 years since the programme’s introduction, a great number of cross-border projects and other initiatives have been funded and implemented within the programme area reaching from the coast of the North Sea to the Lower Rhine area, around 460 km along the Dutch-German border. The total budget of the programme has amounted to ca. 440 million Euro for the period of 2014 – 2020, out of which 222 million Euro have been provided by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

In order to better cater to the programme’s objectives, two main priority axes have been established which in turn comprise several key sectors crucial for the border region: “Increase of cross-border innovation capacity of the programme area” and “Sociocultural and territorial cohesion of the programme area”.<sup>1</sup> For this respective Interreg Europe project, priority axis 1 is most relevant.

**Priority axis 1: *Increase of cross-border innovation capacity of the programme area***

Promoting the competitiveness in the region by means of a infrastructure of high-tech enterprises and research institutions improves the market potential and presents the first priority of the programme. In order to achieve this objective, creating cross-border networks and clusters, as well as promoting cross-border knowledge transfer and product innovations is essential. In doing so, the programme mainly funds projects tackling product and process innovations in SMEs.

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<sup>1</sup> The third priority is allotted to the technical assistance to the project, such as managing authority, certifying authority, first level control, etc.

To achieve these objectives in the field of innovations, five key sectors were identified:

- Agribusiness/Food
- Health & Life Sciences
- High-Tech Systems & Materials (HTSM)
- Logistics
- Energy/low-carbon economy

For each key sector, an expert group consisting of representatives from the economic, scientific and public sector elaborated a so-called “strategic initiative”. These strategic initiatives build the framework for all project carried out within a particular key sector and ensure the targeted use of funding for projects within the Interreg programme.

b) *INTERREG VI A Germany-Netherlands 2021-2027*

Currently, the policy instrument is in a phase of transition. The programme period of the INTERREG V A Germany-Netherlands programme that was determined for 2014 - 2020 has come to an end. All budget has been allocated to projects. By 31 December 2022, all projects that received funding under the INTERREG V programme will have been finalized. Since there is no budget for new projects available under the INTERREG VA policy instrument, no policy changes can be expected. Therefore, the policy instrument that was initially brought into the project is no longer suitable for policy change. The policy instrument for the following programme period 2021 – 2027, the INTERREG VI A Germany-Netherlands programme, has been under preparation concretely for the last year. After its final approval by the European Commission in early 2022, the new policy instrument is officially launched in April 2022. The first projects under this policy instrument will prospectively be approved and funded by end 2022.

For the policy instrument INTERREG VI A Germany-Netherlands 2021-2027 the following thematic priorities have been selected:

- Priority 1: A more innovative programme area.
- Priority 2: A greener programme area.
- Priority 3: Working together on a connected border area.
- Priority 4: A Europe closer to its citizens in the border area.

Within these priorities, specific objectives and lines of action have been further defined in order to cater concretely the needs of the region. The objectives and lines of action of the INTERREG VI A Germany-Netherlands programme have been defined as follows:

### **Priority 1: A more innovative programme area.**

Specific objective: Development and extension of research and innovation capacities and the introduction of advanced technologies.

Line of action 1: Development of cross-border innovation projects and networks of SMEs and knowledge institutions and larger companies.

Line of action 2: Development of cross-border innovation projects and networks of SMEs and knowledge institutions and larger companies with a focus on the low-carbon economy.

Specific objective: Increasing the sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and creating jobs in SMEs, including through productive investments.

Line of action 1: Development and implementation of innovative technologies and digitization in the operating processes of SMEs (focus in "internal processes").

Line of action 2: Internationalization (D-NL) of SMEs (focus on "market").

Line of action 3: Development of competences for sustainable entrepreneurship in SMEs.

### **Priority 2: A greener programme area.**

Specific objective: Promote climate change adaptation, disaster prevention and resilience using ecosystem-based approaches.

Line of action 1: Development and implementation of pilot projects and solutions in the field of climate change adaptation.

Line of action 2: Development and implementation of cross-border strategies in the field of adaptation to climate change.

Specific objective: Promoting the transition to a resource-efficient circular economy.

Line of action 1: Development of cross-border innovation and demonstration projects between SMEs and knowledge institutions, and larger companies with a focus on circular economy.

Line of action 2: Development of environmentally friendly production processes and resource efficiency in SMEs.

### **Priority 3: Working together on a connected border area.**

Specific objective: Improving the effectiveness and inclusive nature of labor markets and access to quality jobs by developing social infrastructure and promoting the social economy.

Line of action 1: Cross-border cooperation and networks aimed at improving access to the interregional labor market.

Specific objective: Improving equal access to inclusive and high-quality education, training, and lifelong learning services by developing accessible infrastructure, including the promotion of the resilience of long-distance and online learning.

Line of action 1: Cross-border cooperation and networks aimed at improving the educational offer and cross-border exchange of information on qualifications.

Specific objective: Ensuring equal access to health care and promote the resilience of health care systems, including primary care, and promotion of the transition from institutional care to care in the family and local community.

Line of action 1: Cross-border cooperation on accessibility, efficiency, innovative medical care, prevention and quality assurance of health systems.

