iEER Gap Analysis Report

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SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the research and consultation with stakeholders in the regions of Brandenburg, Helsinki-Uusimaa, Kerry, Marche, Northern Ireland, Valencia, and West Pomerania in the framework of the iEER Interreg Europe funded by the EU. By conducting a gap analysis and environment scan, this exercise aims to identify the necessary actions to advert the impact of Covid-19 on the entrepreneurial ecosystems in the partner regions. It offers a background to the project partners and illustrates the key learning outcomes of the project extension from October 2021 to September 2022. The report will outline the justification of the chosen research methodology, which applied a mixed methods approach to collect and analyse the data in the gap identification process as well as ensuring the validity and reliability of the applied process.

A three-phase process was implemented in the project as presented in Table 1:

Phase	Purpose
Phase 1	Conduct a desk-based exercise on a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem scan for each region for pre and post the Covid-19 pandemic.
Phase 2	Participation in 2 action-based interregional learning events to explore and discuss the experience and learnings from each region as relevant to the themes of this project – social and female entrepreneurship and digital and green entrepreneurship-based initiatives.
Phase 3	Participation in an action-based learning event with policy makers on social impact for post Covid-19 entrepreneurial support activities. This was followed by a day dedicated to further exploration of such impact through a partner led experiential based learning workshop.

Table 1: The Three Phased Mixed Methodology

The key findings of each phase informed the next phase with a summary of each phase being presented at the beginning of the next one. The findings of each phase will be presented and discussed in this report. The uncertainty caused by the pandemic was noted and its associated fear across all sectors and disciplines, both in the public and private sectors.

In summary, first it was found that each partner region coped well during the Covid-19 pandemic with many co-designed support plans between policy, practice, and academia being developed and implemented at a local, regional, and national level.

Second, the agility and flexibility of these co-designed plans was noted, as was the success that could be achieved with attention being given to social innovation and female leadership.

Third, the recovery process was indeed a complex one but very much enabled with digital solutions for enterprise support and for ongoing entrepreneurship education programmes. The support for entrepreneurship-based education programmes continued online, was well received, and needs to be built upon as we go forward with more access to mentors' and leaders' expertise on a 1-1 basis.

Fourth, diversity and connection with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) was identified as a need for consideration in all future planning in the regions. This was

deemed crucial to the development of sustainable cities, communities, and regions operating under a culture of inclusion. Whilst inclusion was deemed to represent all, specific reference was given to the need to support the inclusion of the aging population in the regions.

Fifth, although remote working was being successfully implemented, the gap analysis identified the need to address mental wellness regarding talent acquisition and retention arising from the reported experiences of social isolation and exclusion. However, remote working was also seen to support and enable social innovation within the communities, which may address the issues of mental wellness as well as creating new initiatives and services for regional sustainability. Furthermore, its relevance in access to talent was noted.

Sixth, it also created the opportunity for enterprises to scale and to build upon the 'hub network' for the start-up community creating connections and networks and support with the larger and scaling enterprises in the region.

Seventh, the need to optimise the opportunities presented through digital innovation to support key growth sectors, repositioning the economy, and enhancing skills and employability was identified. This also found the need for each region to ensure an excellent broadband infrastructure. Finally, access to finance for the enterprises remains a challenge.   Figure 2 presents an overview of the key requirements for building sustainable and scaling regions post the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Key requirements for building sustainable and scaling regions post the Covid-19 pandemic

In view of achieving a sustainable and inclusive recovery from Covid-19, the report concludes with recommendations for future discussions with policy, practice, and academia. The recommendations include a pledge to education institutions, business support organisations, ecosystem builders, and policy makers to take action supporting impact of social and female entrepreneurship initiatives, creating green entrepreneurial opportunities and developing competence in sustainability for the partner regions and wider communities. Specific reference is given to the need to focus on scaling existing enterprises as well as enabling new start-ups.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

iEER is an Interreg Europe funded flagship project that has been revived for 2022, bringing together 7 EER regions. These include regions in Finland, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom and Spain. It was originally initiated in 2016 by a group of regions awarded with the European Entrepreneurial Region label (EER). iEER defined smart paths and solutions to boost regional entrepreneurial ecosystems supporting young entrepreneurs in 2016-2020.

However, in search of a sustainable and socially inclusive recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, iEER was granted additional funding from Interreg Europe for 2021-2022. This additional funding supported a sustainable and socially inclusive recovery project from the Covid-19 pandemic with a number of objectives outlined below.

Objectives of the Extension

The Covid-19 crisis has resulted in a 6.3% decline of EU economy and triggered unprecedented policy responses across European regions. In search of a sustainable and socially inclusive recovery, the extended activities of iEER seek to answer:

» How do we as a region reboot the entrepreneurship mindset of entrepreneurs and stakeholders recovering from Covid-19?
» How digitisation and remote working, by and large, can support the growth of innovative business and sustainability?
» How do we recover and boost growth by encouraging social entrepreneurship and fulfilling ESG principles and the UN SDGs?

Key Learning Milestones

A number of key learning milestones were identified as listed below:

» Identifying gaps: Research and consultation with stakeholders to identify necessary actions to advert the impact of Covid-19 on the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the partner regions. This was carried out remotely by all project partners.
» Searching for solutions: 2 interregional learning events (ILEs) on 'social entrepreneurship' and 'digital and sustainable recovery for entrepreneurship'. These were held in the Marche and Brandenburg regions respectively.
» Commencing actions: 1 interregional learning event on 'policy actions', 7 Regional/local peer-support learning events addressing recovery for entrepreneurs. The interregional event on policy actions was held in the Northern Ireland region.

Project Partners

The project partners in alphabetical order include:

» Brandenburg University of Applied Sciences, Brandenburg, Germany
» Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council (lead partner) and Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland
» Kerry represented by the Munster Technological University, Kerry, Ireland.
» Marche Regional Authority, Italy
» Northern Ireland Local Government Association, United Kingdom
» Regional Government of Valencia, Spain
» Marshal office of West Pomeranian Region, Poland

