



# SME supporting programmes in R&I

## Identifying good practices and suggesting ways forward



### What is it for?

We collected and analysed a significant volume of information about national and regional programmes supporting SMEs in research and innovation across the EU (plus B&H). We also gathered the views of individual SMEs on their experiences in participating in SME supporting programmes.

But what does all this collective wisdom tell us about what makes a good programme in supporting SMEs in research and innovation? What should be the main principles in designing SME supporting programmes in research and innovation? What are the ways forward based on the SME community?



### What makes a good practice programme?

SMEs were asked about the major problems and needs in participating in R&I programmes as well as the reasons for not participating and the overall problems in undertaking research and innovation activities. From the SMEs' point of view this is what makes a good SME supporting programme:

- Administration elements: simple administrative requirements and procedures, short times-to-contract and funding,
- Financing elements: high funding rates, and improved access to finance,
- Awareness and counselling elements: provision of personal counselling, mentoring and mediation to SMEs before and during the project, and improved publicity and marketing of the programmes.

SMEs also indicated programmes that they consider present most of these features according to their experiences in participating in them. Based on their views good practice programmes include for example:

Name of Programme	Cluster/type of programme
Avanza (I+D) programme (ES)	Sectoral
CDTI – PID (ES)	Open
Ideas (LT)	SME-targeted
Industry 2015 (IT)	Sectoral
Innocsekk (HU)	SME-targeted
KMU Innovativ (DE)	Sectoral
Support for market oriented R&D activities (HU)	'Open'
Supporting business innovations (HU)	SME-targeted
Verbundforschung (BW) (DE)	'Open'
Vinnova Forska & Vax (SE)	SME-targeted
VMSP – APVV (SK)	SME-targeted
ZIM – Cooperation (DE)	SME-targeted
FFG – Basisprogramme (AT)	-
FFG Cooperation Bonus (AT)	-

These programmes received several positive remarks across all R&D capacity groups of SMEs in terms of the degree to which they could be considered as good practice programmes. Adding to the list several programme managers interviewed noted the Innovation Vouchers (existing in UK, NL, DK, SN, DE) as good practice cases highlighting the simple and speedy procedures and administration.

One would expect that most of these good practice cases would belong to the SME-targeted cluster of programmes reflecting high SME relevance and participation (high budget allocated to SMEs, high success rates, limited time-to-contract). However, it is interesting to note that it is not only the SME-targeted cluster presenting good practice programmes, nor that the SME-target cluster programmes have all the good practice elements.

These findings suggest that there is still a lot of room for improvement in the programmes specially targeting SMEs, while other programmes although not mainly oriented towards SMEs can and do allow programme features favouring SME participation.

The SME respondents were also given the chance to compare national and EU programmes in relation to the degree to which they satisfied the SMEs needs. Overall, there was greater appreciation of the EU programmes over the national ones in relation to internationalisation, networking and reputation benefits. At the same time, the special needs of SMEs (in terms of compliance of programme objectives, funding periods, reporting and administration) were considered to be taken into account more easily in national / regional programmes rather than EU programmes. Thus a higher appreciation of national programmes was noted in this regard, alongside certain scepticism against EU R&D programmes especially by SMEs with little or no EU programme experience.

## How should we proceed from now on?

Reflecting their needs and barriers in participation in R&I programmes, the SMEs made several recommendations referring to administration financial and non-financial supporting issues. These were largely echoed by the programme managers and SME stakeholders' views that were gathered by MaPEer. In total, the recommendations made by programme officers, individual SMEs and SME stakeholders form four major categories:

- Recommendations related to programme design: improve the accessibility of programmes to SMEs recommendations by covering all sectors and sizes of SMEs, apply a demand-driven approach by focusing more on SME needs, developing measures to support access to market and faster commercialisation of R&D results;
- Recommendations related to programme administration / management: cutting red tape, simplifying overall reporting and administrative requirements, more transparent evaluation procedures, shortening time-to-contract and time-to-funding, increase publicity and marketing of programmes;
- Recommendations related to programme finance issues: increasing funding rates;
- Recommendations related to broader financial issues: improve access to risk finance, lowering barriers on access to external funds / financing, increasing tax incentives for SMEs that develop R&D activities;
- Recommendations related to knowledge and networks: providing counselling, mentoring and assistance to SMEs before and during the project, create networks between industry and knowledge institutions.

The European Experts Panel on SMEs and Research created under MaPEer addressed the total of the above points with very concrete suggestions. It even made additional recommendations extending to the overall barriers to SMEs in undertaking research and innovation activities. These included, among others, redefining SME categorisation and establishing different participating rules in state aid programmes, adopting 'open innovation' practices to foster better inter-firm collaboration, mandating a minimum participation of SMEs in certain EU large initiatives like PPPs or ETPs, shifting from the concept of "powerful research" and 'excellent research' to "powerful exploitation" and excellent innovation, fostering pre-commercial Procurement procedures oriented to facilitate the involvement of SMEs, or intensifying the dissemination of good practices between the EU and national levels.



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