



European
Commission

Guidebook Series

How to support SME Policy
from Structural Funds.

Supporting the Internationalisation of SMEs

Enterprise
and Industry

7

Guidebook Series

How to support SME Policy
from Structural Funds.

Supporting the Internationalisation of SMEs

A guide for policy makers, stakeholders and managing authorities, especially at regional level, who want to help small and medium-sized enterprises seize international market opportunities — both in the EU and worldwide — supported by the EU Structural Funds.

This guidebook has been compiled by the European Commission on the basis of the sources listed in annex 2. The views expressed in this document do not, however, necessarily represent the opinion of the European Commission.

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Translations of this guidebook into a number of European languages are available on the web.

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/regional-sme-policies>.

While this guidebook has been drafted with the intention of helping stakeholders use EU Structural Funds to assist SMEs, the information is provided without assuming any legal responsibility for correctness or completeness. Specific requests to use EU Structural Funds will always be assessed under the rules in force on the date and in the country of application.

This guidebook is part of a series. The titles published so far are:

- Nr. 1 Building Entrepreneurial Mindsets and Skills in the EU
- Nr. 2 Using standards to support growth, competitiveness and innovation
- Nr. 3 Facilitating Transfer of Business
- Nr. 4 The Smart Guide to Service Innovation
- Nr. 5 SBA implementation at regional level
- Nr. 6 How to use Structural Funds for SME & Entrepreneurship Policy
- Nr. 7 Supporting the Internationalisation of SMEs

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Foreword



In a globalised world, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to be able to withstand increasing competition from developed and emerging economies and to plug into the market opportunities these countries provide. There is a direct link between internationalisation and increased SME performance. International activities reinforce growth and employment, enhance competitiveness and support the long-term sustainability of companies. Yet European SMEs still depend largely on their domestic markets despite the opportunities offered by the wider EU single market and by globalisation at large.

The EU's strategy for SMEs, laid out in the Small Business Act for Europe, launched by the Commission in June 2008 and reviewed in 2011, called on the EU and the Member States to support SMEs and encourage them to benefit from the growth of markets outside the EU, in particular through market-specific support and business training activities.

In doing so they can benefit from the increased emphasis on SME competitiveness and innovation in the EU Structural and Investment Funds, and in particular the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which is by far the largest EU funding source in support of SMEs.

In 2007-2013, the Structural Funds provided some EUR 70 billion in support of enterprises, predominantly to SMEs. Almost 200 000 projects funded by the ERDF provided assistance specifically to SMEs (many projects supporting multiple SMEs). Those projects resulted in 78 000 start-ups and the creation of at least 268 000 permanent jobs in SMEs (with many more jobs saved). These outputs will continue to grow as the projects continue until the end of 2015.

We recommend this guide to policy makers, stakeholders and managing authorities, especially at regional level, hoping it will inspire them to take practical measures to use the Structural and Investment Funds to help European SMEs grow and expand across borders.

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Contents

Acronyms	8	4. How the European Structural and Investment Funds can be used for internationalisation projects.....	23
1. Executive summary.....	9	5. Examples of good practice.....	25
2. Why should SMEs ‘go international’?	11	5.1. Support projects, group 1	27
2.1. Introduction	11	5.2. Support projects, group 2: co-financed by EU Structural Funds.....	35
2.2. The current situation.....	12	5.3. Support projects, group 3: evaluated projects.....	44
2.3. Drivers of SME internationalisation...	13		
2.4. Main barriers to SME internationalisation	14		
3. Public support for SME internationalisation.....	17	Annex I — Support measures and actions taken at EU level	51
3.1. The role of public support.....	17	Annex II — Sources.....	57
3.2. Awareness and use of public support programmes among SMEs.....	18	Annex III — Other useful publications	57
3.3. How to support SME internationalisation	19		

Acronyms

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India, China
BSR-CBP	Baltic Sea Region — Capacity Building Programme
CNBC	Cluster and Network Cooperation for Business Success in Central Europe
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
EBOs	European business organisations
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FTE	Full-time equivalent
IP	Intellectual property
IPR	Intellectual property rights
IT	Information technology
JOSEFIN	Joint SME Finance for Innovation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SBA	Small Business Act
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises

Executive summary

Helping EU SMEs to internationalise

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the European economy. Within the EU they account for 99 % of all businesses, 67 % of all jobs in the private sector, as much as 85 % of all newly created jobs and some 59 % of the value added by the economy. Making international contacts opens up new markets for SMEs and has the potential to boost SME competitiveness and growth considerably.