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A phenomenological based research design was applied to this project. Saunders et al. (2009) likened the research process to the multiple layers of an onion. Each layer represents a key decision that needs to be made, from determining the philosophical paradigm in the outer layer, to the data collection and analysis at its centre, as depicted in Figure 2. The decision taken at each stage will influence the next. This research process provides transparency, as welcomed by Cope (2005) in the field of entrepreneurship research. It also indicates the thought and consideration given to the appropriateness of the chosen paradigm to the aim and objectives of this research inquiry, (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The research inquiry of this study is concerned with the investigation of the iEER partner regions and how they responded to Covid-19; the gaps identified, the learnings from the social, female, digital and green sectors, and implications for future policy.
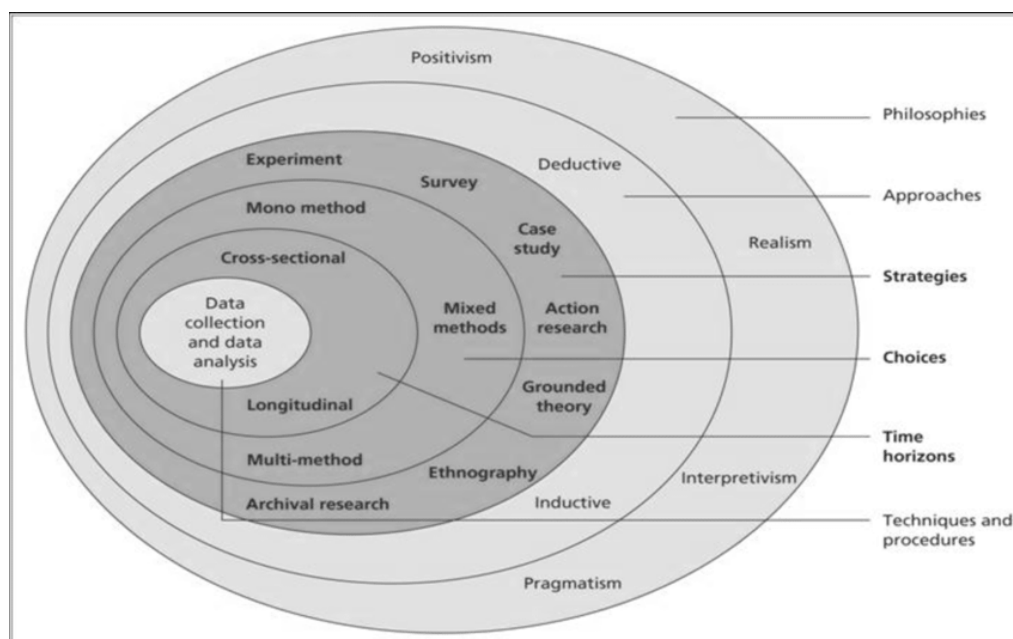
Figure 2: The Research Process. Source: Saunders et al. (2009 p.108)

Philosophical ideas may be hidden in the research and need to be unearthed and made known as they in turn influence the actual practice or implementation of the research, (Slife and Williams, 1995). Hannon (2007 p.307) proposed that "understanding philosophy does provide a valuable base to help us to think more clearly". The philosophical paradigm informs the researcher's thinking and provides an insight into the philosophical origins of the decisions that need to be taken on how best to approach the research design of a particular study, (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Essentially the philosophical paradigm is the 'conceptual lens' that informs the research methodology and methods that will be used in the collection and analysis of the data for the study, (Creswell, 2009, Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Research paradigms, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), help us to understand where the researcher is coming from, and the meaning presented from the data collected as part of the study. These paradigms differ from being very scientific in its orientation, (Positivist), to being totally open to studying the phenomenon at hand and adopt a number of methods of inquiry, (Pragmatic). Equally they are different in wanting to be able to investigate the multiple realities such as the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm

to being able the generalise the findings across multiple settings, which describes the positivist paradigm.

This project seeks to learn how a sample of EER regions have responded to Covid-19 and how they can learn from each other in continuing to support entrepreneurship development in their regions going forward. Therefore, it adopted the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. There are seven main reasons for this:

1. Interpretivism allows for multiple realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) and this project accesses the reality of the iEER regions post Covid-19 as described by a number of policy makers and SMEs,
2. Reality is regarded as being socially rooted and is changing and flexible,
3. It seeks to give meaning to what and who influenced the development of the regions during and post Covid-19,
4. It recognises the complexity and difference attributed to these meanings between the partner regions, (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009)
5. Interpretation allows for a synthesis of these individual descriptions to be developed, (Crotty, 1998).

Hindle (2004 p. 577) stated that qualitative approaches are "demonstrably underrepresented in entrepreneurship research". Hancock et al., (2007 p.4) said that "qualitative research attempts to broaden and/or deepen our understanding of how things came to be the way they are in our social world". Qualitative research methods are recommended for research that seeks to explore human experiences, behaviours or looks at a "real-life" context. According to the literature, qualitative research does not rely on statistical data or measurement. It is suitable for research that seeks to describe or to understand values, ideas, meanings, experiences, (Wisker, 2001). It helps the researcher to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them", Denzin and Lincoln (2005 p.3).

The aim of this project is to investigate the "real-life" entrepreneurship experiences of the partner EER regions both during and post Covid-19. Central to this is what it means to survive such a pandemic as an enterprise and/or enterprise supporter or enabler in the region and lessons learned from the experience. A mixed method as opposed to a mono-method (single) was preferred in order to allow for accessing rich descriptions through close analysis within one methodology. Despite the qualitative focus of this project, a mixed method was deemed more appropriate given the need to conduct a gap analysis as a desk-based exercise (see template in Appendix 1), combined with semi structure-based interviews with a purposeful sample of SMEs (see template in Appendix 2) and the action learning taking place at the interregional learning events (ILE) during this project, (see ILE format in Appendix 3).

Mixed Methodology

A mixed methodology was applied to this project in order to achieve both its objectives and learning outcomes as listed above. The choice of a mixed methodology was deemed most appropriate first, to facilitate the collection of the required data; secondly to optimise the knowledge and learning sharing between all partners and ultimately the wider EER community and finally to triangulate the data collected adding to more robust, reliable, trustworthy and credible findings.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008 p.22) describe mixed methods research as the "products of the pragmatist paradigm that combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process". A mixed methods approach facilitates the merger of both qualitative and quantitative methods and when applied concurrently, the total strength of the research is greater than the use of only one method (Creswell 2009).

There is ongoing debate of the terms reliability, validity and generalisability as applied in quantitative research can be equally applied to qualitative based research as employed in this study. Noble and Smith (2015), concluded that this is possible. However, Morse et al., (2002) proposed that if this is to be the case, then it is critical that qualitative based research builds in strategies that ensure rigour throughout the research process and not just at the end.

Validity refers "to the integrity and application of the methods undertaken and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data, whilst reliability describes consistency within the employed analytical procedures", (Long and Johnson, 2000, p 35). It was possible to evaluate this qualitative based study, in alignment with criteria used in quantitative based research, and yet consistent with the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. These criteria include credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability, (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Table 2 illustrates the strategies that were applied throughout the research process in this study to ensure rigour in investigating the entrepreneurial mind-sets of the twenty participating entrepreneurship educators.

In doing so, it is important to note that this project did not seek to be generalisable to the development of a template for enterprise survival and growth post pandemic for all EER regions, but to develop an investigation of this phenomenon and suggestions for future policies.

