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INSPIRE

**Improving Networks and Services to Promote
Innovative and Resilient Entrepreneurship**

Joint action plan for a more efficient business support system

2026

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Project title	Improving Networks and Services to Promote Innovative and Resilient Entrepreneurship (INSPIRE)
Project code	ROHU00283
Publication title	Joint action plan for a more efficient business support system
Author(s)	Network for Regional Development Foundation
Contributor(s)	Association for Business Promotion in Romania
Page number	38
Publishing date	March 2026

The project is funded by the European Union under the Interreg fund and co-financed by Romania and Hungary.
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Introduction

The INSPIRE project tackled the following joint challenges of the cross-border area:

- Encouraging young people to become entrepreneurs is a good way to address the issue of youth unemployment; however, **starting a business is a risky** endeavour: survival rate after the second year is low in both countries, caused partly by a **lack of knowledge, skills, community** (including partners), and **adaptability**.
- Entrepreneurs looking for support can easily get lost in the **segmented service market** where financial means, administrative assistance, and know-how related to businesses come from different directions, some of them hard to find.
- The business support service providers often run **parallel initiatives** with the same goal – or different initiatives that would fit together as a service package – but **with no cooperation** between them. As a result, the impact of their activities are muted, mostly local – less likely to be significant and long-lasting.

In line with these challenges, the main objective of INSPIRE was **improving institutional capacities to provide high quality and effective business support** for entrepreneurs in the cross-border area **by** (1) **increasing collaboration between business support service providers** on both sides – and across – the border, **and** (2) **improving the survival rate and viability of new businesses** operated by young entrepreneurs.

These objectives were reached by implementing the following activities:

- **Mapping** the relevant organizations and services, and identifying specific collaboration areas based on the **overlaps and gaps in the cross-border service offer**, resulting in a **joint analysis**
- Creating a **catalogue with relevant good practices** that are adaptable by organizations in the cross-border area
- **Matching the overlaps and gaps with the gathered good practices** in the form of an **action plan**, which includes the **detailed description of “quick wins”** (actions achieving maximum impact with minimum resources)
- Disseminating the deliverables mentioned above and facilitating real connections between representatives of business support organizations by **organizing online and face-to-face networking events**
- **Developing and testing a business support programme** for aspiring entrepreneurs, focusing on knowledge exchange, practical assistance, and skills development
- Sharing the results of the project and facilitating networking between the two target groups (business support organizations and future entrepreneurs) by **organizing a final conference**

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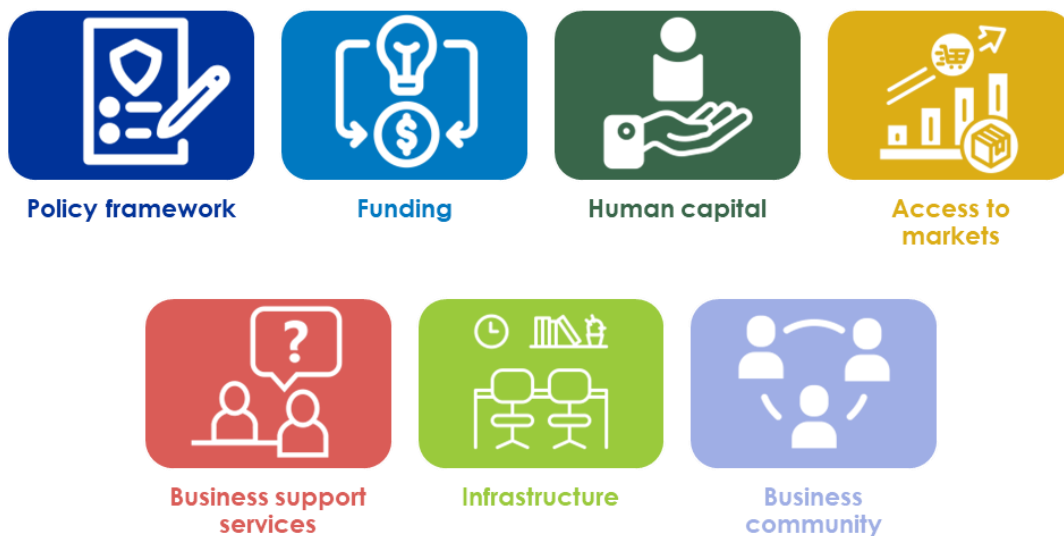
This document is the **Joint action plan for a more efficient business support system**: as stated above, it “merges” the situation analysis of the business support environment and the identified good practices, resulting in **specific project ideas and service descriptions** – the focus is on **short term gains with minimal resources** (the aforementioned “quick wins”). The **actions** described in **Chapter 2** follow the **intervention logic** presented in **Chapter 1** – they intend to contribute to specific objectives that are in line with the joint challenges the partners identified during the project. Every proposed action is detailed according to the following criteria: title & description, expected impact, list of necessary (and possible) partners & stakeholders, approximate budget, and timeline (with implementation stages and indicators).

HÁRFA coordinated the development of the action plan, writing the sections related to the project, the intervention logic, and the monitoring process (i.e., this *Introduction*, along with *Chapter 1* and *Chapter 3*) – however, **the actions described in Chapter 2 are the result of a joint collaboration between HÁRFA and ROVE**.

1 Intervention logic

1.1 Key challenges

When examining the business environment of the cross-border area, the INSPIRE partnership used a **modified version of the ecosystem model developed by Daniel Isenberg**, a professor of entrepreneurship. The original concept **outlines six primary domains which together create the ecosystem for entrepreneurship**, and it was adopted by policy-makers, entrepreneurs, and researchers alike. If these domains work well and interact with each other successfully, a young entrepreneur will have the necessary support they need to not just survive but thrive.



POLICY FRAMEWORK

A strong ecosystem starts with clear, long-term intent – entrepreneurship should be embedded in the regional development strategies and economic vision (with allocated resources), and entrepreneurs should be involved in policy-making.

- National, regional, and urban policies recognize entrepreneurship as a driver of economic growth and prioritize its support in strategies, but this **commitment should be translated into specific actions**, particularly **at local level** – most **municipalities lack dedicated entrepreneurship departments** that could manage them.
- Both countries could benefit from more **structured dialogue between public authorities, chambers of commerce, NGOs, and private sector representatives**.