In this guidebook the term 'internationalisation' refers to all activities that put SMEs into a meaningful business relationship with a foreign partner: exports, imports, foreign direct investment (FDI — relocation or outsourcing), international subcontracting and international technical cooperation. It can take place at cross-border level, at transnational level inside the EU or at international level beyond the EU.

Internationalisation can result in competitiveness gains at firm level which may eventually translate into improved economic performance at national and European level:

- Being internationally active strongly relates to higher turnover growth.
- SMEs that are internationally active generally report higher employment growth than non-active SMEs.
- The relationship between internationalisation and innovation is strong.

In spite of this, few EU SMEs do business internationally, either inside or beyond the EU. According to a study conducted in 2010, 25 % of EU-based SMEs had been involved in exports (inside Europe and beyond) over the previous three years. Only 13 % of EU-based SMEs addressed growth markets outside the EU.

Drivers of and barriers to internationalisation

The size, age and experience of SMEs influence their willingness and ability to internationalise:

- The larger the company, the more it tends to internationalise.

- Exports and imports tend to increase as an enterprise grows more mature.
- Very few internationally inactive SMEs are actually planning to start international activities in the foreseeable future.

Some sectors tend to be more suited to internationalisation than others:

- Trade, manufacturing, transport and communication and research are the most international sectors.
- Companies involved in e-commerce are more internationally active than their traditional counterparts.

If we want to help more SMEs work with foreign partners, we must start by understanding what stops them doing so. The main barriers reported by SMEs are:

- not enough working capital to finance exports;
- the difficulty of identifying foreign business opportunities;
- not enough information to help them locate/analyse markets;
- inability to contact potential overseas customers;
- the difficulty of obtaining reliable foreign representation;
- lack of managerial time;
- not enough and/or untrained staff.

Public support can play an important role

Public support can play an important role in promoting greater internationalisation. A Commission study conducted in 2011 showed that, on average, public support programmes for SMEs (financial and non-financial, at national and EU level):

- increased an SME's turnover in the target market by 28 %;
- increased its total firm turnover by 11 %;
- accounted for three jobs created or saved;
- accounted for approximately 12 % of the next year's turnover.

Successful support has to be based first of all on building capabilities inside the SME, with

access to training and consultancy services playing a central role. Companies need to be scored, screened, and analysed before the mix of (usually) standardised support programmes is adapted to create a company-specific support plan. And to boost competitiveness and growth, programmes must support all types of internationalisation, not only exporting.

Although many programmes to support SME internationalisation are already in place, they are largely unknown: the percentage of EU SMEs aware of these opportunities ranges from 15 % for micro-enterprises to 27 % for medium-sized enterprises, and from only 10 % for enterprises that are not internationally active to 22 % of SMEs with international activities.

Using EU Structural and Investment Funds to support internationalisation

Structural Funds can boost practical projects to help SMEs make international contacts. This guidebook therefore suggests action that could usefully be taken in all Member States and in all regions with the support of European Structural Funds.

The target audience is primarily policy makers, stakeholders and managing authorities at regional level.

How to support SME internationalisation

Annex 1 lists EU measures to which you have easy access and which can help you in advising SMEs.

Chapter 3.3 gives an overview of some approaches that have proven very successful in Member States. These programmes provide support to individual SMEs or work through networks and clusters. They tend to be most effective when focused on specific sectors.

Chapter 4 describes how to use EU Structural Funds for internationalisation projects.

Chapter 5 gives examples of good practice, to provide inspiration for practical action to spur European SMEs to expand internationally and boost growth.

2

Why should SMEs 'go international'?

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2.1 Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)¹ are the backbone of the European economy. They account for 99 % of all EU businesses, 67 % of all jobs in the non-financial private sector, as much as 85 % of all newly created jobs (EC, 2011 (3), p 5-6) and some 59 % of the value added produced by the economy.

