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SKILLS+

ACTION PLAN FOR MAŁOPOLSKA

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Part I – General information

Project: „Supporting knowledge capacity of ICT SME to engage in growth and innovation” SKILLS+

Partner organisation: Malopolska Regional Development Agency (Poland)

Other partner organisations involved (if relevant): -

Country: Poland

NUTS2 region: PL21 Malopolska

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Part II – 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: Regional Innovation Strategy for Malopolska

Regional Innovation Strategy of the Małopolskie Voivodeship 2020 “(RSI WM 2020) is a strategic program for the “Development Strategy for the Lesser Poland Voivodship for years 2011-2020 “(SRWM 2011-2020) in the field of innovative economy.

The main objective of Regional Innovation Strategy for Małopolska is to achieve by 2020: “increased competitiveness and innovativeness of the Małopolska economy by implementing a harmonious policy focused on improving the conditions for doing business, innovation and science, developing the information society and stimulating demand for innovation and strengthening ties cooperation between science and the economy, especially in the fields of regional specialization”. The declaration of the authors of the RIS regarding the implementation of the “harmonious policy” included in the main objective should be interpreted as an announcement of territorially balanced public intervention, which is addressed both to urban areas and to rural areas.

The main objective are implemented through three priorities: Priority 1. Stimulating innovative activity of enterprises Priority 2. The development of infrastructure based on knowledge Priority 3. Development of the information society.

The conducted analysis confirms that the Self-government of the Małopolskie Voivodeship acknowledges the importance of SMEs and ICT solutions (both in the dimension of ICT infrastructure availability and the dissemination of their use in business) for the region's economic development. It is, however, worth bearing in mind the insufficient visibility and, in some cases, the lack of writing clear strategic preferences for entrepreneurs and residents of rural areas in strategic documents. In other words, despite less access to ICT solutions in non-urbanized areas than in urban ones, strategic documents of the Voivodeship in the majority of its provisions referring to ICT in the context of SMEs development perceive both types of territories equally.

The implementation of a project directly inspired by participation in the SKILLS + project will contribute to the achievement of the main goal of RIS WM 2020 in the scope of increasing the level of ICT use in SMEs. New ways of achieving the RIS WM 2020 goals will be implemented. Therefore, the effectiveness of achieving the RIS WM 2020 goals will be improved.

Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

ACTION 1

“Vouchers for success” – including ICT consultancy for entrepreneurs

1. The background

The peer review team recommended few Good Practises from other countries that could be implemented in Malopolska Region. From those GPs Malopolska preferred four GPs:

- 1) GOLLI (Global Orders, Logistics Labels & Information)
- 2) DIGIBOOSTI
- 3) IT Cluster of Central Germany
- 4) Ventspils Digital Centre, VDC

Recommendations from Peer review included: Promote the uptake of ICT by rural and urban SMEs by linking ICT uptake to competitiveness solutions by Upscale the digital potential of Polish retail SMEs or SMEs with consumer departments sales sections to be able to sell cross border and Improve digitalisation of rural SMEs through targeted actions.

Among the four good practices of the SKILLS+ project recommended for implementation, also in Malopolska, two are fully in line with the content of strategic RSI projects. These are DIGIBOOSTI and IT Cluster of Central Germany. The DIGIBOOSTI project is directly connected with the substantive scope of the strategic endeavor B.2., where it is provided that: “support will be provided for investment activities of enterprises, consisting in particular of: (...) 3) acquisition of

expert services related to the implementation of an innovative undertaking (...)". A similar project in Malopolska could be implemented by business environment institutions, which allows the RSI to mention these entities as partners participating in the implementation of the aforementioned strategic endeavor.

During the meeting of representatives of Stakeholders Group, recommendations from peers review were analyzed, taking into account local conditions in Malopolska (almost 3.4 million citizens, almost 400 thousand economic activities, of which over 90% are sole proprietorships).

From the above-mentioned good practices DIGIBOOSTI was chosen as the most likely to be implemented. Due to the specificity of enterprises in Malopolska (micro enterprises), some adjustments will be necessary.

To sum up, despite the awareness of the limited chance to implement fully all recommendations and good practices of the SKILLS+ project within strategic documents, it can be concluded that:

- a) essential postulates of entrepreneurship support in areas other than big cities and promotion of ICT use by the community and entrepreneurs from non-urbanized areas are already included in the RSI and SRWM 2011-2020. However, it should be remembered that intervention for rural and urban areas has been treated together, i.e. without taking into account the specifics (potentials and needs) of both types of territories. The possible visibility of clear preferences for entrepreneurs and residents of rural areas in the future will constitute a qualitative change in relation to the current provisions of the SRWM and the RSI.
- b) good practice DIGIBOOSTI, which has been recognized by experts as the most promising and desirable for Małopolska in the form of the ICT Expert project, can be implemented as part of the current RSI. However, it should be remembered that possible financing is dependent on whether this project complies with the Detailed Description of the Priority Axes of the Regional Operational Program of the Małopolskie Voivodeship for the years 2014-2020.

Both national programs (Operational Program Digital Poland 2014-2020 and Operational Program Smart Growth 2014-2020) and the Regional Operational Program of the Małopolska Region for 2014-2020 (ROP MR) can be considered as potential funding sources for implementation of SKILLS+ recommendations and best practices. Nevertheless, both due to the national dimension of OP DP 2014-2020 and OP SG 2014-2020, which focus on achieving nationwide targets, as well as regional specificity of the objectives set by the SKILLS+ project, more possibilities to fund its implementation should be seen in ROP MR (3rd Priority Axis Entrepreneurial Małopolska).