### **Priority 4: A Europe closer to its citizens in the border area.**

Specific objective: Improving the efficiency of public administration bodies by promoting cooperation in the fields of law and administration as well as cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, especially with the aim of removing legal and other obstacles in border regions.

Line of action 1: Cross-border cooperation in the fields of law and administration, cross-border development of common approaches and cooperation between authorities and other (societal) stakeholders.

Specific objective: Building mutual trust, especially by promoting cooperation between citizens.

Line of action 1: Cross-border cooperation and networking between citizens, regional and local organizations and authorities.

Due to the broad field of operation of social enterprises, a participation and promotion of social enterprises in the region as beneficiaries of the policy instrument is feasible across a large number of priorities, specific objectives and lines of action of the new policy instrument. Therefore, the new policy instrument offers a lot of potential to promote social enterprises in the region, to improve their access to funding and to increase their network with other social enterprises and policy makers on two sides of the border. This is well aligned with the objectives of the BRESE project to deconstruct barriers for social enterprises, to improve business support instruments for social enterprises, and to bring social enterprises on the political and societal agenda.

Additionally, important initiatives in the field of social entrepreneurship can be funded by the so-called People-to-People projects. These projects are funded with a grant of up to 25,000 euros. Each People-to-People project must contribute to reducing the barrier effect of the border for citizens and organisations in the fields of employment, education, culture; Nature, landscape and environment; Structure and demography; or Network development at local and regional level. The application procedure for these projects is relatively low-threshold and unbureaucratic, therefore, the timeframe between the submission of a project application and its approval takes only a few weeks. All kinds of initiatives in the field of social entrepreneurship fit very well in the rationale of people-to-people projects; the People-to-People projects therefore offer a great opportunity as a funding source for some of the actions presented in this action plan.

Up to date within the framework of the INTERREG VA Germany-Netherlands programme almost no social enterprises participated in the cross-border projects. This means, on the one hand, that a lot of potential to make use of available funds remains unused. On the other hand, also a lot of potential of social enterprises to foster inclusive growth, address societal needs, and build social and territorial cohesion, which is especially relevant for border regions, goes to waste. What is therefore, crucial for the Dutch-German border region is to raise awareness of the availability of funds with social enterprises as potential target group for funding within INTERREG A cross-border projects, and to raise awareness for the concept of social entrepreneurship and its societal and sustainable potential with programme managers of the policy instrument and policy makers in the border region. This will be reflected in the action of this action plan.



## 4. Actions

### 4.1. **Organisation of cross-border Matchmaking and Network Events for social enterprises, policy makers and other social economy stakeholders in the border region.**

#### 4.1.1. Background

In several consultations and meetings with regional stakeholders, as well as in the regional analysis conducted within the framework of the BRESE project, it became evident that there is a relatively well developed ecosystem of support organisations specifically targeting social entrepreneurship by means of, for example, accelerators, such as the Impact Factory and KplusV. Those accelerators maintain broad networks of social enterprises on their respective sides of the Dutch-German border. However, awareness for the possibility of receiving funding by the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme within the framework of cross-border projects is has been missing up to date both with the accelerator programme but also with the social enterprises themselves, which are almost always SMEs and therefore, a primary target group of the policy instrument across a number of different sectors. The action was inspired by the good practice “Social enterprise summit” by BRESE project partner 3, the Ministry of Regional Development and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Latvia. On the example of the summit, the project envisaged by this action will contribute to improving cooperation between the social entrepreneur ecosystem and the public sector, as well as to awareness raising about social enterprises among different stakeholders.

#### 4.1.2. Action Description

This action foresees the organisation of at least one matchmaking event for social enterprises with in phase 2 of the BRESE project. During the matchmaking events, selected social enterprises from the border region pitch their business activity and ideas to a wider audience consisting of actors from the Impact Entrepreneurship ecosystem as well as representatives of municipalities and provinces from the German-Dutch border region. In this way, social enterprises can also expand their network beyond the borders, establish new contacts and develop future collaborations. Alongside the pitches, the funding opportunities of the policy instrument and the way in which social enterprises can concretely engage in cross-border projects will be presented. This will social enterprises become aware of their role as a target group for founding within the INTERREG VI A Germany-Netherlands programme, and the programme partners recognise the existing social economy ecosystem in the region which has the potential to contribute the priorities of the policy instrument of a more innovative, greener, more social border region. In addition, the topic of Impact Entrepreneurship and the

opportunities it offers will be presented to a wider audience, including especially representatives of the public sector, such as cities, municipalities and provinces. Thus, the public sector's awareness of the innovative potential of impact entrepreneurs will be strengthened which will bring the topic on the political agenda.

#### 4.1.3. Players involved

There are different players involved in this action:

Firstly, the accelerator programmes on both sides of the border are the key stakeholders. They have a strong expertise in the field of social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship business development. Moreover, they have a wide network of social enterprises and established contacts to a number of actors in the social economy ecosystem.

Secondly, the social enterprises themselves are crucial players. In order to reach them for the matchmaking events, the network and close contacts of the accelerator programmes will be used. This will ensure that the potential beneficiaries are reached directly.