Internationalisation opens up new markets for SMEs and has the potential to boost SME competitiveness and growth considerably.²

In this guidebook the term 'internationalisation' refers to all activities that put SMEs into a meaningful business relationship with a foreign partner: exports, imports, foreign direct investment (FDI — relocation or outsourcing), international subcontracting and international technical cooperation (EC, 2010, p 5) — in other words: business activities responding to the opportunities and challenges that globalisation brings (EC, 2007, p 13). It can take place at cross-border level, at transnational level inside the EU or at international level beyond the EU.

Internationalisation can result in competitiveness gains at firm level which may eventually translate into improved economic performance at national and European level (EC, 2010, p 57). A study published in 2010 and covering the years 2007 and 2008 showed the following results (EC, 2010, p 8) :

- **Being internationally active correlates strongly with higher turnover growth.**
More than 50 % of SMEs that either invested abroad or were involved in international subcontracting reported increased turnover, whereas the average for SMEs as a whole was about 33 %.
- **SMEs that are internationally active generally report higher employment growth** than other SMEs. For example:
 - Exporters' employment growth stood at 7 %, non-exporters' at 3 %.
 - Importers' employment growth stood at 8 %, non-importers' at 2 %.
 - SMEs both importing and exporting reported 10 % employment growth; others only 3 %.

¹ The European Commission considers a business to be an SME if it has a workforce of up to 250 employees, an annual turnover of up to EUR 50 million and a balance sheet total of up to EUR 43 million.

² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Small_and_medium-sized_enterprises.

- SMEs with FDI reported employment growth of 16 %, others only 4 %.

- **The relationship between internationalisation and innovation is strong.**

26 % of internationally active SMEs launched products or services that were new for their sector in their country, while for other SMEs the figure was only 8 %. The internationally active SMEs were also more successful with process innovations that were new for their sector in their country (11 % vs 3 % for other SMEs).

Internationally active SMEs, therefore, are more competitive than their domestic counterparts (EC, 2010, p 70). They benefit from access to know-how and technology, increased efficiency and economies of scale and increased competence by entering difficult markets and exploiting the advantages of cutting-edge technology (EC, 2007, p. 10). Given increased market integration, SMEs can play an important role in global value chains.

In spite of this, only a small proportion of EU SMEs are doing business at international level within or outside the EU.

2.2 The current situation

International activities help companies compete, grow, and survive in the long term. But a study conducted in 2010 showed that 25 % of EU-based SMEs had been involved in exports (inside

Europe and beyond) in the three previous years.³

Only 13 % targeted markets outside the EU.

For the vast majority of European SMEs, therefore, the EU is their main market. It is also a good and appropriate first step for the launch of international operations beyond the EU. In most cases, the EU's Internal Market allows small and micro-enterprises to grow to the stage where they can successfully compete beyond the EU's borders. Thus, for most SMEs the EU can act as a launch pad for more successful engagement in international markets (EC, 2007, p. 5).

The benefits of internationalisation flow not just from exporting but from all types of international activity. Importing, for example, can improve performance by providing access to new technology and abilities, and there are more European firms active in importing than in exporting. Foreign direct investment (relocation or outsourcing), technology transfers, participation in international value chains and other forms of inter-SME cooperation are also gaining ground. In all cases, companies are mainly seeking greater competitive advantage: access to technology and cheaper or more readily available inputs is just as important to them as access to other markets, if not more important (EC, 2007, p 8).

The following table gives an overview of the different approaches taken by EU SMEs (EC, 2010, p 16, 17, 33, 36) :

Type of internationalisation	...% of all EU SMEs	...% of these targeting		...% of all SMEs targeting markets outside the EU
		a cross-border region (approx.)	other EU countries (approx.)	
Importing	29 %	35 %	89 %	14 %
Exporting	25 %	47 %	80 %	13 %
Technological cooperation with a foreign partner	7 %	n.a.		
Subcontracting for a foreign partner	7 %			
Using foreign subcontractors	7 %			
Foreign direct investment	2 %			

³ EC, 2010, p 5: Statistics are based on a sample of approximately 1000 SMEs across 26 sectors. The data was collected in spring 2009 (when the EU had 27 Member States) and covers the years 2006-2008.