Criteria	Strategy
1. Credibility	1. The project partners deliberately adopted a proven research process and design, including a method of research fully appropriate to a qualitative base research methodology. 2. A co-designed template and semi-structured interview guide was circulated and completed by all project partners. 3. An updated summary was presented at each interregional learning event for wider project partner approval and sign-off.
2. Confirmability	1. Steps were taken throughout the process to confirm the authenticity of this project. 2. The limitations of access to reports and/or SMEs were made known and noted. 3. Detailed notes were taken from each interregional learning event made and retained at each stage of the process.
3. Transferability	1. A detailed description of both the process and the findings, that would allow future EER Regions to carry out a similar study in their region is available in the appendices for future and further comparison and learning purposes. 2. This project has aimed to document the detail in support of transferring the work in related follow-up research. However, its exact transferrable opportunities will not be known until or if someone else decides to carry out a similar study in the future.
4. Dependability	1. This project aimed to be consistent in its approach, implementation, and reporting from its beginning to its end. Such consistency was adopted in linking the context of this study; to its topic; to the review of extant reports; to the underpinning research paradigm and methodology; to the chosen research design; to the data analysis and finally, to the reporting and discussion of the findings and conclusions. 2. The centrality and continuity of one lead project partner throughout the process allowed for and ensured the consistency that underpins the dependability of this project.

Table 2: Strategies applied to enhance the reliability and validity of this project

Phases of Data Collection

This mixed methodology was carried out over 3 phases as follows:

Phase 1: This required all project partners to conduct a desk-based exercise on a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem scan. The intention was to provide a broad mapping of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of each region for pre and post Covid. This was then expected to allow all project partners to identify gaps that may now exist in our regions.

Following the regional scan, this phase also included a number of semi structured interviews with a purposeful sample of SMEs including those in the start-up phase. The decision to apply a purposive sample was linked to the focus of this partner project on digital, green, social and female entrepreneurship. Conscious of the time demands of all companies as they coped with post Covid-19, required a short number of questions with a limited number of companies.

The purposive sample allowed for comparison of the findings of the project partner regions. Additionally, it will allow input for a future project conducting a more extensive quantitative based study to assert further feedback from this community in future policy supports and initiatives.

Phase 2: This consisted of first, the action-based learning interregional learning events and secondly, the project partner experiential learning based workshops. Each interregional learning event was deliberately designed to allow for engagement with representative stakeholders from policy, academic and practice. Opportunity was provided for breakout sessions after each topic at the event to allow all present to network, observe and share back their collective findings verbally and also on written notes and whiteboards. This provided real time learning, the opportunity to learn from each of the interregional learning events and allowed for optimum data collection.

Phase 3: This phase incorporated action-based learning, providing the opportunity to engage more specifically with policy makers on social impact for post Covid-19 entrepreneurship support activities. It was followed by a day dedicated to the partner led experiential based workshop. This created an interregional co-designed discussion on the outcomes of the gap analysis of the regions and planning for themes for future policy maker interest.

Data Analysis

All of the data collected from the three different phases was manually analysed. This was possible due to the qualitative focus of this project and purposeful sample of participants and speakers. These samples collectively represented the academic, policy, and practice community of stakeholders. Thematic Analysis was applied to the data and reported on accordingly. Thematic Analysis focuses on 'what' is said with less emphasis on 'how' it is said. It "systematically analyses themes and patterns within the text" (Mohamed & Ragab 2016, p.7). Text in this instance refers to the analysis of the presentations and notes taken from each interregional learning event.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this project are discussed under each of the three phases with a summary of the opportunities and challenges being presented for each phase below:

1. Phase One: Desk Research: Mapping of Partner Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Response to Covid-19 and Start-Up Structure based interviews.
2. Phase Two: Action Based Learning:
   - Interregional Learning Event: Number 1: Female and Social Entrepreneurship Response
   - Interregional Learning Event: Number 2: Digital and Green Response
3. Phase Three: Policy and Social Impact Response

PHASE 1: DESK RESEARCH REVIEW AND STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH A PURPOSEFUL SAMPLE OF SMES

Desk Research: Mapping of Partner Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Response to Covid-19

This discussion will be presented as a collective response from all project partners under the topics presented in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem response to Covid-19 template as illustrated in the Figure 3 below:

Region List Alphabetically
Brandenburg, Germany
Helsinki-Uusimaa, Finland
Kerry, Ireland
Marche, Italy.
Northern Ireland, United Kingdom
Valencia, Spain
West Pomerania, Poland

Figure 3: Regional Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Scan Topics

These topics were agreed in advance by all project partners. They were identified based on their importance in the support of a sustainable and scaling region. It was agreed that they would be used as a basis to scan the relevant region on how it responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. The topics chosen included a review of how each region responded to the pandemic and how each region continued, or not, to address the key requirements in building a sustainable entrepreneurial region during this time and the gaps identified in same. Such requirements included the issues that arose for each region during the pandemic, and the effect Covid-19 had on the areas that were deemed necessary in supporting young entrepreneurship as identified in the original iEER project. These included the relevance of Covid-19 to the programmes operating in each region that promoted entrepreneurship education; the financial support and mentorship available to the start-up communities; the inter-operations between policy, practice, and academia; the type of start-ups that required support; the role of the SDGs in future entrepreneurial trends and specialisation and the role of RIS 3 in the regions. An overview of the outcome of each of these topics in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem scan and the gaps identified will now be presented below.

Summary of Issues arising in the regions from Covid-19

Overall, general uncertainty prevailed causing much panic and anxiety, and the introduction of what was to become part of the future working life – remote working. The several periods of full lockdowns, social distancing rules and mask wearing combined with the different levels of restrictions created a lot of uncertainty and panic among businesses and the public. Constant changes to rules and restrictions meant businesses had to constantly adapt, while remote working and online communications placed a great strain on the broadband network.

Uncertainty about the future caused by the pandemic resulted in the abandonment or postponement of new business ventures, especially visible in the case of start-ups at an early stage of operation in the regions. This was compounded by the closure of national borders in the beginning of the pandemic, making it difficult to access foreign work force and also hit the hospitality sector hard. In fact, some business sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and retail suffered much worse than those involved in IT and online services, who saw increased revenue during Covid-19. Despite growth in these sectors, some companies in the regions reported serious impacts such as layoffs or significantly increased risk of bankruptcy.

Finally, the need to adapt to working and studying from home was challenging. School closures immediately entailed that people had to adapt to working from home and home-schooling children. As time moved on, the lack of socialisation due to remote working impacted the mental wellness of many.

Summary of how the regions responded

Despite the issues reported in the regions' entrepreneurial ecosystem caused by the pandemic, there were mixed views with regards to how the different regions responded to Covid-19. Some regions witnessed local and regional policy implementation, and for others, guidance was led by national policies. These policy reactions included the establishment of inter-operational emergency stakeholder response teams between policy, practice and academia. Government support packages to businesses and employees were introduced to protect businesses from closures and unemployment. Regulations were put in place to prevent bankruptcy from creditors during lockdowns. Most importantly, each region reported the importance of a good digital infrastructure going forward.