In the case of good practices, the analysis shows that in Małopolska the DIGIBOOSTI project (developed and implemented in Finland) is the most adequate and possible to implement in the current EU financial perspective. The implementation of this good practice is potentially possible in the formula of the project offering advice on raising the ICT competence of MSMEs. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that in specific Małopolska's conditions it is neither feasible, nor justified to directly implement assumptions and elements of the DIGIBOOSTI project. The conclusion is justified by the specificity (very low level of ICT development), fragmentation (a large number of the small enterprises), and the needs (often of a completely basic nature) of Malopolska enterprises.

2. Action

The project is a direct result of the participation of the Małopolska Regional Development Agency in the SKILLS+ Project. Good practices learned under the SKILLS Project have initiated a project which main aim is to increase the availability of specialist consultancy services support (including ICT) for entrepreneurs.

To implement the action for SME companies following steps are planned:

- 1) preparation of the application - January 2019
- 2) participation in the competition procedure - February 2019
- 3) obtaining external financing - April 2019
- 4) project implementation, provision of co-financing for SMEs enabling the purchase of high quality ICT services increasing the competitiveness of enterprises, including those from non-urbanized areas. - Project implementation June 2019 – December 2022;
Signing the contract June 2019,
Project recruitment from July 2019 (continuous recruitment). The implementation of individual Grants (grant agreements) should not exceed 6 months from the date of conclusion of the grant agreement. The deadline for implementing individual Grants is December 31, 2022. It is estimated that last grant agreements, probably, might be signed in October 2022

The project implementation will include:

1. Diagnosing the needs of SMEs regarding the need for specialized ICT consultancy services;
2. The SME will choose a company that provides professional ICT consultancy services with which it will cooperate. The quality of services provided by the company is verified at the level of accreditation or certification allowing registration in a special database;
3. SMEs will receive 70-95% co-financing, up to PLN 20,000 for the service;
4. An advisory service tailored to the company's needs in the field of using advanced information technologies or information and communication technologies in the enterprise will be provided, eg customer relationship management systems (CRM), enterprise resource management support systems (ERP).

It is planned to support at least **50** SMEs from the Małopolska area in this regard.

The grant award procedure will be carried out in two stages and will be carried out continuously throughout the project implementation period until the funds allocated for grants are exhausted. At the beginning, the potential Grantee will fill out a simple online application form, which will be the basis for conducting by MARR consultants comprehensive diagnosis of the need for consulting.

The purpose of the diagnosis is to define the real consulting needs of the company and to propose the scope of consulting.

In the second stage, companies will submit grant applications. After positive verification, a contract is signed and the company can benefit from funding for specialist consultancy services. After completing the services, the company is required to submit a set of documents confirming the service. After verification, a grant is paid.

The challenges addressed by the measure are:

- SMEs in rural areas should be supported in the area of ICT development (information / communication technologies) so that they can take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital single market and the benefits of the digital economy. Developing policies / plans that promote ICT skills and encompass new business opportunities in the digital environment is extremely important
- lack of qualifications and competences of ICT causes digital exclusion and negatively affects SME competitiveness
- increasing demand for the use of IT tools while looking for a job and during setting up and running a business
- better chance of professional activation and / or the success of your own business thanks to digital skills
- facilitating cooperation with the administration thanks to the use of e-government
- digital inclusion of individuals and micro enterprises from non-urbanized areas

The expected impact is related to the following:

- acquiring ICT skills by residents and micro enterprises from Małopolska, at least 50 as a result of SKILLS+ project,
- digital skills as a way to reduce disparities between urbanized and non-urbanized areas,
- digital complexity as a way to increase the competitiveness of micro enterprises and increase opportunities in the labour market.

3. Players involved

Małopolska Regional Development Agency – responsible for implementation of the project

Management Board of the Małopolska Voivodship – the policy responsible body. During periodic meetings of Innovation Council of Małopolska (an opinion-making and advisory body for the Management Board of the Małopolska Voivodship in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship of the Voivodship) the results and good practices of the project are presented. The policy responsible body is aware of the

SKILLS+ project, but it will not endorse the Action Plan. The Action Plan will be endorsed by the management board of MARR.

It should be noted that the process of modifying the Regional Innovation Strategy of the Małopolskie Voivodeship 2020 has probably ended and no further changes are planned to be implemented.

4. Timeframe

“Vouchers for success” implementation 2019-2022

5. Costs (if relevant)

36,97 million PLN

6. Funding sources

“Vouchers for success” 2019-2022

Małopolska ROP 2014-2020, granted and under an open competition procedure,

As a source of funding of the project based on the DIGIBOOSTI project for SME (not yet granted) it was identified Sub-measure 3.4.5 Vouchers for advisory services under the Regional Operational Program of the Małopolska Region for 2014-2020. Announced currently the call for proposals will be implemented in the formula of vouchers project (an umbrella project), under which it will be possible to purchase specialized advisory services (including ICT) in the form of services provided by the highly qualified external entity (verified on the basis of accreditation or certification), while, co-financed will not be the remuneration of employees, what distinguishes it from the DIGIBOOSTI project. Nearly PLN 37 million has been allocated to this call for proposals in the Sub-measure 3.4.5, under which applications for funding will be accepted between November 30, 2018 and February 5, 2019, whereas its resolution is planned for May 2019. The maximum value of a single grant is PLN 20,000, and management costs cannot exceed 10% of the project value

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Stamp of the organisation (if available): _____