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- When projects are selected for funding, they are often **geared towards infrastructure** (e.g., developing industrial parks) – initiatives that will often **benefit foreign investments and large companies a lot more than local SMEs**.

FUNDING

Entrepreneurs should be able to find a wide range of funding opportunities including investments, grants, venture capital or simply contracts/sales. In smaller cities, this is not necessarily about providing funding – it's about making access possible and practical.

- While entrepreneurs can theoretically benefit from a wide range of national or EU-funded programmes, the **requirements are** often very **strict and favour (1) businesses with more years behind them, (2) specific sectors, and (3) startups** with a high global potential.
- **Local authorities rarely allocate direct funds for supporting new businesses financially** – this means that there's no incentive for young people to stay in their home city/area even if they have a viable business idea.
- Organizations should work on the **transparency of the system** – entrepreneurs often lack awareness of funding opportunities.
- Rural and first-time entrepreneurs often **lack capacity to prepare competitive applications**.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Cultivating future entrepreneurs and keeping them local is only possible if entrepreneurship is embedded into school and university programmes and local success stories are widely shared to inspire others.

- **Entrepreneurial education is not systematically embedded in curricula.** (The programme developed within the framework of INSPIRE can serve as a basis for integrating entrepreneurial competencies into various levels of education on both sides of the border.)
- One of the major consequences of a lack of entrepreneurial education is the **lack of an entrepreneurial mindset in youth** – opening and managing a business is not seen as a mainstream career path by most of them.

ACCESS TO MARKETS

New businesses need exposure and customers – helping them unlock new market pathways through startup-friendly procurement, matchmaking, clusters, etc. is crucial.

- Market access and related support **varies significantly across sectors**. Artisans and agricultural producers are covered by fairs within local programmes, but **the cross-border element is missing** – **businesses** might be interested in widening

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their customer base but **don't have the necessary information about where to start.**

- Local SMEs have **limited opportunities to enter the sphere of public procurement** – this is especially true for **new businesses with no established contact list** and rural business owners are in an even worse position.

BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES

Support services (mentoring, legal advice, training, etc.) must match real needs and be timely (across all business stages) and visible (mapped and signposted clearly).

- There are different levels of services – the higher level we go, the less options businesses have: **mentoring is rare**, and **dedicated assistance is non-existent**.
- **Services are available** in many organizations, but for a new entrepreneur with limited experience (and even for existing businesses), **navigating between them is not easy**.
- Some support and initiatives are **tied to EU projects and external funding**, leading to **intermittent service**.
- The **geographic concentration** of support services and a **heavy focus on county capitals** is a significant structural challenge, leading to the **marginalization of rural entrepreneurs** who have less opportunities and access.

INFRASTRUCTURE

There should be affordable (open) workspaces such as incubators, accelerators, makerspaces, and fablabs, providing a strong community offer.

- There are **white spots on the map that are underserved** and need a physical space to serve as a hub (or at least access to co-working).
- Experience shows that **some existing infrastructure remain relatively empty or are underused** after they are built – they were not developed beyond the establishment of their physical space, never becoming true hubs.

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

A strong entrepreneurial culture binds the ecosystem together – it shares stories and fosters connections through events and a “pay-it-forward” mentality.

- Relevant **events are prevalent**, although **often standalone** – the main challenge here is that they do not yet reach the majority of local entrepreneurs due to **limited marketing activities**. **Rural entrepreneurs**, in particular, **face isolation, with few opportunities** for peer learning and less access to these meetups.

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1.2 Vision

Based on the current state of the ecosystem, the partners formulated a vision – an ideal state for the cross-border area in approximately 10 years' time. This means the following:

- **Strong political commitment** to entrepreneurship is consistently translated into practical, locally **implemented actions**, supported by **dedicated capacities** at municipal and regional level, and **sustained** beyond individual project cycles.
- **Funding** opportunities are **transparent, diversified**, and better **matched** to different entrepreneurial profiles – as a result, viable business ideas are no longer lost due to early-stage financial insecurity.
- Human capital is strengthened through **systematic entrepreneurship education, practice-oriented learning**, and cross-border cooperation between educational institutions and businesses.
- Markets are more accessible as local businesses gain the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to operate beyond their immediate locality – **cross-border linkages open new customer bases**.
- **Business support goes beyond basic administrative assistance** and includes mentoring, tailored advisory services, and **long-term accompaniment**, ensuring that new and growing businesses are not left alone at critical stages of their development.
- **Entrepreneurs can easily navigate the ecosystem** through coordinated **one-stop-shop** solutions, clear information channels, and reliable points of contact.
- Business **communities are strong, inclusive, and visible**, reaching rural entrepreneurs and fostering peer learning, cooperation, and trust.

To summarize:

Ten years from now, the cross border area has a connected, inclusive, and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem where local businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs can easily access coordinated support and grow sustainably regardless of location, size, or sector.

Ultimately, the region is recognized as a cohesive and resilient entrepreneurial space, where **geography is no longer a disadvantage**, **collaboration replaces fragmentation**, and **entrepreneurship contributes** not only to economic growth but also **to talent retention**, social cohesion, and long-term regional development.

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1.3 Main and specific objectives

The main objective of INSPIRE – as stated in the *Introduction* – was improving institutional capacities to provide high quality and effective business support for entrepreneurs in the cross-border area by increasing collaboration between business support service providers and improving the survival rate of new businesses. The partners decided that the **main objective** of their strategy and this action plan should be similarly worded but broader in scope:

Strengthening the cross-border entrepreneurial ecosystem by translating strong policy commitment into coordinated, accessible, and entrepreneur-centred actions that improve business survival, talent retention, and regional cohesion

To achieve the above, the planned actions will be structured around 3 specific objectives.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Improve the coordination and accessibility of entrepreneurial support services

This objective addresses (1) the **siloed operation** of hubs, support organisations, and business community events; (2) the **lack of one-stop-shops**; (3) **intermittent** project-based **services**; and (4) the **urban-centric concentration** of support. It emphasizes **coordination across institutions and borders**, as well as **better navigation for entrepreneurs** within the ecosystem.