Support for Entrepreneurship Education in the regions

In general, the 'entrepreneurship for education' supports showed that there was little or no change to educational entrepreneurship programs between all the partner regions; all adapted online programmes and support instead. All regions have extensive lists of educational entrepreneurial programmes available to students at every level of education from primary level to higher education. There was no information as to the level of participation in educational entrepreneurship programmes during Covid-19 compared to participation prior to Covid-19. It was noted that all educational entrepreneurial programmes were voluntary and it was up to each provider and institute, and for each teacher or student to choose to participate. However, it was reported that every effort was made to make sure of their continuance using digital assets and resources. Classes had periods of time when they were conducted online. This, in turn, raised the issue of the quality of broadband service in the regions.

Despite every effort being made to continue these entrepreneurship educational programmes, some programmes were cancelled due to restrictions (such as foreign exchange and visiting schools from outside of regions). It was also reported that there was a limited amount of

entrepreneurial supports available at the Higher Educational Institute level. All events and especially international travel had been affected by Covid-19, which led to a surge in virtual meetings and events. While this has worked fine in most situations as a response to the pandemic, it was found that the optimum value of these educational entrepreneurial programmes is not sustainable in this format. The need to address a hybrid form of delivery was identified as a gap going forward.

Support for the Types of Start Ups, Financial, Mentorship, Digital and the Interoperability of Public Services during Covid-19.

The overview of the findings of the entrepreneurial ecosystem scan for this support is divided into the financial support for start-ups; the types of start-ups supported; the mentorship made available; and the implementation of plans agreed through interoperations of the public services. Reports from the different regions indicated that during Covid-19 there was a high level of interoperability, such as the information being shared by health services on the number of Covid cases in the regions. Without this information it would have been difficult for other public departments to react. The attention given to the level of inter-operation planning and support between the public services was noted and commended by all project partners.

Summary of financial support for Start-Ups

The immediate response was noted in all regions. However, the amount and types of support ranged from a single national guiding policy to a 128 local/regional action plan in one of the regions. The efforts made to continue the support to the start-up and SME communities were seen in the extensive lists of financial supports available. The majority of regions reported that the government provided additional financial supports to businesses and employees during Covid-19. This was deemed as being crucial in protecting businesses and employees during lockdowns as without this additional financial support many businesses would have ceased to trade. Some exceptions were reported with start-ups (some early phase start-ups could not receive support as they did not have an expected timeline for proof of income). However, it is also worth noting that some businesses, such as those in the IT sector, did not require any supports as the Covid-19 outbreak brought about an increase in revenue.

Types of Start-Ups Supported

It was extremely interesting to learn that not one of the project partners were aware of any regional self- assessment policies, strategies, or templates. Whilst a number reported on the existence of regional development plans, much less was known on how this activity was assessed and of its impact value. This was a noted gap from this entrepreneurial ecosystem scanning process.

Due to the lack of regional auditing of start-up supports in general in the regions, many of the project partners were unable to answer this question in detail. Some regions did report on the establishment of organisations that may be responsible for such insights, but no information was available on how it was gathered or shared. One reason given as to why the information was not being shared may have been due to the restriction on publication of such data. There was no information available that outlined how start-up activity was or is being monitored. It would appear that the monitoring of start-up activity is done only at national level. The monitoring of such activity at a regional level along with a regional self-assessment policy have been identified as gaps of note in this analysis due to the difficulty reported in ascertaining this information in the different regions.

However, it was found in this entrepreneurial ecosystem scan that the list of the types of start-ups that required support within the regions crossed many sectors with a focus on existing and/or potential businesses as seen below:

» Digitally focused and/or enabled
» Small business start-ups
» Social Innovation and Lifestyle start-ups
» Scalable start-ups and those available for acquisition.

Summary of Mentorship

The importance of access to mentors for start-ups is well noted in the field of entrepreneurship. During Covid-19 it was found that all mentorship supports were moved to online consultation. At the time of this entrepreneurial ecosystem scan it was difficult to measure if the online environment had the same impact compared to face-to-face consultations. Whilst all support was moved online, it was also difficult to evaluate whether the level of the mentorship remained high during this period.

Support for Digital Infrastructure

Each region has its own digital infrastructure plan in place. During Covid-19 the need for good digital infrastructure became more important than ever, with education, businesses and communications moving to online. This sudden digital requirement was reported as placing significant pressure on the current system exposing many shortcomings in the quality of broadband services in certain areas of the regions. One exception was Helsinki-Uusimaa in Finland, which did not rate it as an issue in their region.

Does the Region Align Entrepreneurial Activity to UN SDG's?

Most regions have UN SDG development plans in place, backed by government strategies. There is tremendous support for SDGs in the regions, with some reporting that it is a major factor contributing to the support and growth of the start-up and SMEs communities. The goals are reported as enabling a co-ordinated effective and efficient entrepreneurial ecosystem. They support an entrepreneurial, innovative and sustainable culture with entrepreneurship initiatives that generates employment and value. In particular, the UN SDGs promote technology-based entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, territorial cohesion, and equality in entrepreneurship. Adherence to these goals with regards to access to future funding was noted, where companies will be required to report on their environmental, societal and governance compliance.

There appears to be an increased appetite amongst businesses to adapt to and to be advised by the SDG goals, which is a very positive move forward. This trend is further supported by the increasing requirement for company ESG (Environmental, Societal and Governance) plans for future fundraising and investments. A summary of the European ranking of the project partners with regards their SDG orientation is presented below in Figure 4, which is very heartening indeed.

Does the Region Align Entrepreneurial Activity to UN SDGs

Rank out of 34 of Partners Country for SDGs from Europe Sustainable Development Report 2021

Rank	Country	Score	Performance by SDG
1	Finland	80.75	
6	Germany	75.33	
15	Poland	71.03	
16	Ireland	70.59	
17	United Kingdom	70.15	
22	Spain	68.52	
23	Italy	68.50	

Source: https://eudashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings

Figure 4: Regional Alignment with Entrepreneurial Activity to UN SDGs

Future Trends Recovery Plan

Most regions reported some form of a recovery plan, either at the national or regional level . Some are specific recovery plans for Covid 19, while others are incorporated in the regional development plans. These plans are crucial for the recovery of businesses and development of economies in each of the partner regions. It is also worth noting that the provision to measure the impact of such plans is not known in this research. This was a further gap noted in the entrepreneurial ecosystem scan conducted for this project.

Structured Interviews with a purposeful sample of Start-Ups and SMEs

Overall, the feedback from the structured interviews with the purposeful sample of start- ups and SMEs found that whilst support had been made available, much more can be done as we move out of the pandemic. Complaints were made about the lack of clarity in the changing Covid restrictions and fears about additional claims for emergency aid paid out.

However, it was found that the readiness to respond quickly to the need of the businesses during Covid-19 showed how agile governments could be, and such agility should be part of future governance. For example, it was suggested that a green and inclusive recovery plan across government departments is required, and would need a dedicated responsible coordinator.