Altogether, more than 40 % of European SMEs are involved in some form of international business relationship. However, few are active outside the EU (EC, 2010, p 15).

Which growth markets outside the EU do European enterprises most benefit from?

A 2011 study showed that the following seven target markets are increasingly important for European businesses: Brazil, Russia, India, China ('the BRIC countries'), Japan, South Korea and Ukraine. The share of internationalised EU SMEs with business activities in these growth markets in 2009 to 2010 was as follows: Russia: 13 %, China: 10 %, Ukraine: 8 %, Japan: 7.5 %, Brazil: 6.5 %, India: 6 %, and South Korea: 4.5 % (EC, 2011 (1), p 13).

2.3. Drivers of SME internationalisation

Support service providers should be aware of the business environment factors that promote or hamper SME internationalisation: 'drivers' and 'barriers'. They cannot influence them directly, but by being aware they can make the best use of drivers and reduce barriers as far as possible.

Let us start with the drivers.

The main features of the current wave of globalisation are (EC, 2007, p 6):

- an unprecedented lowering of trade barriers worldwide;
- vastly improved logistics and communications systems available to all companies;
- the information technology revolution which has opened the way for greater technology and knowledge exchanges and the advent of new types of economic transactions such as e-commerce.

These benefits apply to big corporations and SMEs alike, but to SMEs it seems to be less obvious how to make good use of them. Raising more international SMEs means raising more international entrepreneurs, with early exposure, preferably in the educational system,

to the international environment and to the benefits of an international outlook (EC, 2007, p 10).

If we zoom in on the different home markets of SMEs, we see that the smaller the country, the more international its SMEs. Countries such as Estonia, Denmark, Sweden, the Czech Republic or Slovenia have a percentage of exporters between 55 % and 35 %, while the EU average is 25 % and Germany, France and the UK score around 20 % (EC, 2010, p 24).

Unsurprisingly, SMEs located close to a border are much more active in their cross-border regions, but not more widely than that (EC, 2010, p 6).

SMEs' size, age and experience are important factors in their willingness and ability to internationalise:

- **The larger the company, the more it tends to internationalise, in general:** 24 % of micro enterprises, 38 % of small enterprises and 53 % of medium-sized enterprises export; for imports the respective percentages are 28 %, 39 % and 55 % (EC, 2010, p 5).
- **Exporting and importing activities increase as an enterprise grows more mature.** The percentages of SMEs that export gradually increases from just over 15 % of enterprises up to 4 years old to nearly 30 % of enterprises 25 years old or more (EC, 2010, p 6).
- As far as **experience** is concerned, few internationally inactive SMEs plan to start international activities in the near future. Only about 4 % of all non-internationalised companies state any intention to start international operations at all (EC, 2010, p 6).

Is there any specific type of internationalisation that is particularly suitable to start with?

SMEs most often start by importing. Of SMEs that both import and export, twice as many (39 %) started by importing as by exporting (18 %). 42 % started importing and exporting in the same year (EC, 2010, p 6).

Finally, some sectors tend to be more suited to internationalisation than others:

Trade, manufacturing, transport and communication and research are the most international sectors. The sectors with the highest share of exporting SMEs are mining (58 %), manufacturing (56 %), wholesale trade (54 %), research (54 %), sales of motor vehicles (53 %), renting (39 %), and transport and communication (39 %). Among services, the research sector scores highly (EC, 2010, p 6).

Companies involved in e-commerce are more internationally active. Having the means to sell products or services online correlates positively with being active in export or import markets (even when controlled for other effects such as size of firm). The conclusion could be that the internet has made it easier for SMEs of all sizes to overcome some of the barriers to internationalisation. In fact, the relationship between certain barriers and size of firm has weakened because of the internet (EC, 2010, p 7).

2.4. Main barriers to SME internationalisation

Insight into the barriers to SME internationalisation makes it possible to target support to the specific needs of SMEs (EC, 2010, p 57).

Although international markets, both private and public, offer substantial opportunities for European companies, SMEs face particular obstacles to tapping the global market, not least when it comes to access to market information, locating possible customers and finding the right partners. They also face more complex issues such as compliance with foreign laws, for example mandatory rules of contract law, customs rules, technical regulations and standards, managing technology transfer and protecting intellectual or industrial property rights. In dealing with such challenges SMEs are usually less well equipped with in-house expertise and financial or human resources than larger enterprises (EC, 2011 (2), p 3).