- Within 3 years, at least 60% of the participating ecosystem organisations should deliver support services that are operational **beyond a single project cycle** (e.g., recurring programmes).
- After the 5th year of implementation, at least 70% of entrepreneurs should report that they were able to identify and access relevant support through a **single entry point**, compared to a baseline established in the first year.
- 10 years from now, at least 35% of supported entrepreneurs should originate from **rural or non-county-seat locations**.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: Enhance young people's entrepreneurial skills and mindset

This responds directly to the **weak entrepreneurial mindset** among youth and the **lack of access to entrepreneurial education**.

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- Within 5 years, at least 500 students and young adults (aged 16 to 35) should complete **practice-oriented entrepreneurship training or challenges**, with minimum 20% participating in cross-border activities.
- In 10 years, the **share of young participants considering entrepreneurship a viable career option should increase** by at least 25%, measured through pre- and post-training surveys.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the market access and financial readiness of local SMEs and new businesses

This objective tackles limited **access** to finance, low **awareness of funding opportunities**, weak **application capacity** (especially among rural and first-time entrepreneurs), poor **access to public procurement**, and the absence of **cross-border market mechanisms** for local producers and SMEs.

- After 5 years, at least 65% of supported entrepreneurs should demonstrate **improved awareness** of available funding instruments, and at least 30% should **successfully submit a complete and eligible funding application**.
- In 10 years, minimum 50 SMEs and producers should **access new cross-border markets** (through fairs, B2B matchmaking, supply chains, etc.), with minimum 25% reporting **new or increased cross-border sales** within 12 months of participation.

1.4 Intervention areas and list of actions

Every specific objective corresponds to an intervention area.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Improve the coordination and accessibility of entrepreneurial support services

- This means the establishment of an **integrated cross-border support system** that reduces fragmentation, eliminates service overlaps, and ensures equal access for both urban and rural entrepreneurs.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: Enhance young people's entrepreneurial skills and mindset

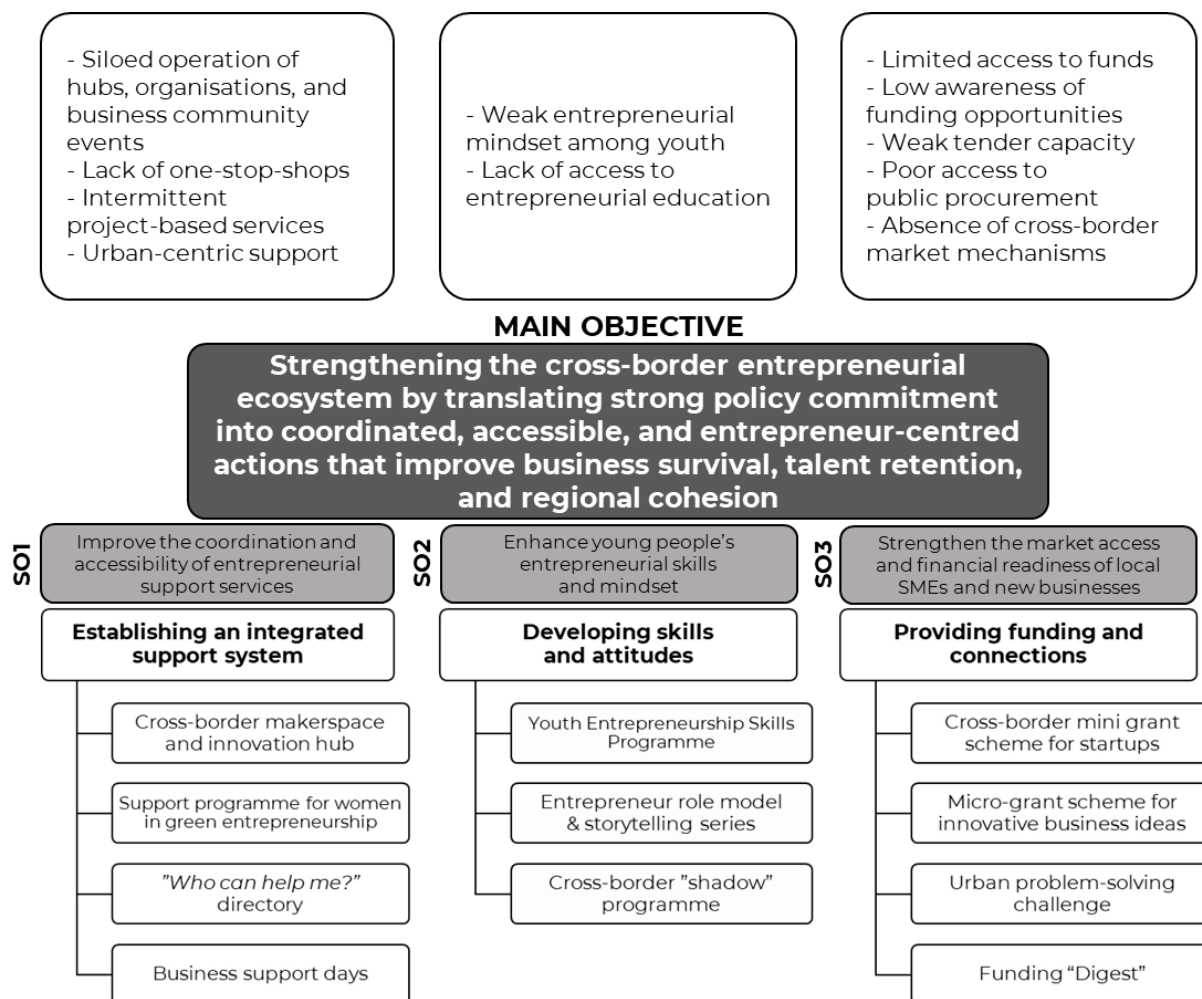
- This means building a **strong base of entrepreneurial human capital** by expanding practical entrepreneurship education, cross-border cooperation between educational institutions, and talent exchange opportunities.

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SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the market access and financial readiness of local SMEs and new businesses

- This means increasing the **ability of businesses to access funding, markets, and procurement** opportunities through targeted capacity-building, transparency, and cross-border market linkages.

The resulting intervention logic of the action plan can be seen on the figure below.