There is a need to maximise the opportunities presented through digital innovation to support key growth sectors, which in turn can help reposition the economy and enhance skills and employability. This is leading to a positive digitalisation push to adopt and exploit digital technologies. However, broadband connectivity and the need to enhance skills across the labour workforce in rural areas will be imperative in the ability of the businesses to benefit from these opportunities. Furthermore, it was reported that there is a need to maximise research, development, and innovation activities to improve competitiveness.

It was reported that "new tasks often simply mean more work" and businesses need advice on how to improve operational effectiveness. The companies reported on the need for the government to consider for example, tax relief, support for social challenges such as childcare, platforms for exchange, equal rights for all forms of business and clearly communicated rules. Finally, access to finance remains a challenge to ease business cashflow and improve liquidity.

In summary, the entrepreneurial ecosystem scan identified the following gaps in the development of sustainable entrepreneurial regions as presented in Table 3 below:

Gaps identified in the development of sustainable entrepreneurial regions through the Entrepreneurial ecosystem Scanning Process
Support for a digitally enabled ecosystem.
Support to scale and increase employment in the regions.
Support for social innovation.
Promotion of female entrepreneurs and leaders.
A hybrid policy for entrepreneurship education programmes.
Development of the entrepreneurial mindset and leadership of educational institute providers and educators.
A policy to support a viable remote working environment, including a mental wellness strategy for talent acquisition and retention.
A green and inclusive recovery plan.
A plan to maximise R&D and innovation to improve competitiveness.
Access to finance for both start-ups and scaling businesses.
Provisions to measure the impact of the proposed recovery plans.
Support for Environmental, Societal and Governance (ESG) plans for future fundraising and investments.
Policy of Regional Self-Assessment practice.
Promotion of RIS 3 strategies in the regions.

Table 3: Gaps identified from the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Scan

PHASE 2: ACTION BASED LEARNING

Interregional Learning Event: Number 1: Female and Social Entrepreneurship Response

The findings from the first action learning event held in the Marche Region was informed by a selection of academics, policy makers and practice. Key insights were provided regarding both social and female entrepreneurship. This event also included an interactive experiential led workshop with all key stakeholders to identify and discuss the opportunities and challenges within the regions.

Social Entrepreneurship challenges and opportunities as presented from the multi stakeholder speaker representatives:

The keynote speakers representing the triple helix structure of policy, academia, and practice, first and foremost reported on the increased activity in social innovation and the need to expand on this within the regions. This would require a new mindset and new types of leadership that would develop and grow social innovative projects and businesses. It was acknowledged that socially driven organisations, whilst solving social needs and goals, were also required to make a profit and find the balance between making this profit and meeting the social need. The need to build bridges between the fully commercial type of business and social enterprises was acknowledged as well as the underpinning ethos of social initiatives that sought to build bridges between and within communities. This was indeed a challenge and the need for special support for companies that target social outcomes was proposed by all speakers. The need to comply with business regulation and deliverables for any social initiative was acknowledged whilst also being about community wellness connecting with community needs. Similar to the fully driven commercial entity, the social enterprise is also required to be creative and to be solution-focused solving many different types of problems. Finally, it was reported that whilst many social innovations target the care sector, they are also required to consider digital enablers in the development and implementation of their strategies.

Female Entrepreneurship challenges and opportunities as presented from the multi stakeholder speaker representatives:

The need to challenge the female entrepreneur stereotype was put forward. Indeed, the need to address the stereotype female-led business as being care-driven was also challenged, with many females leading business across multiple disciplines. The discussions were very clear to illustrate that there was no difference between female and male entrepreneurs on the requirements to run their business. Whilst the speakers spoke very favourably about the opportunities in the regions for female entrepreneurs, the challenges in achieving this was very open and transparent. It was reported that female entrepreneurs need a stronger personality and that conditions such as maternity-related demands can be challenging and reinforce the need for a strong and determined personality.

The speakers spoke of the wide evidence of female intrapreneurs. This referred to females behaving and acting entrepreneurially within organisations as opposed to being the founders. This led to discussions on the role of women as leaders. Regardless of leadership or entrepreneurship versus intrapreneurship, a growing number of female enterprise founders in the regions was reported. Finally, this identified the need to promote a culture in the regions that would support and enable the increasing number of female entrepreneurs across all sectors of social and commercial enterprises.

Evidence of Sustainable Goal Activity in the Social and Female led enterprises in the Project Partner Regions:

The multi-stakeholder representative speakers all referred to the growing evidence and importance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals activity in the social and female led organisations and enterprises. These included a wide number of the UN SDGs such as innovation (SDG 9); clean energy (SDG 7); good health and well-being (and specifically mental wellness) (SDG 3 and 3.4); quality of and access to education (SDG 4); sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11); gender balance (SDG 5); and better working conditions (SDG 8). Together these led to increased economic growth within the regions across social and/or female led enterprises. They offered a focus on sustainability with attention being given to the environmental, social, and governance impact of these types of initiatives in the regions. However, the need to address and support innovative business models and opportunities to engage with international networks was deemed as being crucial to the opportunities offered by the inclusion of the UN SDGs in the entrepreneurial activities in the regions.

Outcomes from the Action Learning Multi Stakeholder Breakout Sessions:

During the breakout sessions at the interregional learning camps, the multi-stakeholders explored the existing evidence of any of examples of current models of excellence in measuring the impact of social and female led initiatives in the regions, and/or of any gaps in same. These breakout sessions also explored how the regions might implement and measure these whilst incorporating the SDGs. The overall conclusion of the breakout sessions acknowledged that this will be a very difficult and very complex task, yet achievable with extensive collaboration between stakeholders. The sessions identified the existing work being carried out within the regions and how regions can work together and learn from each other. The sessions also identified the gaps that will require further work and support. Both of these outcomes are now discussed in some more detail.

Regarding the work being carried out, it was agreed that social enterprises in all regions experienced growth. However, their effectiveness and the value of their impact was unknown. The gap in impact measurement was an issue that was identified both in the entrepreneurial ecosystem scanning process and the interregional learning events.

The revenue contribution of social enterprises to the regions was noted, yet with no specific detail regarding their contributions to the economic and social sustainability of the regions. For example, whilst the impact of social and female led initiatives on the individual founders and the region was noted, their impact on the extended supply and value chains was unknown. This also held through regarding their impact on the creation of indirect numbers of employees and of their role in the development of sustainable cities through community versus individual engagement. Little was known of their impact on direct or indirect benefactors. Furthermore, their impact on the people using their services was not known.

The growth in the circular economy activities was reported by all regions. Although many examples were provided of successful initiatives in the circular economy, for example social enterprises targeting upcycling and recycling practices,

there was no micro or macro data to evidence this. It was agreed that this in turn limited the opportunities to acquire R&D investment or even to know how this money could be spent by these types of organisations. Traditionally, such enterprises depended on the availability of volunteers, but these were decreasing for various reasons in all regions. This was noted as being ironic given that volunteers were needed now more than ever.