Successful policies to help SMEs expand internationally must start by understanding the

main problems they face when considering whether to start operating with a foreign partner. According to the OECD,⁴ the main barriers reported by SMEs are (EC, 2007, p 10-11):

- not enough working capital to finance exports;
- the difficulty of identifying foreign business opportunities;
- not enough information to locate/analyse markets;
- inability to contact potential overseas customers;
- the difficulty of obtaining reliable foreign representation;
- lack of managerial time to deal with internationalisation;
- not enough and/or untrained staff.

Enterprises that are not yet active in the international market may underestimate some barriers and overestimate others, so companies' international experience, or lack of it, needs to be considered when designing and developing business support services (EC, 2010, p 57).

A survey conducted in 2010 (EC, 2010, p 58-59) revealed the following **barriers within companies**, as perceived by SMEs:

- the price of their product or service;
- the high cost of internationalisation;
- the quality of the product and lack of qualified staff;
- the specifications of the firm's products;
- language.

The most important barrier as perceived by SMEs is the price of the firm's products or services. This, of course, depends on general prices in the home market and the level of business efficiency; so specific internationalisation support measures are not likely to address this. However, building-in measures aimed at increasing business efficiency, either by combining internationalisation and innovation policy or by encouraging efficient sourcing of inputs, perhaps by direct imports, may prove effective.

The second most important barrier is 'the high cost of internationalisation'. It is the EU's task to work towards international trade rules that meet the specific needs of European SMEs. The

⁴ Final background report of the OECD-APEC joint project on 'Removing barriers to SME access to international markets', OECD-APEC Global Conference, 6-8 November 2006, Athens, Greece.

European Commission aims to lower tariff and non-tariff trade barriers by negotiating free trade agreements with non-EU countries. It also seeks regulatory approximation through various dialogues, for instance under the European Neighbourhood Policy, i.e. the Eastern Partnership and EU-MED industrial cooperation.

However, SMEs can be given direct technical help, e.g. by making information on international markets easily accessible, helping them to establish international partnerships in business, research or technology (e.g. through the Enterprise Europe Network, see annex 1) or subsidising participation in foreign trade fairs.

Firm size makes little difference to internal barriers except as regards lack of sufficiently qualified staff: the smaller the enterprise the bigger this barrier is perceived to be.

The study also looked at external barriers in the business environment (EC, 2010, p 59-60). The factors most SMEs perceived as hindering internationalisation are:

- lack of capital;
- lack of adequate public support;
- lack of adequate information;
- the cost of or difficulties with paperwork needed for transport;
- other laws and regulations in the foreign country;
- tariffs or other trade barriers in the foreign market;
- cultural differences (including business culture).

The patterns for perceived external barriers in the EU and the wider world are fairly similar, although 'tariff and other trade barriers in foreign markets', 'other laws and regulations in foreign countries', 'tariffs or other trade barriers in the home country' and 'cultural differences' are cited rather less in connection with the EU. Surprisingly, SMEs cited 'lack of capital' and 'lack of adequate public support' more often with reference to the EU than to global markets. This might be because, as a rule, SMEs active in non-EU markets tend to be larger and more experienced. Larger SMEs consider 'other laws and regulations in foreign countries' to be more important, while micro-enterprises more often cited 'lack of capital'.

3

Public support for SME internationalisation

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3.1. The role of public support

We have seen that SMEs play a key role in the stability and potential of any national economy in terms of employment and value added. As most SMEs face resource limitations, they need support to acquire the capabilities needed to compete successfully in the international market (EC, 2007, p 17).