2 Activity plan

Action title:	Cross-border makerspace and innovation hub			Ecosystem category:	Physical spaces Culture/community
Specific objective/intervention area:				SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Improve the coordination and accessibility of entrepreneurial support services/Establishing an integrated support system	
Description:	This action aims to establish or pilot a cross-border makerspace-type support initiative inspired by the NOD Makerspace model. The initiative will provide access to shared workspaces, basic prototyping tools, and collaborative environments for early-stage entrepreneurs, creatives, and innovators. Participants will benefit from hands-on learning opportunities, technical support, and community-based knowledge exchange. The space will host workshops, training sessions, and networking events focused on practical skills such as product development, digital fabrication, and creative entrepreneurship. The initiative will also promote inclusion by ensuring access for young people, disadvantaged groups, and first-time entrepreneurs. By combining infrastructure with community and learning elements, the action supports innovation, skills development, and collaboration in the cross-border region.				
Intended outcome:	Improved access to shared innovation spaces and practical tools, leading to enhanced entrepreneurial skills, increased collaboration, and the development of new products and business ideas in the cross-border region				
Stakeholders:	Business support organizations, local authorities, educational institutions, trainers and technical experts, creative professionals, and early-stage entrepreneurs				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	50,000-150,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	9-18 months

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IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Planning and concept development	Month 1	Month 3	Identification of location, needs assessment, concept design of the makerspace, and partnership building with relevant stakeholders	Concept plan, partnership agreements, identified location	Business support organizations, local authorities, educational institutions
Space setup and equipment procurement	Month 4	Month 8	Preparation of the physical space, procurement and installation of basic equipment and tools, and setup of operational framework	Functional makerspace, installed equipment, operational guidelines	Local authorities, technical experts, suppliers
Programme delivery (training & workshops)	Month 9	Month 15	Organization of workshops, training sessions, and community events focusing on practical skills, prototyping, and entrepreneurship	Number of workshops, participants trained, events organized	Trainers, mentors, business support organizations
Community building and networking	Month 9	Month 18	Facilitation of networking events, collaboration activities, and cross-border exchanges among participants	Networking events, partnerships created, community members engaged	Business support organizations, community groups
Monitoring and evaluation	Month 16	Month 18	Assessment of results, participant feedback collection, and evaluation of the makerspace impact and sustainability	Evaluation report, recommendations for future development	Business support organizations, experts

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Action title:	Support programme for women in green entrepreneurship			Ecosystem category:	Business support
Specific objective/intervention area:				SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Improve the coordination and accessibility of entrepreneurial support services/Establishing an integrated support system	
Description:	This action aims to support the development of sustainable and inclusive businesses by targeting women entrepreneurs in the cross-border region. The programme will provide training, mentoring, and networking opportunities focused on green business development, circular economy principles, and sustainable product and service design. Participants will benefit from practical workshops, one-on-one coaching, and access to relevant networks that support environmentally conscious entrepreneurship. The initiative will also encourage collaboration between local stakeholders, including business support organizations, educational institutions, and community actors. By addressing barriers such as limited access to support, lack of confidence, and geographic isolation, the action will create opportunities for women to start and grow sustainable businesses. The programme will be implemented as a pilot and may be expanded in the future.				
Intended outcome:	Increased participation of women in entrepreneurship, development of sustainable business ideas, and stronger inclusion of underrepresented groups in the cross-border entrepreneurial ecosystem				
Stakeholders:	Business support organizations, local authorities, NGOs, educational institutions, mentors, trainers, and women entrepreneurs				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	15,000-40,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	6-12 months

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IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Programme design and stakeholder engagement	Month 1	Month 2	Development of programme structure, identification of target group, and engagement of relevant stakeholders	Programme framework, partnerships established	Business support organizations, NGOs, local authorities
Preparation of training and mentoring activities	Month 3	Month 4	Development of training materials and mentoring structure focused on green entrepreneurship	Training materials, mentoring plan	Trainers, experts
Programme implementation (training and mentoring)	Month 5	Month 9	Delivery of workshops, mentoring sessions, and networking events for participants	Number of participants, sessions delivered, mentored entrepreneurs	Trainers, mentors, business support organizations
Networking and community building	Month 6	Month 10	Organization of networking events and collaboration activities among participants and stakeholders	Networking events, partnerships created	Business support organizations, community actors
Monitoring and evaluation	Month 11	Month 12	Evaluation of programme results and identification of opportunities for scaling and continuation	Evaluation report, recommendations	Business support organizations, experts

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Action title:		"Who can help me?" directory		Ecosystem category:	Business support
Specific objective/intervention area:				SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Improve the coordination and accessibility of entrepreneurial support services/Establishing an integrated support system	
Description:		This action focuses on the development of a comprehensive, cross-border "Who can help me?" directory designed to function as a practical navigation tool for entrepreneurs at all stages of business development. The directory will consolidate currently fragmented information about business support organizations, funding bodies, advisory services, training providers, incubators, accelerators, chambers of commerce, NGOs, public institutions, and individual experts operating in the Romanian-Hungarian border region. The directory will be structured around user needs rather than institutional logic, allowing entrepreneurs to search support options based on criteria such as business stage (idea, start, growth), type of support (mentoring, finance, legal advice, training, market access), sector, location, and language. Each listed organization will include a clear service description, eligibility conditions, contact details, and referral pathways to other relevant services. A strong emphasis will be placed on clarity, simplicity, and regular updating, addressing one of the key challenges identified in this action plan: entrepreneurs often know that support exists but do not know where to start. The directory will function both as a digital tool and as a reference resource for business support providers themselves, enabling better referrals and coordination across the ecosystem.			
Intended outcome:		Improved transparency, visibility, and usability of entrepreneurial support services across the cross-border area, leading to faster access to relevant assistance, reduced duplication of services, stronger institutional cooperation, and a measurable increase in entrepreneurs using a single entry point when seeking support			
Stakeholders:		Business support organizations, chambers of commerce, incubators and hubs, local and regional authorities, NGOs, educational institutions, individual experts and mentors, IT and communication service providers, entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs (as end users)			
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)					Estimated costs: 5,000-15,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)					Estimated timing: 4-6 months

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IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Mapping and data collection	Month 1	Month 2	Identification and mapping of relevant support organizations, services, and experts on both sides of the border, using existing INSPIRE data as a baseline	Comprehensive service database	Business support organizations, chambers of commerce
Structure and content design	Month 2	Month 3	Development of directory logic, categories, user pathways, and content standards	Directory structure and templates	Ecosystem coordinators
Technical development	Month 3	Month 4	Development of digital interface and search functionality	Functional prototype	IT providers
Validation and launch	Month 4	Month 5	Verification of content with stakeholders and public launch	Published directory	All stakeholders
Dissemination and maintenance setup	Month 5	Month 6	Promotion and definition of update responsibilities	Dissemination kit, update process	Ecosystem coordinators

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Action title:	Business support days	Ecosystem category:	Business support Physical spaces
Specific objective/intervention area:		SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: Improve the coordination and accessibility of entrepreneurial support services/Establishing an integrated support system	
Description:	While many support services technically exist in the cross-border region, they are geographically concentrated, project-based, and difficult to access for rural entrepreneurs. This action proposes the introduction of rotating, locally delivered “business support days” designed to bring coordinated, multi-disciplinary entrepreneurial support closer to entrepreneurs living and operating outside county capitals and major urban centres. Business support days will be organized on a regular basis (in every 2 or 3 months) in smaller towns and rural municipalities, using existing public or community infrastructure such as municipal buildings, libraries, cultural centres, or local hubs. Instead of creating new permanent structures, the action relies on a rotational model, whereby staff, experts, and advisors from urban business support institutions travel to these local venues on scheduled days. This ensures cost-efficiency, flexibility, and the rapid testing of service demand in underserved areas. Each business support day will function as a one-stop, low-threshold access point, offering a combination of services tailored to local needs. These may include introductory business advice, information on funding opportunities, basic legal and administrative guidance, mentoring intakes, referral to specialized services, and short thematic workshops. The exact service mix can be adapted over time based on local feedback and attendance patterns, allowing the model to remain responsive and needs-driven. Beyond direct service provision, business support days also serve an important coordination and trust-building function. By presenting multiple institutions together in a single, accessible format, the action helps reduce the fragmentation of the support ecosystem and strengthens cooperation between organizations that otherwise operate in parallel. For entrepreneurs, especially those with limited prior experience, this format lowers psychological and informational barriers, making support visible, approachable, and human-centred. Over time, the initiative is expected to contribute to greater inclusion of rural and peripheral entrepreneurs, improved continuity of support beyond individual projects, and stronger local embeddedness of regional business support systems. If successful, the model can be maintained, expanded to additional locations, or combined with other actions such as the “Who can help me?” directory and targeted training programmes.		

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Intended outcome:	Improved geographic accessibility of business support services for entrepreneurs in smaller towns and rural areas, increased engagement of underserved groups, and stronger integration of rural entrepreneurs into the broader cross-border entrepreneurial ecosystem				
Stakeholders:	Business support organizations, chambers of commerce, local authorities, libraries and community centres, municipal development agencies, rural and micro-enterprise entrepreneurs				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	8,000-20,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	6-12 months
IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Concept development	Month 1	Month 1	Definition of format (frequency, service types, staff rotation model)	Action plan	Business support organizations
Selecting host location	Month 1	Month 2	Identification of rural and small-town venues	List of host municipalities	Local authorities, libraries and community centres
Coordinating staff rotation	Month 2	Month 3	Assignment of experts and service providers	Expert roster	Business support organizations, chambers of commerce
Service delivery	Month 3	Month 12	Implementation of business support days	Number of sessions and beneficiaries	All stakeholders

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Action title:	Youth Entrepreneurship Skills Programme			Ecosystem category:	Human capital
Specific objective/intervention area:				SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: Enhance young people’s entrepreneurial skills and mindset/Developing skills and attitudes	
Description:	This action aims to introduce a cross-border entrepreneurship education programme for secondary school and university students . The initiative will integrate practical entrepreneurial learning into formal and non-formal education through workshops, training sessions, and project-based activities. Students will participate in interactive learning formats such as entrepreneurship labs, business idea development, and financial literacy sessions. The programme will also involve cooperation between schools, local businesses, and support organizations to provide real-life insights and mentorship, and even cross-border competitions and challenges. By focusing on early-stage skill development, the action will help young people build entrepreneurial mindsets, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. A prototype form of this programme was tested within INSPIRE through two 2-day workshops on 20-20 participants aged between 18 and 30 as a pilot initiative but should be adapted and scaled across the cross-border region. After both trainings, a feedback form was sent out to the participants to support the evaluation process – 50% of them completed it. Their overwhelmingly positive response means that no major changes are necessary in the developed curriculum , therefore, the steps marked with green on the next page are already available to use as a basis .				
Intended outcome:	Improved entrepreneurial skills, mindset, and awareness among young people, leading to increased interest in entrepreneurship and stronger connections between education and the local business environment				
Stakeholders:	Educational institutions (schools), business support organizations, local authorities, teachers, trainers, local businesses, and students				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	15,000-40,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	6-12 months

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IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Programme design and partnership building	Month 1	Month 2	Development of curriculum , identification of participating schools, and establishment of partnerships with stakeholders	Programme framework , partner agreements, selected schools	Schools, business support organizations, local authorities
Training preparation and materials development	Month 3	Month 4	Development of training materials, tools, and interactive learning formats for students	Training materials, workshop plans	Trainers, educators, experts
Programme implementation (workshops & labs)	Month 5	Month 9	Delivery of entrepreneurship workshops, practical sessions, and project-based learning activities for students	Number of sessions, participating students, developed business ideas	Schools, trainers, local businesses
Mentoring and project development	Month 6	Month 10	Support for students in developing their business ideas with guidance from mentors and practitioners	Mentored teams, developed concepts	Mentors, business representatives
Evaluation and results dissemination	Month 11	Month 12	Evaluation of programme outcomes and sharing results with stakeholders for future scaling	Evaluation report, dissemination materials	Business support organizations, schools

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Action title:	Entrepreneur role model & storytelling series	Ecosystem category:	Human capital Culture/community
Specific objective/intervention area:		SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: Enhance young people's entrepreneurial skills and mindset/Developing skills and attitudes	
Description:		This action aims to systematically strengthen entrepreneurial culture and mindset in the cross-border area by making entrepreneurship visible, relatable, and socially valued, especially among young people. Instead of relying solely on formal training or abstract promotion, the action uses real entrepreneurial stories as a learning and inspirational tool, building on the power of personal experience. The programme will identify and involve a diverse pool of local entrepreneurs from both sides of the border, representing different sectors, business stages, geographic locations (urban and rural), and social backgrounds. The focus will not be limited to high-growth or technology-driven enterprises – it will include small local businesses, social enterprises, creative entrepreneurs, and family-owned ventures, reflecting the actual structure of the regional economy. The storytelling series will be delivered through a combination of formats to maximize reach and accessibility. These may include live talks at schools, universities, community spaces, and business events; moderated discussion sessions and Q&As; recorded interviews, short videos, podcasts, and written profiles; as well as informal meet-ups where participants can interact directly with entrepreneurs. The content will be disseminated both offline and online, using partner networks and digital channels to ensure continuous visibility beyond individual events. A key qualitative element of the action is its focus on authentic entrepreneurial journeys, not only on success. Entrepreneurs will be encouraged to speak openly about challenges, failures, uncertainty, financial and emotional pressures, work-life balance, and critical decision points, alongside achievements and milestones. By normalizing difficulty and learning, the action contributes to reducing fear of failure, which was identified as a major barrier to entrepreneurship among young people. The cross-border dimension of the series adds further value by exposing participants to different entrepreneurial environments, institutional contexts, and business cultures within the same region. Joint events or paired stories featuring Romanian and Hungarian entrepreneurs will highlight similarities and contrasts, support mutual understanding, and contribute to the emergence of a shared cross-border entrepreneurial identity. Beyond inspiration, the series also functions as a soft entry point into the broader support ecosystem. Events can be linked to other actions in the action plan (e.g., the Youth Entrepreneurship Skills Programme).	

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Intended outcome:	Increased visibility and social acceptance of entrepreneurship as a realistic career path, strengthened entrepreneurial mindset among young people, reduced fear of failure, stronger connection between local business communities and educational or youth communities, enhanced sense of belonging to a shared cross-border entrepreneurial ecosystem				
Stakeholders:	Local entrepreneurs and business founders, schools and universities, youth organizations, NGOs, business support organizations, chambers of commerce, local authorities, media partners, cultural and community spaces				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	5,000-15,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	4-8 months
IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Role model identification and selection	Month 1	Month 2	Identification of a diverse pool of entrepreneurs, ensuring representation across sectors, age groups, genders, business stages, and urban-rural locations	List of selected role models, consent agreements	Business support organizations, chambers of commerce
Storyline and format design	Month 2	Month 3	Definition of storytelling format, development of guiding questions	Storytelling templates, event formats	Business support organizations
Content production	Month 3	Month 5	Organization and recording of sessions, preparation for dissemination	Number of recorded stories, produced materials	Media partners, entrepreneurs
Public dissemination and events	Month 4	Month 8	Delivery of storytelling events, online publication	Number of events, audience reached	Schools, NGOs, local authorities

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Action title:	Cross-border “shadow” programme	Ecosystem category:	Human capital
Specific objective/intervention area:		SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: Enhance young people’s entrepreneurial skills and mindset/Developing skills and attitudes	
Description:	Interest in entrepreneurship might exist, but many potential entrepreneurs lack realistic insight into what running a business actually involves on a day-to-day basis, often resulting in hesitation, unrealistic expectations, or disengagement at early stages. This programme is designed to provide practical, experience-based exposure to entrepreneurship for young people – students and aspiring entrepreneurs – in the Romanian-Hungarian border region. The programme enables participants to “shadow” experienced entrepreneurs, managers, or company founders for a short, structured period, observing real business operations from inside the enterprise. Unlike traditional internships or training programmes, the shadowing model focuses on observation, reflection, and guided learning, allowing participants to gain a holistic understanding of entrepreneurial decision-making without the pressure of formal performance requirements. Activities may include attending meetings, observing customer interactions, reviewing workflows, and discussing strategic or operational challenges directly with the host entrepreneur. The shadowing experience will be intentionally short-term and well-structured (ranging from one day to several days), ensuring accessibility for students and young adults while minimizing the burden on host businesses. Each shadowing period will follow a clear framework, including an introductory briefing, defined learning objectives, and a reflective debriefing session. This structure ensures that learning outcomes are explicit and that both participants and hosts understand expectations. A defining feature of the programme is its cross-border nature. Participants will be matched with host entrepreneurs in the neighbouring country whenever feasible, exposing them to different legal frameworks, business cultures, market conditions, and professional norms. This experience not only strengthens entrepreneurial competencies but also enhances intercultural awareness, adaptability, and openness to cross-border cooperation – skills that are increasingly important in the regional economy. From the perspective of the host entrepreneurs, the programme offers an opportunity to contribute to the development of the next generation of entrepreneurs, to strengthen ties with educational and support institutions, and to reflect on their own practices through dialogue with participants. Over time, a pool of experienced hosts can emerge, forming an informal mentoring and ambassador network within the cross-border ecosystem.		

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Intended outcome:	Improved understanding of entrepreneurial reality among young people and aspiring entrepreneurs, increased confidence and informed decision-making regarding business creation, strengthened cross-border professional networks, enhanced practical entrepreneurial competencies that complement formal education and training				
Stakeholders:	Host entrepreneurs and SMEs, students and young adults, educational institutions, youth organizations, business support organizations, chambers of commerce, local authorities, ecosystem coordinators facilitating matching and monitoring				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	15,000-25,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	6-12 months
IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Programme framework design	Month 1	Month 2	Development of shadowing model (duration, learning objectives, roles)	Programme description, guidelines	Business support organizations
Host entrepreneur recruitment	Month 2	Month 3	Engagement of entrepreneurs, clarification of expectations	List of host entrepreneurs	Chambers of commerce, SMEs
Participant outreach and selection	Month 3	Month 4	Open call – selection based on motivation and learning interest	Selected participants	Youth organizations, educational institutions
Matching and preparation	Month 4	Month 5	Matching of participants with hosts, preparatory briefings	Matched pairs	Coordinators
“Shadowing” implementation	Month 6	Month 12	Execution of “shadowing” visits, including observation, discussions, and reflective learning elements	Number of completed “shadow” visits	Host entrepreneurs and SMEs