The multi-actor breakout sessions explored the concept of using models of excellence as indicators of how these types of initiatives could be increased and supported. However, it was concluded that the focus should not be on models of excellence or best practice but rather on models of good practice. It was agreed that the model of good practice would be more effective in creating more opportunities to increase the numbers engaged in and using these social and female led initiatives. This outcome of the discussions was underpinned by the fact that the model of good practice would be easier to replicate both within and between regions easing the task of their duplication; thereby generating further growth and sustainability in the regions. It would also contribute to the growth of more inclusive models that would encourage and promote models of diversity.

Such growth would also require the engagement of private and government partnerships together with the model being supported by a number of related multiple stakeholders across the region. This would help address a situation where a region may be socially disabled, unable, or unwilling to support their development and growth. Equally it would greatly help foster a culture of social and female led initiatives in the regions. It was also agreed that this would not be enough to support sustainable growth. This would require increasing the number of young people in such initiatives and to begin awareness education from a very young age.

Finally, the breakout sessions identified the need to develop a matrix of indices that would allow the multi-actors to learn from each other both within the regions and between the regions. This would require the need to identify the type of data required for such a matrix, how the data would be collected and who would collect, collate and analyse it. Having developed and implemented such data collection and analysis, the need to identify how it would be interpreted and shared as knowledge across the regions would also need to be resolved. Even though this would present an onerous task for government, it was agreed that its availability would contribute significantly to the role of social and female led initiatives in the growth of sustainable regions post Covid-19. It was also agreed that it would make an equally significant contribution to future policy making and decisions supporting such growth in the regions.

Interregional Learning Event: Number 2: Digital and Green Response

The findings from the second action learning event held in the Brandenburg Region was also informed by a selection of academics, policy makers and practice. Key insights were provided by representatives of digital and green entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. During this interregional learning event, time out was taken after each group of presentations to allow the multi-stakeholders present to reflect on and to discuss and share their learnings from the speakers, identifying the opportunities and gaps. The second day of this interregional learning event was dedicated to a Lego-SERIOUS play workshop to allow the project partners to collectively identify future projects that might address the gaps and opportunities identified on day one. This was also designed to identify gaps that may inform future policy development at a regional and European level.

Opportunities and requirements for Green Oriented Entrepreneurship:

The passion and ambition required for green founders was clear amongst the speakers. However, it was also noted that this was even more important for this sector as change in behaviour towards green is difficult. The need for efficiency, sufficiency and consistency in the development and implementation of green based initiatives was noted. It was also noted that the concept of green did not just refer to a wider circular environment but also referred to being green sensitive and active in an increasing digitally led environment.

The need to increase more sustainable individual behaviours towards the reduction of data volume, standby modes and to reduce data production, downloads and uploads was put forward as an opportunity for everyone to behave in a greener oriented fashion. This generated a discussion on the need to develop more educational programmes that would educate all and allow all individuals to engage in more responsible digital behaviour. Questions were posed with regards to the necessity and handling of bitcoin and other digital currencies, as well as artificial solutions. This was put forward as a topic of discussion for policy makers in the fintech sector and to include its consideration for a greener driven strategy to be deliberated on by the founders and leaders in these sectors.

The growth in green software design in the regions was noted as well as sustainable web hosting solutions, being run at least with renewable energy. However, the need for a greener culture was not reserved only for software solutions but also for the hardware developments. These developments have implications for policies around sustainable supply chains; longer periods of usage; designed to be repaired and not discarded; energy efficiency; and sustainable e-waste management and recycling. Finally, the opportunities for the development and growth of the social aspects of enterprise such as gender equality, diversity, privacy, and strategies to prevent cyber bullying were outcomes of the presentations, reflections and collaborative discussions.

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Goals and Opportunities of scaling up a digital business

Similar to the discussions on the green response to today's economy, the approach taken to the digital sector provided the opportunity to hear and learn from a number of presenters and to engage in individual reflections and collaborative discussions. The regional economies and wider environment during and post Covid-19 certainly favoured extensive digital innovation and solutions. Growth was reported across the sector by all regions. It was also shown how digital solutions enabled the succession of family businesses by creating new business models and revenue streams.

A number of examples of digital based companies that successfully managed to scale during Covid-19 was presented. The presence of and growing number of hubs in the regions were identified to be crucial in enabling this scale. The hub network also supported a pipeline of activity where the scaling companies engaged with, enabled, and mentored new digital-based start-ups across multiple sectors. They provided a social community of likeminded people who shared their business and lifestyle concerns and supported one another at multiple levels. It was reported that these hub networks need to be supported for economically viable and sustainable regions. This would require collaboration between policy makers, practice, and academia, with a focus not only on the education of the necessary talent but also of the development and support of leading research & development centres in the regional universities. Scaling of any business need the necessary expertise and qualifications, combined with technology transfer know-how and engagement with leading researchers. Reference was also made to the need to nurture an entrepreneurial mindset to allow employees to be interested in a professional challenge and to develop and lead the necessary change required in a scaling organisation.

However, the gap in the support for the scaling of these businesses was discussed at length. It was reported that much was known about the awareness of risks of a delayed or failed scaling. On the other hand, it was shown that the scaling of a digital business is possible, but so too is it possible to apply digitally informed solutions that can enable other organisations to scale. There is a need to promote the awareness of succession of a family business and/or the scaling of any business as an exciting, viable and sustainable career option. The need to create a scaling culture in the regions was put forward as well as the need to establish a database of successful stakeholders who could advise an individual or an organisation through the process of scaling an operation through their own experience and their network of other stakeholders who have led, supported, enabled and engaged in business succession and/or scaling.

All outcomes of the individual reflections and collaborative discussions were brought forward to the Lego SERIOUS play brainstorming workshop. A number of gaps were identified, as were a number of accompanying solutions. Overall, the outcome of the workshop proposed the need to address solutions at several levels with specific attention being given, first, to the need to address the gaps in supporting the scaling of organisations in the regions; and second, for age-tech solutions in aging communities, and finally, the need to develop impact measurement tools of entrepreneurial based initiatives in the regions.

PHASE 3: POLICY AND SOCIAL IMPACT RESPONSE

During the interregional learning event held in Northern Ireland, the project partners focused on how policy can enable entrepreneurial activity in their regions and support its social sustainability. Similar to the other two interregional learning events, the outcomes from this learning event were informed by a selection of academics, policy makers, and practice. Key insights were provided regarding policies currently being implemented, the need for more targeted policies, as well as how regions could engage with the issue of social impact of entrepreneurial initiatives.

