

Entrepreneurial education and support systems for entrepreneurs called for at iEER Midterm Conference in Brussels

The iEER Interreg Europe project –*Boosting innovative entrepreneurship ecosystem in regions for young entrepreneurs* organized its midterm conference on 22 – 23 March in Brussels. Conference attracted over 100 participants from all over Europe including project partners, regional and public authorities, business associations, and other relevant EU stakeholders to discuss and learn about findings and experiences from the first two years of the project.

The first day started with a plenary session giving the overview and setting the scene to the conference. The First Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions and the Chairman of the iEER High Level Committee Mr. Markku Markkula gave welcoming words and reminded that the main objective of the iEER project was to encourage regions to take entrepreneurship as their key target, at the time when there wasn't enough evidence of the entrepreneurial ecosystems at the regional level. He also encouraged the participants to think what will be the next steps for the network and concept of the EER hosted by the European Committee of the Regions.



In the plenary session some tangible results of the project, such as an interactive [eHandbook](#) and startup development phases framework, were introduced by **Cathy Giles** and **David Kanewaran**, Institute of Technology Tralee which is the technical responsible for the interregional learning of the iEER. The iEER posed a policy framework to develop a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem covering 11 phases from -5 to 5. For developing a conducive entrepreneurship ecosystem, iEER called for more focus and policy attention to the entrepreneurial education and mindset activation in early childhood, continuing throughout a person's learning journey, as well as efforts for the authorities in the monitoring and evaluation of the policy intervention.

After the plenary session the participants took part in four different parallel sessions. At parallel sessions regional stakeholders presented their good practises in the fields of entrepreneurial competence and mindset activations, startup and acceleration support, supporting startups in outlying areas, and implementation of smart specialisation strategies for young entrepreneurs. Sessions enabled valuable exchange of views and discussions between project partners and EU stakeholders.

European Commission Vice-President Katainen called on regions to contribute to the EU budget debate

Second day was more policy-oriented and the discussions focused on how entrepreneurial success could be delivered through various growth and jobs programmes. Keynote speaker, the Vice-President of the European Commission Mr. Jyrki Katainen mentioned that two global megatrends, namely circular economy and artificial intelligence, will bring opportunities for entrepreneurs, and public policy should thus be geared



towards them. Katainen said also that access to finance is a continuous problem for the European SMEs and a major barrier for investments. Therefore, action at the EU level is crucial. Today, EU supports SMEs through various financial instruments such as COSME and Horizon 2020 which are complemented by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). In fact, approximately 600 000 SMEs have already been supported during the two years of EFSI. For the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) the European Commission is planning a new *investEU* fund. The idea is to bring the current seven different financial instruments for SME under a single umbrella.

Furthermore, Commissioner Katainen encouraged cities and regions to take actively part in the current EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) process and bring ideas on how to effectively use EU funds beyond 2020. Katainen called upon the participants to not to leave the MFF only to the national governments as regions' voices are needed.

The first panel discussed the role of public sector in facilitating favourable environment for entrepreneurship. It is suggested, following the findings of the iEER project report, that entrepreneurship education support and investments are needed in the very early stages. It is of

utmost importance that entrepreneurial spirit among the students is fostered in universities. Panel members were also asked how would they allocate EU funding to support young entrepreneurs. There was a common understanding that entrepreneurial exchange programmes, funds for education, awareness raising, and Erasmus for Clusters would improve the current situation.

SMEs and multinationals are experiencing different kinds of realities. While the other enjoys various benefits and access to information, support and infrastructure the other is alone in the market. The second panel session concentrated on what can be done in the future regarding iEER regions delivering growth and jobs for startups and young entrepreneurs. Experience of Kerry County, Brandenburg, West Region Romania and Valencia in getting to know what other regions are doing bring added value for their regions and evidently for everyone in Europe. Public-Private Partnerships models were integral in implementing the projects effectively. Territorial integration, regional differences, importance of the outlying areas, differentiation of services and support for different regions, support systems and safety nets i.e. social security schemes for entrepreneurs and their families are crucial.



The conference was concluded with a signatory session. High level representatives from each of the iEER region signed a distinguished regional iEER action plan. The ten regional actions plans amounts to a total of 50 actions in developing and implementing entrepreneurship support and policy in the iEER regions. They will be

implemented and invested with 11 Growth and Jobs Programmes during 2018-2020.

The action plans are committed by 10 European regions affiliated with the European Entrepreneurial Region Award, including Hauts de France, Brandenburg State from Germany, Region of Southern Denmark, Marche from Italy, Valencia from Spain, Kerry from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Polish West Pomerania, West Region Romania, and Helsinki-Uusimaa region, being the lead partner.

The iEER is part of the **Interreg Europe** community of the European Union in driving better regional policy and capacity building of the public sector for Europe.