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Action title:	Cross-border mini grant scheme for startups			Ecosystem category:	Finance Markets Business support
Specific objective/intervention area:				SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the market access and financial readiness of local SMEs and new businesses/Providing funding and connections	
Description:	This action aims to pilot a small-scale funding programme for early-stage entrepreneurs in the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border region. Inspired by the Start-Up Nation Romania model , it combines financial support with training and mentoring . Selected participants will receive small, non-reimbursable grants to support the launch or development of their business ideas. In addition, beneficiaries will participate in training sessions covering key entrepreneurial skills such as business planning, financial management, and marketing, and will receive mentoring support . The application process will be simple and transparent , ensuring accessibility for young people, women, and first-time entrepreneurs. The pilot action allows testing and future scaling at cross-border level .				
Intended outcome:	Improved access to funding for early-stage entrepreneurs, leading to the creation and development of new businesses in the cross-border region Increased entrepreneurial skills and capacities through integrated training and mentoring support, as well as stronger cooperation between Romanian and Hungarian business support organizations				
Stakeholders:	Business support organizations, local and regional authorities, business mentors and trainers, financial experts, and early-stage entrepreneurs (target group beneficiaries)				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	20,000-50,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	6-12 months

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IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Programme design and preparation	Month 1	Month 2	Development of the funding scheme framework, eligibility criteria, application process, and preparation of the call for proposals	Programme guidelines, call for applications published	Business support organizations, local authorities
Call launch and selection process	Month 3	Month 4	Promotion of the programme, collection of applications, evaluation, and selection of beneficiaries	Number of applications received, 5-10 selected beneficiaries	Business support organizations, experts, evaluators
Grant implementation and support services	Month 5	Month 10	Disbursement of grants and delivery of training and mentoring to support business development	Number of supported startups, training sessions delivered, mentoring provided	Trainers, mentors, business support organizations
Monitoring and evaluation	Month 11	Month 12	Monitoring progress of supported businesses and evaluating programme results and impact	Evaluation report, recommendations for scaling	Business support organizations, experts

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Action title:	Micro-grant scheme for innovative business ideas			Ecosystem category:	Finance Business support
Specific objective/intervention area:				SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the market access and financial readiness of local SMEs and new businesses/Providing funding and connections	
Description:	This action aims to introduce a simplified micro-grant scheme to support early-stage entrepreneurs and small-scale innovation projects in the cross-border region. The initiative will provide small, easily accessible financial support to individuals or teams for testing, validating, or developing business ideas. The application process will be designed to be simple and fast, reducing administrative barriers and encouraging participation from young entrepreneurs and first-time applicants. In addition to financial support, selected beneficiaries may receive basic mentoring or advisory services to strengthen their business concepts. The scheme will focus on experimentation and early-stage development, allowing participants to test ideas with minimal risk. As a pilot initiative, it can serve as a model for future, larger-scale funding programmes in the cross-border area.				
Intended outcome:	Improved access to small-scale funding for entrepreneurs, increased experimentation and innovation, and stronger capacity of individuals to develop and validate business ideas				
Stakeholders:	Business support organizations, local and regional authorities, financial experts, mentors, and early-stage entrepreneurs				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	10,000-30,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	3-6 months

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IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Scheme design and preparation	Month 1	Month 2	Development of funding scheme structure, eligibility criteria, and simplified application process	Programme guidelines, call for applications	Business support organizations, experts
Call launch and application phase	Month 2	Month 3	Promotion of the scheme and collection of applications from interested participants	Number of applications received	Business support organizations
Selection and funding	Month 3	Month 4	Evaluation of applications and allocation of micro-grants to selected beneficiaries	Number of funded projects	Experts, evaluators
Implementation and support	Month 4	Month 6	Support for beneficiaries in implementing their ideas, including optional mentoring	Developed or tested business ideas	Mentors, business support organizations
Evaluation and follow-up	Month 6	Month 6	Assessment of results and identification of opportunities for scaling the scheme	Evaluation report	Business support organizations

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Action title:	Urban problem-solving challenge	Ecosystem category:	Markets
Specific objective/intervention area:		SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the market access and financial readiness of local SMEs and new businesses/Providing funding and connections	
Description:	This action is designed as a structured programme that connects local authorities with entrepreneurs, startups, and SMEs to jointly address real, clearly defined urban and municipal challenges in the Romanian-Hungarian cross-border region. Within the framework of the challenge, participating municipalities and public institutions will identify and formulate specific problem statements related to their day-to-day operations or longer-term development goals. These may include, for example, challenges in areas such as environmental sustainability, waste management, mobility, energy efficiency, digital public services, citizen engagement, social inclusion, or the revitalization of underused public spaces. The problems will be framed to encourage creativity and allow diverse types of enterprises to participate – they will be invited through an open call. The selected businesses will take part in a timed challenge process, typically consisting of an introductory phase, a solution development period supported by mentoring, and a final pitch session where solutions are presented to the challenge-owners. The cross-border nature of the challenge adds further value by enabling knowledge exchange, peer learning, and market expansion opportunities across national boundaries. Entrepreneurs are exposed to different municipal contexts and needs, while public authorities gain insight into alternative approaches and solutions developed elsewhere in the region. Where feasible, joint or mirrored challenges may be organized, reinforcing the perception of the cross-border area as a shared innovation space rather than two separate markets. From the perspective of municipalities, the challenge format offers a low-risk, pilot-oriented approach to accessing innovative solutions. Rather than committing immediately to large procurement contracts, local authorities can explore ideas, test prototypes, and engage with entrepreneurial actors in a structured yet flexible setting. This builds mutual trust and understanding between the public and private sectors and contributes to a cultural shift toward more collaborative, innovation-friendly governance.		
Intended outcome:	Improved access of SMEs and startups to public markets, increased use of entrepreneurial solutions in addressing local urban challenges, strengthened cooperation and trust between municipalities and businesses, enhanced innovation capacity of both public institutions and local enterprises, creation of pathways from experimentation to implementation		

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Stakeholders:	Local and regional authorities, municipal departments and public service providers, SMEs and startups, innovation hubs and incubators, mentors and technical experts, procurement specialists, business support organizations				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	20,000-30,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	8-12 months
IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Challenge identification and definition	Month 1	Month 2	Municipalities identify urban challenges – problems are translated into clear challenge statements	Published challenge descriptions	Local authorities
Programme design and mentoring setup	Month 2	Month 3	Design of challenge process, selection criteria, mentoring framework, and evaluation method	Challenge guidelines	Innovation hubs
Open call and team selection	Month 3	Month 4	Open call for entrepreneurs, startups, and SMEs – selection of teams based on feasibility and innovation potential	Selected teams	Business support organizations
Solution development phase	Month 5	Month 8	Mentored solution development, including workshops, technical support, and feedback sessions with municipalities	Draft solutions, prototypes	Mentors and technical experts, SMEs and startups, local authorities

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Final presentations and evaluation	Month 9	Month 10	Final pitch event, assessment of solutions by municipalities and experts, identification of pilots or follow-up steps	Winning or shortlisted solutions	Local authorities, mentors and technical experts, procurement specialists
Follow-up and reporting	Month 11	Month 12	Documentation of results, lessons learned, and recommendations for piloting or procurement pathways	Final report	Local authorities, business support organizations, procurement specialists

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Action title:	Funding “Digest”			Ecosystem category:	Finance
Specific objective/intervention area:				SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the market access and financial readiness of local SMEs and new businesses/Providing funding and connections	
Description:	Aspiring entrepreneurs often lack awareness, timely information, and the capacity to interpret complex funding schemes. As a result, viable business ideas remain unfunded or are abandoned at early stages. The Funding “Digest” is designed as a regular, simplified information and orientation tool that improves entrepreneurs’ access to, and understanding of, available funding opportunities at local, national, and EU levels. It will compile and curate relevant, up-to-date funding opportunities into a structured, easily understandable format , translating technical call documents into clear summaries. Rather than replicating official guidelines, the digest will focus on the information entrepreneurs most urgently need, such as eligibility criteria, funding intensity, expected commitments, key deadlines, required documents, and common pitfalls . The digest will be produced and distributed on a regular basis (e.g., semi-annually), ensuring that information remains current while avoiding excessive frequency. Distribution will rely on a network-based approach , using business support organizations, chambers of commerce, local authorities, incubation programmes, and other ecosystem actors as dissemination channels. In this way, the digest also functions as a coordination tool for support providers. A central objective of the digest is to reduce information overload and replace it with clarity and predictability . Many entrepreneurs are discouraged not by the absence of funding, but by the perceived complexity and uncertainty of funding application processes. By presenting opportunities in a concise and comparable format , the Funding “Digest” enables entrepreneurs to make informed strategic decisions about whether and when to apply, and how to prepare in advance.				
Intended outcome:	Improved awareness and understanding of available funding opportunities among entrepreneurs, increased preparedness and confidence in engaging with funding schemes, higher quality of funding applications				
Stakeholders:	Business support organizations, chambers of commerce, local and regional authorities, funding agencies and MAs				
Cost requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated costs:	3,000-8,000 EUR
Time requirements: (use colour on the correct cell)				Estimated timing:	2-3 months

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IMPLEMENTATION STAGES					
Activity	Timing		Description	Output indicators, deliverables	Partners
	Start	End			
Structure and format design	Month 1	Month 1	Definition of structure, categorization of funding types and content standards (length, language, clarity)	Digest template	Business support organizations
Funding opportunity mapping	Month 1	Month 2	Identification and screening of relevant local, national, and EU funding schemes – prioritization based on SME relevance	Compiled funding list	Funding agencies and MAs
Content preparation and validation	Month 2	Month 3	Simplified summaries prepared and reviewed for accuracy and clarity – translation where necessary	Finalized issue	Business support organizations
Publication and dissemination	Month 3	Month 3	Distribution through newsletters, websites, business support days, and partner networks	Distribution metrics	All stakeholders

3 Monitoring progress

The **Network for Regional Development Foundation** and the **Association for Business Promotion in Romania** are dedicated to setting up and monitoring the implementation of this action plan – however, regular external evaluations should also be incorporated into the process later on to avoid bias and ensure reliable quality management. As an ASP of the INSPIRE project, the **Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County** is also available for implementation and monitoring.

It is important to note that **before** any further **implementation** can take place, the partners will need to create a **detailed budget, finding and securing multiple funding sources**. Therefore, realizing and continuing the listed **actions** will **most likely start in 2027**.

Most of the actions are intended to set up procedures, programmes, and services that should be maintained and repeated for a long time, therefore, **reporting in the first few years of implementation** (i.e., in 2027 and 2028) should happen at least **biannually** to provide adequate time for addressing issues that might hinder long-term sustainability – **after** the first major evaluation at **the end of 2028**, reports can become **annual** instead (if deemed safe by the stakeholders). Reports should be done using a **standardized reporting template, focusing on ongoing actions** (see below).

DATE									
MADE BY									
NAME/TITLE OF THE ACTION									
Action summary (500-1000 characters)		Can be copied from the action plan							
Progress description (1500-2000 characters)									
Indicate rate of progress by marking one of the options below.									
10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Stakeholders involved		List of organizations and their task(s) in the reporting period							
Outcomes achieved (500-1000 characters)		Schedule and related milestones (past) List of outputs and deliverables (achieved)							
Future outcomes (500-1000 characters)		Planned schedule and related future milestones Remaining outputs and deliverables							
Risks – past and future (e.g., delays, lack of resources, deviations from the initial plan)									

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The individual action reports should be **shared with the stakeholders who are involved** in their implementation. In case of **major deviations**, it is recommended to **organize a meeting** where the involved parties can discuss necessary measures.

As mentioned above, the **first major review** should take place at the **end of 2028** – at that point in time, the partners foresee that most of the actions will be in progress. The review should result in an **updated version of the action plan** – **actions** that couldn't be started until that date should be **examined and modified** as necessary to remain included in the document. A similar review evaluation must happen in **every two years after 2028** – these are the occasions when **external experts should be involved** for a different point of view. As indicated in the vision statement, **implementation should end in 10 years' time, 2037**.

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Bibliography

INSPIRE Application Form (ROHU00283)

INSPIRE Joint analysis of entrepreneurship support (2025)

C4TALENT: [Building Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in Small and Medium-Sized Towns](#) – A practical guide for urban policymakers and practitioners (2026)