

Helsinki-Uusimaa Action Plan

1. Background

Helsinki-Uusimaa Region was among the first regions awarded the European Entrepreneurial Region label in 2012 for its qualification in promoting youth entrepreneurship. Helsinki-Uusimaa was awarded a second time, in 2021-2022, for qualification in entrepreneurship for a sustainable recovery. Helsinki-Uusimaa recognised that entrepreneurship is critical to the success of innovation and growth in the region, and hence, boosting an entrepreneurial mindset and skills has been a long-standing priority in regional development. Entrepreneurship connects phases of innovation process from Research and Development to Business Development, growth, scale, and renewal.

For a regional authority, the development of a vibrant innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem is a prerequisite to the success and coherence of innovation and regional policies. Facing the turbulence and uncertainty brought by the Covid-19, and later Russia's war against Ukraine, the additional funding of Interreg Europe to the iEER project provided the Helsinki-Uusimaa region resources to review its own response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Within the project it was possible to learn and share good practices, such as the [Social value Act](#) from Northern Ireland, [Havel Valley](#) from Brandenburg, and [MF Nextequity](#) Crowdfunding from Marche for inspiration. Helsinki-Uusimaa contributed the cases of [Maria 01](#) in impact measurement and [Circular living lab](#) of Laurea University of Applied Sciences to the iEER network.

2. Key findings from the gap analysis

In the spring of 2022, Laurea University of Applied Sciences conducted a workshop involving projects which aim to promote digitalisation among SMEs, entrepreneurs, and start-ups. Most projects were funded by the European Structural Funds under the priority of SME com. All in all 19 projects were present. Laurea also conducted interviews with key stakeholders of the Helsinki-Uusimaa start-up ecosystem (e.g. Maria 01 start-up Center, City of Helsinki Campus Incubator Project, Aalto University Start Up Centre, Health Incubator Helsinki) to understand the impact of Covid-19 and possible areas for future improvement.

Despite the pandemic, there has been a [record-breaking](#) amount of venture capital to Finnish start-ups. One reason is that most start-ups located in the capital region are highly digitalised, meaning they could thrive even in the digital sector, which thrived even in the most restrictive periods of the pandemic. Hence these start-ups continuously attracted VC funding for scale-up. Still, they faced challenges as well; for example, companies reported difficulties in finding skilled workforce such as programmers. Due to the closure of national borders, international talent was out of reach for quite some time.

Green and digital transition in Helsinki-Uusimaa is facilitated by sector-specific incubators and accelerators who provide start-ups the needed network and tailored service, for instance incubators for Health, urban Tech, Edtech and digital start-ups. The UN Sustainable Development Goals have been taken into consideration at various levels and the term mostly referred as "impact entrepreneurs or entrepreneurship". Start-up support organisations also vocalise SDGs in their operation and promote diversity and inclusion as integral practice. They also collected and reported the progress and impacts made, using indicators provided by the SDGs. For example [Maria01 publishes an annual impact report](#). There is also rising awareness that more efforts to support commercialisation and growth of science-based start-ups is needed.

To maintain Helsinki-Uusimaa's position as global innovation leader, it needs talents and a resilient innovation and business environment, which in turn requires investment. Helsinki-Uusimaa has set to increase the investment in R&D&I to 5% of regional GDP. In that sense, the future priorities will focus on investing in research, innovation, and commercialisation. The development of an attractive start-up ecosystem is key to foster this trend. Hence, Helsinki-Uusimaa should seek to build an attractive start-up ecosystem for talents and further development of a robust start-up ecosystem where science-based start-ups can find their way to scale up.

3. List of actions

3.1. To foster green and digital transition with European Regional Development Fund 2021-2027

The disruption brought by Covid-19 and Russia's war against Ukraine is a wakeup call for many who had taken economic growth for granted. Digitalisation and sustainable business models and solutions are a prerequisite for companies to succeed in the future. That requires skills, investment, and political guideline. To continue the support to green and digital transition, Helsinki-Uusimaa has dedicated the year 2022 to promote green and digital entrepreneurship as part of the European Entrepreneurial Region year. In the first regional call of European Regional Development Fund programme 2021-2027, Helsinki-Uusimaa has set a special selection criterion to fund projects that support and implement actions for green and digital transition.

Timeframe: Autumn 2021 to Autumn 2022, the launch of 1st ERDF call and selection of projects

Indicator: Funded projects supporting green and digital entrepreneurship

3.2. To develop an impact-driven entrepreneurial culture and innovation ecosystem in Helsinki-Uusimaa

The start-up ecosystem in Helsinki-Uusimaa is progressive in the way that UN Sustainable Development Goals are taken into consideration at various levels. There is a consensus among companies and entrepreneurs to achieve a positive impact to society and mankind, and that digitalisation and sustainable business models are opportunities for sustainable growth. The term impact entrepreneur or entrepreneurship is a buzz word that is linked with deep-tech or science-based start-ups, also highlighted in the Commission's New European Innovation Agenda. For a sustainable and socially inclusive recovery from the Covid pandemic, impact-driven entrepreneurship is an indispensable concept for the innovation strategy of Helsinki-Uusimaa and demands efforts of various actors in developing an innovation ecosystem where impact-driven entrepreneurs can thrive.

3.2.1. Continuous dialogues and coordination with R&D&I actors to achieve 5% investment of Regional GDP in R&D

Timeframe: Spring 2022-2025, as part of implementation of Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional programme and Helsinki-Uusimaa Innovation Strategy

Indicators: Percentage of investment in R&D&I at regional level

3.2.2. New EU projects supporting the development of an impact-driven entrepreneurship ecosystem



- Timeframe: Autumn 2022-spring 2023 for proposal preparation, winter 2023 to 2025 for implementation,
- Indicators: Project proposal application for EU fundings of Interreg Europe, I3 or Innovation ecosystems project
- Number of partners involved and number of policies addressed.