Thirdly, the policy makers are also involved in this action. The aim of this action is to make the social economy ecosystem visible to policy makers in the region and therefore, raise awareness for the potential of social enterprises. This will put the topic higher on the regional political agendas and highlight the need to take action by regional and local governments.

#### 4.1.4. Timeframe

The project proposal was handed in in early February 2022 and was approved by the relevant bodies of the policy instrument on 18 March 2022. The starting date for this project was 1 April 2022. At least two matchmaking events will be organised within the timeframe between April 2022 and the end of phase 2 of the BRESE project, end of July 2023, with the first one envisaged for June 2022.

#### 4.1.5. Costs and Funding Source

The costs refer to the organisation of the project. This includes room rental and catering and a certain amount of staff hours for the organisation. This action can be funded by the policy instrument, more specifically within the framework of a People-to-People project, funding project costs by a maximum of 50,000.00 EUR.



#### 4.1.6. Expected impact / Potential for improvement

The organisation of cross-border matchmaking events by making use of the networks of the available accelerator programmes will increase awareness for the availability of funding for social enterprises in the region. More concretely, the matchmaking events will help social enterprises to form partnerships across the border which will ultimately lead to the creation of cross-border projects with participation of social enterprises and thus, improve access to funding for these enterprises. In turn, thanks to the participation of policy makers and other social economy stakeholders, the social economy ecosystem is made visible. Additionally, due to the participation of stakeholder representing different branches of the quadruple helix, the social economy ecosystem is further developed enabling long-term cooperation. This will ultimately help foster social enterprises in the border region.

### 4.2. Giving Social Economy a more prominent role within the programme.

#### 4.2.1. Background

In consultations with regional stakeholders and when analysing the policy instrument INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands it became evident that social enterprises, which are almost always SMEs or take the legal form of a non-profit organisation, are in fact an eligible target group for being project partners in projects funded by the policy instrument. In turn, the broad range of fields of operation in which social enterprises are active, are very often well aligned with the objectives and priorities of the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme. With the preparation process for the new INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme for the period 2021-2027 ongoing, there was a good moment to raise awareness for the topic of social economy and illustrate how social economy actors should receive a more prominent role within the programme.

#### 4.2.2. Action Description

This action intends to give social economy a more prominent role within the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme by explicit mentioning social economy actors as a target group for project funding. In doing so, the programme will recognize social economy actors as eligible project partners which help to achieve the objectives of the programme and the region. In turn, social economy actors will recognize the funding opportunities within the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme which will lead to better access to funding for social enterprises and to increased impact in the

region.

This action became evident throughout previous semesters of the BRESE project. Since the preparation process for the new INTERREG VI A Germany-Netherlands programme for the period 2021-2027 have already been ongoing, attempts to start implementing this action have started alongside this process. As one can read in the policy context described in previous chapters of this action plan, explicit mentioning of social economy as part of the specific objective under priority 3 “Working together on a connected border area” has been included in the new programme text. Therefore, the action has already been implemented to a certain extend.

#### 4.2.3. Players involved

Firstly, the programme partners of the Interreg DE-NL programme forming the preparation committee and ultimately, all programme partners of the policy instrument INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands have the capacity to draft the new programme text and incorporate changes on programme level. These partners include: the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Innovation, Digitalisation and Energy of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Ministry of Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development of Lower Saxony, the Province of Groningen, the Province of Friesland, the Province of Drenthe, the Province of Flevoland, the Province of Overijssel, the Province of Gelderland, the Province of North Brabant, the Province of Limburg, the Ems-Dollart-Region, the EUREGIO, the Euregio Rhine-Waal, and the Euregio Rhine-Maas-North.

#### 4.2.4. Timeframe

Consultations with the preparation committee with regards to the role of social economy in the new programme have started in 2020. The first meeting with the preparation committee, in which social enterprises and their potential role within the programme has been presented to the committee took place on 30 November 2020. The new programme will be launched in April 2022. Possible changes with regards to social economy actors will come into force with the new programme and then remain a part of the implementation for the entire programme period 2021-2027.

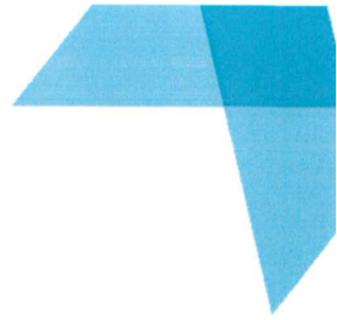
#### 4.2.5. Costs and Funding Source

Since this action only requires an incorporation into the programme regulations, no additional costs have to be expected, and therefore, no funding source is needed.



#### 4.2.6. Expected impact / Potential for improvement

With social economy concretely mentioned in the programme, social economy actors, such as social enterprises, receive a more prominent role within the programme. This will identify them clearly as a target group of the policy instrument eligible for funding within project. Ultimately, this will lead to more projects with participation for social economy actors and to improved access for funding. From the perspective of the programme, stronger participation of social economy actors will help achieve the programme's objectives and raise awareness for the potential of social enterprises in the region.



Date: 29.03.22

Signature:



Stamp of the organisation:

