



*European Entrepreneurial Region Award
presents*

Best practices for SME support in EU regions and cities

Region & country	Best practice	Description	More information
Supporting the innovation of SMEs for the green and digital transition			
Business Region Gothenburg (Sweden)	Gothenburg Green City Zone	<p>Gothenburg Green City Zone is an initiative by the City of Gothenburg, implemented through Business Region Göteborg, Volvo Cars and RISE Research Institutes of Sweden, where business, the public sector, academia and institutes work together to test and develop the emission-free transport system of the future, where we test new technology for both vehicles and infrastructure with the aim of achieving emission-free transport by 2030.</p> <p>Thanks to the collaboration and foresight Gothenburg has become a testbed where ideas have come to fruition, opening up more rapid and effective ways of making sustainable solutions of the future achievable.</p> <p>We have created a full-scale test environment where we live test and develop the transport of the future. We test innovations, scale up proven solutions and look for ideas that don't exist yet. Several parallel projects</p>	Gothenburg Green City Zone - Invest in Gothenburg

		and collaborations are currently underway, such as wireless charging of taxis, transition to electrified freight transport, and exploring how electric cars batteries can be used to strengthen local electricity grids.	
Asturias (Spain)	Open Innovation 4.0	<p>The Open Innovation 4.0 Asturias is a public-private collaboration initiative set up by SEKUENS, CEEI Asturias and leading companies established in Asturias, that allows the acceleration and traction of young startups to the market. It is framed in a context of open innovation allowing the leading companies to interact with the entrepreneurial ecosystem and advance in their technological challenges.</p> <p>Through this program leading companies from different economic sectors present their technological challenges in the field of industry 4.0 and an open call is launched for startups to present their solutions as digital enablers. Each leading company selects the most appropriate solution and the binomial <i>leading company-startup</i> participate in the Industry 4.0 Acceleration Program for the definition of the joint project to achieve the real development and implementation. After five editions, the results of the program give 31 leading companies, 28 technological solutions implemented and 172 startups involved.</p> <p>The Open Innovation 4.0 Asturias counts with international recognition, since it has received the “European Enterprise Promotion Awards, EEPA” 2019, by the European Commission and is one of the pillars of the Asturias Digital Innovation Hub selected by the programme DIHELP. Based on its success, the program has been extended and tested in other areas to strength the digitalization. It has been transferred by CEEI Asturias to national level through the Spanish Association of European Business Centres (ANCES) to the Ances Open Innovation Program and through the AT-Virtual Project (Interreg VB Atlantic Area) lead by CEEI Asturias, at the European context. AT Virtual, has got relevant outcomes for future transferences, being the most important the platform for open innovation</p>	https://dihelp.eu

		<p>which covers all phases for a successful implementation process of I4.0 solutions.</p>	
<p>Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy)</p>	<p>Developing shipping industry ecosystem</p>	<p>In 2021 the FVG region, based on the priorities defined in its S3 strategy, launched a vast project building a solid ecosystem in maritime technologies, implemented through the approach based on a strategic foresight and better integration of the various research institutions located in our region with the world of businesses, including SMEs.</p> <p>The initiative is being implemented in the framework of the Vanguard Initiative (VI), based on call for pilots, with FVG taking the leadership of the demonstration case H2 in shipping, which aims to address the new energy/environmental challenge by using the clean hydrogen for greening the shipping sector.</p> <p>This demo-case will bring the innovative topic of hydrogen in the maritime supply chain (energy supply system, H2 production, certification, storage, transport, distribution/refuelling stations, and end-users) to an international level by searching complementarities among the other regions. Practical activities consist in sharing expertise, knowledge, facility centres, Labs, test beds among the regions in order to overcome some defined technologic bottlenecks.</p> <p>The initiative has started last year but only now we are capitalising some results (creation of the regional ecosystem based on 4 helix (Public Authorities, Academia, Enterprises, Tech Cluster specialised in the maritime sector). The key actor inside this <i>demo-case</i> are the FVG Region (all DGs), the Maritime Technology Cluster FVG, the University of Trieste and a large number of enterprises (SMEs being gradually involved in the project).</p>	<p>Hydrogen (H2) Vanguard Initiative (s3vanguardinitiative.eu)</p>

<p>Extremadura (Spain)</p>	<p>Bioeconomy and Circular Economy High Tech Incubator</p>	<p>The High Technology Incubator in Bioeconomy and Circular Economy (Incubadora de Alta Tecnología en Bioeconomía y Economía Circular – IAT) offers support to new technology-based companies and accelerate business projects that respond to the challenges and opportunities arising directly from the market, the agro-industrial sector or research results in relation to the concepts of Bioeconomy and Circular Economy.</p> <p>The IAT provides entrepreneurs and SMEs with a set of networking and support services to de-risk their innovation journey to develop new products and processes from the region's natural resources, by-products and waste of the agri-food industry.</p> <p>As initiatives can be at different development stages, the IAT provides them with a comprehensive support to meet their particular needs, from assessing the feasibility of a technological solution idea or business project, to developing and validating a prototype at pilot scale, to accessing market and scaling-up.</p> <p>The IAT is managed and developed by the Centre for Scientific and Technological Research of Extremadura (CICYTEX) in partnership with FUNDECYT-PCTEX and Extremadura AVANTE. It is an initiative co-financed by the ERDF.</p> <p>In a nutshell, the IAT can be considered a success story for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • combining public funds from different sources to provide a comprehensive support to entrepreneurs and SMEs in line with European policies related to the Bioeconomy and the Circular Economy, such as the European Green Deal. • providing access to unique scientific and technological equipment; • enabling inter-institutional coordination to deliver expert mentoring that integrates scientific-technological, business and market advice. 	<p>https://www.iatex.es/en/home/</p>
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<p>Helsinki-Uusimaa (Finland)</p>	<p>Test Bed Helsinki</p>	<p>In the Helsinki-Uusimaa region, our cities have pioneered initiatives like Testbed Helsinki, providing a platform for SMEs to engage in the testing of innovative technologies in a safe and supportive environment. The core idea is that the whole city serves as an innovation platform – known as testbeds, which are physical or virtual environments accessible to all city partners. The development and testing of new products and services are carried out in real-life conditions together with companies, city staff, end-users, universities, polytechnics, and research institutes.</p> <p>For instance, in the field of health technical and medical technology, Health Proof Helsinki project combines Helsinki's three most significant public research, development and innovation environments (RDI environments) in the form of a unified service for companies with Early-stage preclinical testing environments and expertise (Metropolia Proof Health), research and testing environments and expertise in primary health care and social work (City of Helsinki), and research environments and expertise in specialist care and diagnostics (HUS Helsinki University Hospital).</p>	<p>https://testbed.hel.fi/en/Health Proof Helsinki - About</p>
<p>Overijssel Province (Netherlands)</p>	<p>Perron 038 innovation center</p>	<p>Perron038 is an innovation center where companies (inter alia SMEs), educational institutions, technicians and students meet to share and develop knowledge to accelerate innovation for the manufacturing industry. Perron38 is setting up 5 laboratories with the newest technical equipment for the regional manufacturing industry. Here the regional SMEs can explore and investigate how the equipment fits in their process of product development and their production processes. Companies, students and technicians collectively do research and development (R&D) under the</p>	<p>Perron038 - The place for the innovative manufacturing industry in Zwolle</p>

		<p>motto 'test before invest'. This makes Perron038 the center for smart industry in the region of Zwolle in the Dutch province of Overijssel, that has a large SME sector.</p> <p>Content-wise the emphasis lies on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robotics & Logistics • Additive Manufacturing (3d printing) • Artificial Intelligence (the collection and analysis of data) • Vision & Optics Lab (camera technology) • Flex Factory of the Future (the simulation and testing of production processes) <p>These types of public/private financed test and demonstration facilities are very important to encourage and stimulate SMEs to do R&D activities, but also to innovative investments in their own business operations.</p> <p>The project is financed by de REACT-EU program.</p>	
<p>Western Pomerania (Poland)</p>	<p>Innovation Broker</p>	<p>The activity is dedicated to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises looking for innovations for their company and sources of financing, and in need of tips and contacts for cooperation with scientific units. SMEs learn about the prospects for implementing innovations in their company, discuss development barriers and opportunities and forms of starting cooperation with R&D institutes.</p> <p>In 2022, a tool (application) was created for self-examination of the level of innovation development in the company and covered 124 companies. In the next stage, experts conducted in-depth innovation audits in 15 companies with the greatest potential for innovative development, which indicated, among others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what barriers/gaps exist in the entrepreneur's activity that prevent the implementation of innovations; 	<p>Broker Innowacji (wzp.pl)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what actions an entrepreneur can carry out to optimize processes in his business and increase his potential for cooperation with the innovation ecosystem; - with which West Pomeranian universities it can cooperate and to what extent; what external financing an entrepreneur can obtain to support innovative activities (e.g. loans/credits granted on commercial terms, non-repayable subsidies, loans/credits granted on preferential terms, tax exemptions and reliefs, bank guarantees); - what are the technical, legal and organizational aspects related to the transfer of technology to and from the enterprise. <p>In total, 139 innovation analyzes were performed as part of the Innovation Broker.</p>	
Famalicao Municipality (Portugal)	Local Innovation Ecosystem Platform	<p>As part of the Famalicao Made In Strategy, the City Council of Famalicão developed in 2021 a multidisciplinary working group composed of researchers in different subjects, such as augmented artificial intelligence, microelectronics, electromechanics microsystems, composed materials, micro-nano manufacturing, biotechnology and bioengineering, in a total of more than 15 research centres, 4 universities, 4 technological centres, 3 incubators, to cooperate and to assist SME in their innovation processes. We promote innovation missions inside companies inviting them to share their problems and challenges within processes and product innovation and the researchers to analyse and give relevant feedback, as well as to challenge companies to assess innovation programs and capability.</p> <p>This is a supportive ecosystem for technology, innovation, learning, and knowledge which brings together different partners from universities, research and technological centres to local businesses and SMEs and gives</p>	Famalicão Made In (famalicaomadein.pt)

		<p>the results of the research a market value, by transforming knowledge into innovation.</p> <p>This good practice is being a huge contribution to the effectiveness of the local industrial strategy from Made IN Famalicão to Created IN Famalicão.</p>	
<p>Reducing administrative burdens and improving the level of services and the interaction between the public administration and SMEs</p>			
<p>Madrid (Spain)</p>	<p>Open line against overregulation</p>	<p>In a changing and dynamic economy, excessive regulation constitutes an obstacle to implementing new ideas or businesses. This reality becomes particularly relevant in situations like the one we are experiencing in our Region, where companies, to move forward, need to adapt quickly, rapidly, and dynamically to the new needs posed by the market.</p> <p>In this context, the project called “<u>Línea abierta contra la Hiperregulación</u>” (‘Open Line Against Overregulation’) emerges: through a simple web form, a tool is made available to citizens, entrepreneurs, or other professional groups through which they can inform the Administration about the excess of regulation that prevents or hinders the development of an idea or business. We commit to analyzing each case and carrying out the relevant regulatory modifications or derogations within our competence.</p> <p>Since its launch in March 2021 and during these two first years, a total of 205 initiatives have been promoted and implemented to make life easier for the residents of Madrid and to make investment in Madrid more attractive and agile.</p> <p>We understand that those who encounter an obstacle on the path to undertaking or exercising their activity are best equipped to identify it, and that is why we have created this channel of direct interaction with the Administration. Furthermore, as a result of this initiative, awareness of deregulation is being generated within the administrative system,</p>	<p>Línea abierta contra la hiperregulación Comunidad de Madrid</p>

		promoting systems of regulatory review and the elimination of obsolete requirements.	
Helsinki-Uusimaa (Finland)	Circular PSP	<p>The Circular PSP project entails building an innovative information system platform that utilises artificial intelligence to help with circular economy supporting public procurements.</p> <p>The project, funded from the EU Horizon Europe Pre Commercial Procurement Programme (PCP), ircularPSP brings together 7 procurers from 7 countries, representing 45 million citizens, to invest €5.64 million in R&D to tackle the common challenges following a pre-commercial procurement (PCP) approach.</p> <p>The project is set to increase the volume of circular procurement and widen commercialisation opportunities for green digital companies and result in EU leadership in Circular Economy.</p> <p>The core tools of the project are artificial intelligence (AI) specialised in the domain of CE, a public service platform making the AI available to staff and businesses in the local economy and a circular change framework to transition from a linear mindset. Together, the solution will enable municipalities to better prepare future public procurements to be more circular.</p>	Circular-PSP - Home (circularpsp.eu)
Valencia (Spain)	Plan Simplifica	<p>Plan Simplifica 2024-2026 is a “coordinated, single and coherent” strategy in terms of regulatory simplification, streamlining and reduction of administrative burdens within the framework of the administration and its instrumental public sector.</p> <p>It is proposed as a Preliminary Draft Law regulating the bases and principles of administrative simplification will have the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotion of the culture of simplification in the public administration ○ Verification, evaluation and simplification of the entire legal system and procedures ○ Promotion of e-government measures 	Así es el Plan Simplifica de Mazón, el camino hacia una eficiencia administrativa (valenciaextra.com) (version ES)

		<p>The Plan includes the development of a series of measures in three areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship, which is part of an ambitious technological project of the Administration to enable citizens to interact in a friendlier and more effective way with the administration. • Business, closely related to the business channel. This project, which requires phases of development, involves in this first instance the unification of portals aimed at business people and the agile search for procedures that are of interest to them. • Internal, which involves the internal purging of active procedures for citizens/businesses, the adoption of an appropriate taxonomy of procedures, the complete document management of procedures and the implementation of a general file manager. As well as the rationalisation and simplification of a series of administrative procedures of the Generalitat that present serious deficiencies in their management due to organisational, technological or regulatory issues in the field of industry and social services. <p>The Plan is complemented by the regulatory measures mentioned above, as well as by the creation of an Office of Administrative Simplification, which will design and implement the simplification and rationalisation of the procedures of the Generalitat and its public sector, promoting the training of public employees in this area.</p>	
<p>Overijssel Province (Netherlands)</p>	<p>Implementation of simplified cost options in ERDF projects</p>	<p>The Overijssel Province adopted in the programming period 2021-2027 new simplification measures for the ERDF funded projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fixed hourly rate <p>The rate of an employee in a project is no longer determined on the basis of the pay slip. Instead a fixed hourly rate is used for everyone. There is no hassle anymore with pay slips and adjustments after an employee has started earning more. At the start of a new project the</p>	

		<p>hours an employee will spend on the project will be determined. The number of hours will be multiplied by €55. This sum will determine the eligible wage costs. The first experiences with this new working method are very good, both for project partners as well as for the management authority of the ERDF.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1% surcharge on third party costs <p>Invoices under the amount of €250 will no longer be processed. Instead, each invoice will be increased by 1% at a flat rate. This saves a lot of costs and time on checking of small amounts of money. The aim of this measure is to reduce administrative costs and burden.</p>	
Facilitating SME access to finance, including the sustainable finance			
Asturias (Spain)	The 4th Investors Club	<p>CEEI Asturias has implemented a new and sustainable program to access private funding for early-stage startups. The “4th Investors Club” is an unconventional Investors Club that brings together individuals with interest in the startups world, however approached on a different investor profile. The investor from this club is a young professional who can contribute with contacts and experience beyond their financial investment. They always invest smaller amounts in co-investment. The Club has been annually expanded and currently counts with a total of 126 members, who regularly receive investment proposals for innovative Asturian startups with high growth potential. Once the investors have selected the proposals of their interest, the club held meetings between the 2 actors during which the startups present their business models and financial needs to investor.</p> <p>Early-stages startups interested in getting funds through private capital, count with the support from CEEI Asturias throughout the funding process based on its tailored Investment Readiness Program, providing also intensive and practical workshops with tools and strategies for an efficient</p>	

		<p>communication. In terms of indicators: 35 startups involved since 2018, 9 closed investment agreements, 447,500€ private funding provided by the club and a total of 1,660,000€ invested by the startups.</p>	
<p>Extremadura (Spain)</p>	<p>Crowdfundmatch programme</p>	<p>Extremadura region, with eight other European regions, leads the Crowdfundmatch project, financed by the new Interreg Europe programme. The project, scheduled until 2027, focuses on leveraging crowdfunding as an alternative funding instrument to optimize the use of EU public funds, specifically European Structural and Investment Funds.</p> <p>Among the key aspects of the Crowdfundmatch project, we can mention a more efficient use of public funds, since crowdfunding can enhance the efficiency of public fund spending and maximizing the impact of investments.</p> <p>As for the advantages of crowdfunding, it can contribute to the digitization of both public and private sectors, fostering technological advancements and innovation. At business level, it permits to test citizen engagement, since consumers are directly involved in the funding process. New products/services can also be verified by end-users. This feedback increases the quality and relevance of offerings, contributing to better market alignment.</p> <p>The project is based on Extremadura's experience in fundmatching, having implemented a pilot programme in 2013-2014 in reward-based crowdfunding, financed partly by the ESF and the ERDF.</p> <p>Currently, the partners of Crowdfundmatch are developing a common fund-matching scheme methodology for pilot testing in 2025 and Extremadura is exploring the feasibility of working not only with reward-based crowdfunding but also with investment-based crowdfunding since it broadens the scope of funding options available to SMEs.</p>	<p>CROWDFUNDMATCH - Unlocking the Crowdfunding Potential for the European Structural and Investment Funds Interreg Europe - Sharing solutions for better policy</p>

		<p>In brief, Crowdfundmatch represents an opportunity to ease access for SMEs to finance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More efficiency in the use of structural funds and in the allocation of these funds (according to the market response). - Creation of new co-financing instruments based on public-private collaboration and networks of qualified investors for new start-ups/strategic projects. - Development of new public-private co-financing instruments specific to alternative financing that can be replicated in other EU countries thanks to the new regulations on the harmonisation of alternative financing platforms, - Creation of more flexible financing alternatives for SMEs with direct public support through co-financing. 	
<p>Gothenburg Business Region (Sweden)</p>	<p>Green Bonds</p>	<p>The City of Gothenburg issues bonds to finance various environmental projects in areas such as renewable energy, public transport, water treatment, energy efficiency, city planning and waste management.</p> <p>By setting up the Green Bond Framework, the City of Gothenburg aims to mobilise debt capital to support the transition to an environmentally sustainable city by 2030. The City has been committed to sustainable finance for a long time and was the first city in the world to issue a green bond in 2013. In April 2022, Gothenburg became the first city to link sustainability targets with a loan facility. The City was also one of the founders of the Nordic Public Sector Issuers' Position Paper on Green Bond Impact Reporting, first published in 2017 with the aim of providing guidance on impact reporting for Nordic public sector issuers.</p>	

South Moravia & Brno	Prototype and Validate	<p>Prototype and Validate is a program supporting the creation of a prototype of an innovative product or service for companies from Brno and the region.</p> <p>The creation of a quality product or service and its launch on the market is preceded by a number of preparatory steps. One of them is the prototyping phase.</p> <p>In the Czech Republic, there is no financial instrument at national level that would support the early phase of innovative projects of small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, the statutory city of Brno decided to provide financial resources for the development and production of the prototype, including the necessary verification with potential customers.</p> <p>The Prototype and Validate program supports business projects in the early stages of development. By Czech standards, this is an original concept, with which the city of Brno followed up on the previous successful program with similar targeting SME Instrument Brno. Dozens of projects apply for each of the challenges of the Prototype and Verify program. In the final round, in which a jury consisting of representatives of the city of Brno, JIC and successful entrepreneurs from the local environment selects the winners.</p>	Prototypuj a ověřuj - BrnoIN
Closing the skills gap of SMEs for green and digital transitions			
Barcelona (Spain)	IT Academy	<p>The IT Academy is a training model alternative to the traditional teaching one to train people willing to work in the ICT sector in a short period of time. It is a public response (implemented in cooperation with the city's social and economic ecosystem) to a social and economic need in the context of a rapid and deep digital boosting in many economic sectors and was launched as a response to the lack of IT skilled professionals in Barcelona.</p> <p>The objective of the programme is to reinforce the ICT companies' competitiveness by providing them with highly skilled professionals in</p>	IT Academy - Aprèn a programar en 18 setmanes - Barcelona Activa (barcelonactiva.cat)

		<p>a very short period, only 18 weeks. It aims to train 3,000 programmers in 5 years (2020 - 2024).</p> <p>The results of the programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2370 people trained between 2019 and 2022. • Actions to promote the incorporation of women, reaching the 40% of female students in 2022. • 353 companies reached, being the 70% of them from the IT sector. Examples: Accenture, Apple, Copernicus, Altran... • Reskilling training contributes to generate the 11% of the IT professionals of the city of Barcelona. • 82 % of labour insertion (re-skilling training) 	
Helsinki-Uusimaa (Finland)	EU Year of Skills 2023 activities	<p>Helsinki-Uusimaa has been actively involved in up-skilling and re-skilling schemes, particularly by deploying a European social fund. For instance, during the European Entrepreneurial Region Year 2021-2022, our region's Universities of Applied Sciences developed and piloted Circular Economy training instruments and packages for SMEs, digitalized incubation activities, and developed an innovative model for sustainable public procurement. which emphasises the green and digital transition and the integration of disadvantaged groups.</p>	<p>Helsinki-Uusimaa – Kestävä ja digitaalinen yrittäjyysalue 2021-2022 - Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu</p>