Using an interactive experiential driven creative gaming tool to identify solutions to identified gaps

This event also included an interactive experiential-led workshop to advance the previous project brainstorming session at the Brandenburg interregional learning event. It was led by one of the project partners from Laurea University of Applied Sciences, using their experiential-driven creative gaming tool to allow the partners to see how we can collectively address the gaps identified and how this may inform policy makers. An image of the outcomes of each group's collective thoughts regarding the gaps and opportunities identified for 1) the age-tech and silver economy; 2) impact measurement tools and 3) succession planning are respectively presented below. They illustrate the co-created experiential learning that took place between the project partners, which facilitated a creative thinking process and input for individual regional action plans together with future collaboration between the partners. They also contributed to the input for future recommendations for policy, practice and academia.

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Group outcomes on gaps and opportunities for age tech and silver economy.

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Group outcomes on gaps and opportunities for impact measurement tools.

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Group outcomes on gaps and opportunities for succession planning.

Following the gaps identified in the entrepreneurial ecosystem scanning process and the three interregional learning events, each of the project partners were asked to complete an action plan for their region using the template provided in Appendix 4. These have yet to be completed at the time of the writing of this report. Initial suggestions have ranged from organising an online 24 hour hackathon addressing solutions for scaling a business between the regions of interested project partners; to developing a green-driven entrepreneurship programme; to the promotion social value impacts; to an expert informed learning event on the role of new digital start-ups offering innovative solutions.

Global Economic Context and future challenges and opportunities

During the interregional learning event in Northern Ireland, presentations addressed the global economic context for entrepreneurship, what is required to reshape enterprise support going forward, current local enterprise support and a discussion on measuring social and environmental impact. An overview of how GDP growth projections have changed from December 2021 to June 2022 is presented below in Figure 5.
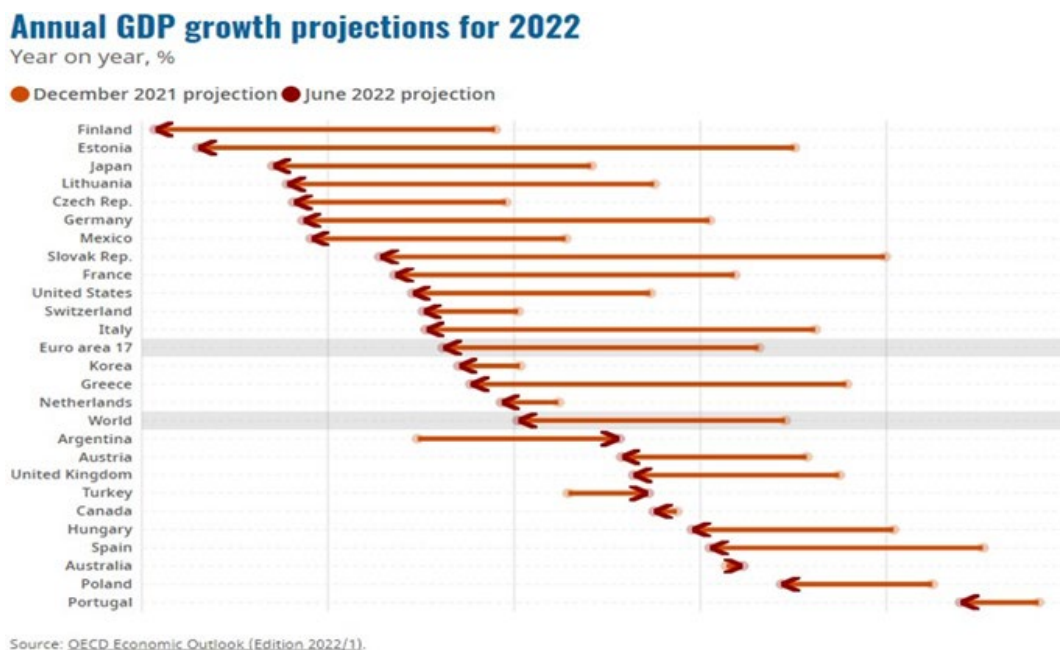

Annual GDP growth projections for 2022
Year on year, %

● December 2021 projection ● June 2022 projection

Source: OECD Economic Outlook (Edition 2022/1).

Figure 5: Annual GDP growth projections for 2022 are significantly more pessimist in many countries than they were in December 2021.

The overview of the global economy post Covid-19 did indicate that despite the regions doing well in the aftermath of the pandemic, the post-pandemic optimism is turning into pessimism with slow or negative growth predicted. The key challenge is high inflation and rising energy prices. Furthermore, the most vulnerable in society will be impacted the most. The gaps identified proposed the need for policy makers to respond by ensuring that the regions build individual, household and business resilience for recovery and future economic shocks.

Reshaping Enterprise Supports at Policy Level

This response would also require the need to reshape enterprise support going forward.   It was reported that despite the awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship, a clear

entrepreneurial deficit remains. The gaps identified the need for policy makers to come together to develop a more ambitious programme of entrepreneurial support in an attempt to address this deficit. Going forward, it was proposed that entrepreneurial supports would be flexible enough to address the barriers experienced by both existing and future entrepreneurs and businesses. Finally, it was proposed that working with partners across the entrepreneurial ecosystem will create a 'spine of support' that will align and add value to the delivery mechanisms, enabling a collaborative support structure through the partners. These will include the regional infrastructure, academia, financial institutions, and statutory delivery partners.

Social Value Impact Measurement

A number of social enterprise case studies were presented, in addition to a discussion on the increase of 'impact entrepreneurs' and concluding with a discussion on the Social Value act in Northern Ireland. The case studies indicated the collaborative input in the required development and implementation of a social enterprise, and equally of their impact across several levels in the community. Specific reference was given to the young population who have long been identified as a conscientious and altruistic generation, taking an activist, hands-on approach to trying to solve the world's problems. This was reflected amongst youth in all regions, who make it clear that they want a greater say in the policies and planning that will shape the future of the country they are to inherit. The vast majority of youth were reported as trying to reduce their personal impact on the environment. Young people are already willing to take action to help mitigate climate change and protect the environment. Recycling, reducing food waste, limiting the purchase of plastic wrapped food, using public transport, and buying second hand clothes are the most reported ways in which young people are willing to act. This commitment of the future population will have implications for both existing and future enterprise development, also referring to their methods of operations, supply chains, product, and service outputs.

However, a gap was identified in the lack of similar commitment by businesses and the policy makers. This was noted by the European Commission, which adopted a proposal requiring EU companies to conduct "due diligence" processes related to their human rights and environmental impacts. Impact-aware entrepreneurs are continuing to acquire increasing investment, which are made with the intention to generate positive, measurable, social and environmental impact alongside a financial return, (GIIN – Global Impact Investment Network). Again, the main challenge and gap identified referred to the need for tools and supports to be developed that will enable impact measurement and reporting. The SDG Compass was proposed as one tool that is currently available, with the objective of guiding organisations to align their strategies and contribute to the UN SDGs. The increase in new digital start-ups targeting ESG principles was also reported.

Finally, along with the reference to the tools such as the SDG Compass and the Circular Canvas Model, it was also suggested that policy could play a strategic role in increasing the social awareness and accountability of organisations. The Social Value Act, which came into force In Northern Ireland in 2022, was shared with the project partners as an example of such a policy. This new act is focused on a mandatory scoring value being applied to all public procurement contracts. It aims to create a range of positive social, economic and environmental impacts, promoting the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and the environment. It aims to apply public contract regulations, with a minimum of 10% of the total award criteria being allocated to Social Value in services and relevant works contracts. Over time, the intention is to increase secure employment and skills, build ethical and resilient supply chains, become carbon neutral, and promote wellbeing. Essentially it seeks to reward companies who innovate and think socially for the common good. Such a policy can be adapted by other regions and policy makers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND ACADEMIA

Plenty of knowledge was shared between the entrepreneurial ecosystem scanning process and the three interregional learning events conducted. This additional funding supported a sustainable and socially inclusive recovery project from the Covid-19 pandemic. A number of recommendations are being proposed by this project to policy, practice, and academia, based on the desk research conducted together with the insights gained from the multi-stakeholder interregional learning events aimed at identifying the gaps for a post Covid-19 recovery in the regions. These are not fully exhaustive given that further research will be required going forward. However, they offer a number of suggestions to be considered.

Education: Developing Capacities and Skills for Sustainability and Digital Innovation

» Continuance and further innovative development of entrepreneurship education programmes promoting sustainability and social value across all levels of the education system
» Rewards for organisations that actively promote inclusion, support mental wellness and add social value
» Promotion of and creating awareness about impact-driven entrepreneurship
» A hybrid delivery of future entrepreneurship education programmes that include both online delivery and resources, supported with one-to-one mentorship and engagement with practice
» Support for the upskilling of all education providers on innovative learning practices towards the unearthing and nurturing of the entrepreneurial mindset of the individual educators
» Rewards for educational providers that evidence entrepreneurial leadership in the development of systems, programmes, and support for sustainable, social and digitally informed programmes of delivery and assessment
» Promotion and support of opportunities for the sharing of good practices (both online and in person) between the education provider leaders, educators, and students across regions

Business Support and Ecosystem Building: Developing an Impact-Driven Business Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

» Better access to ESG informed finance and investment.
» Support for a hybrid form of working that facilitates remote working and enables talent acquisition and retention.
» Community Sustainability through application of digital solutions in health, mental wellness, education, and aging population.
» Support for growth in Social and Female led enterprises and initiatives.
» Continued improvement of the broadband infrastructure across regions, which enables a digitally driven ecosystem.
» Development of plans to maximise and optimise research, development, and innovation activities to improve competitiveness across all sectors.

Role of Regions and the Public Sector: Transparent Monitoring and Measurement aligned to the UN SDGs

» Continuance and growth of the collaborative agile interoperations' practice between policy, practice, and academia at a European, National and Regional level as applied during the pandemic.

» Application of the principles of the entrepreneurial leadership mindset, open innovation and co-creation in policy development, implementation, and evaluation.

» Policy to enable scale of impact-driven businesses and organisations, supporting inclusive employment and talent retention across all sectors.

» Rewards for organisations that actively promote inclusion, support mental wellness, and add social value.

» Development, Impact Measurement, and Self-Assessment Tools in the regions aligning with the UN SDGs and ESG reporting.

» Greater support for regional innovation strategy (RIS 3) roll-out and impact measurement in the regions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Regional Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Scan Template

Regional Entrepreneurial Ecosystem scan

We are seeking to provide a broad mapping of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of each region for pre and post Covid. The intention is that this exercise will allow us to identify gaps that may now exist in our regions.

We will collate the analysis of the individual entrepreneurial ecosystem scans. We will circulate this report to all. We will then organise a workshop for all to initiate discussions to develop guidelines that may assist our regions and others as they plan for the future! We intend to over the months of the project to develop a series of future scenarios building on the Growth Grid we developed at the end of phase one of this consortium. See page 128: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KGE81CsIRMae2aUU3s-92TR_D0fJpnHp/view

To allow us to initiate this process we ask that you please complete the following template for your region. We are not expecting any one to do extensive data collection. This is really a desk research exercise.

1. For column 1 (Pre Covid) can you please provide a summary of:
    i.   what support was available for each box. You can complete this by providing a narrative for each one, provide a list of the supporting organisations for each category;
    ii. map the list of activities of support for all categories on a separate page;
    iii. list any reports and/or statistics that you have available to you for each category. For example, there may be a public report that tells us how many and what type of start ups were supported in our region and so on.

2. For column 2 (Post Covid) can you again please provide a summary of:
    i.   what has changed for these supports; (a narrative may be used here)
    ii. what emergency supports were provided in the region;
    iii. was a Covid emergency support group set up in the region and who was on it e.g. public policy makers, education, private industry etc.
    iv. provide a list of Covid-19 impact reports by your region, national government, cities, consultancy companies etc).

	Pre Covid	18 months post March 2020
Support for Entrepreneurship Education • Primary level • Secondary level • HEIs		
Support for Start Ups • Financial • Mentorship • Level of interoperability of public services at local, regional, national and European level is crucial • Types of start ups supported (can use sectors to describe this)		
Monitoring of Start Up Activity • Who does this? • How often is it done? • How is it done? • How is it shared?		
Support for Digital Infrastructure • Is there a strategy in the region? • Who is responsible? • Who contributes to the plan? • How is the plan shared?		
Regional Self-Assessment Does a process exist? If yes please describe. Does the region align entrepreneurial activity to UN SDGs? If yes please describe		

Appendix 2: Structured SMEs Topic Guide Template

Generals questions:
- Year of foundation / legal form / number of employees / branch of business

Questions in deep to the target group:
- How has COVID-19 influenced your foundation / business?
- How has your way of working changed, if applicable?
- What / who helped you most to keep the business going during that time?
- What / who did you lack in support during the period to help you cope with the crisis?
- What support would you like to have in the future (with / after COVID)?

Appendix 3: Interregional Learning Event Template

Day 1:
- Summary of Project Partner Information submitted pre the interregional learning event
- Presentation from the interregional topic experts (Academic, Policy Makers and SMEs)
- Project Partner Breakout Discussion Groups
- Project Partner Presentation of Models of Good Practice
- Questions and Answers
- Social Networking Event.

Day 2:
- Project Partner Workshop
- Action Learning Set breakout sessions
- Project Partner Action Learning Sets Feedback
- Outline of next steps.

Appendix 4: Project Partner Action Plan Template

Action Plan Template:

1. Background
2. Key findings from gap analysis
3. List of actions improving addressed policy

Policy Action:

Action	Description	Stakeholder	Costs	Timeframe	Impact
1					

Proposed Project:

Action	Description	Stakeholder	Costs	Timeframe	Impact
1					