This is why the EU's strategy for SMEs, laid out in the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA), launched by the Commission in June 2008⁵ and reviewed in 2011,⁶ called on the EU and the Member States to support SMEs and encouraged them to take advantage of the growth of markets outside the EU, in particular through market-specific support and business training activities (EC, 2011 (2), p 5). This was followed up in more detail in the Commission's 2011 communication *Small Business, Big World — a new partnership to help SMEs seize global opportunities*.⁷

SMEs clearly appreciate public support: 11 % of those using public support measures provided by their governments say that they would not have done business internationally without it. In total, 55 % of internationally active SMEs agree to at least one of the following four statements (EC, 2010, p 70):

- Without support they would not have internationalised at all.
- With support they internationalised earlier than they would have done otherwise.
- With support they engaged in additional internationalisation activities.
- With support they gained more insight into opportunities in foreign markets.

Public support may also provide a valuable contribution by addressing those problems that are perceived as the main barriers to internationalisation: access to information and access to financial support (EC, 2010, p 70).

The Commission's 2011 study showed that, on average, using public support programmes

⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0394:FIN:EN:PDF>.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/small-business-act/files/sba_review_en.pdf.

⁷ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0702:FIN:EN:PDF>.

(financial and non-financial, at national and EU level) (EC, 2011 (1), p 8)

- increased an SME's turnover in the target market by 28 %;
- increased total turnover of the firm by 11 %;
- accounted for three jobs created or saved;
- accounted for 12 % of the next year's turnover.

3.2. Awareness and use of public support programmes among SMEs

Although there are already many programmes to support SME internationalisation, they are largely unknown: the percentage of EU SMEs that are aware of these possibilities range from 15 % for micro enterprises to 27 % for medium-sized enterprises, and from only 10 % for enterprises that are not internationally active to 22 % for SMEs with international activities (EC, 2010, p 7).

There are differences between sectors: 20 % to 25 % of SMEs in wholesale and manufacturing are aware of support programmes, while for retail, transport and personal services only 10 % to 13 % of the businesses are aware of the public support available to them. Step one in adequately supporting SMEs to access international markets opportunities is therefore to raise the rather low awareness of business support programmes among SMEs (EC, 2010, p 7).

While small firms are much more exposed to trade barriers than large firms, it is larger enterprises that are more aware of support measures available to them and that subsequently make good use of them (EC, 2010, p 63, 64). So far, very few EU SMEs actually use public support measures. According to the 2010 study, non-financial support is used more by the smallest of those firms that do business internationally: 10 % of micro enterprises, compared with 8 % of small enterprises and 6 % of medium-sized enterprises. Financial support, on the other hand, is used more by the larger SMEs of those active internationally: 10 % of micro enterprises, 13 % of small firms and 16 % of medium-sized enterprises (EC, 2010, p 7).

There are very large differences between countries. A high percentage of SMEs in Austria (47 %) reported using financial support, whereas in countries such as Portugal, Denmark and the Netherlands, the figure is 1 % or less. The use of non-financial support is highest in Slovenia (23 %), Cyprus (19 %) and Latvia (16 %), but far lower in all other Member States (EC, 2010, p 7, 67). The following table shows the use of financial and non-financial public support measures for internationalisation in 2009 broken down by country, as a percentage of those SMEs that do business on an international scale:

Percentage of internationally active SMEs that use financial or non-financial support

Rank	Country	% using financial support	Rank	Country	% using non-financial support
1	Austria	47 %	1	Slovenia	23 %
2	Turkey	32 %	2	Cyprus	19 %
3	Greece	17 %	3	Latvia	16 %
4	Latvia	17 %	4	Lithuania	12 %
5	Norway	14 %	5	Luxembourg	11 %
6	Germany	14 %	6	Italy	11 %
7	Spain	10 %	7	Norway	11 %
8	Italy	9 %	8	Greece	11 %
9	Slovakia	9 %	9	France	9 %

Rank	Country	% using financial support	Rank	Country	% using non-financial support
10	France	7 %	10	Spain	9 %
11	Romania	6 %	11	Germany	7 %
12	Hungary	5 %	12	Denmark	5 %
13	Sweden	5 %	13	United Kingdom	5 %
14	Cyprus	5 %	14	Ireland	4 %
15	United Kingdom	5 %	15	Austria	3 %
16	Slovenia	4 %	16	Poland	3 %
17	Luxembourg	4 %	17	FYROM	2 %
18	Liechtenstein	4 %	18	Finland	2 %
19	Belgium	4 %	19	Belgium	1 %
20	Finland	3 %	20	Slovakia	1 %
21	Estonia	3 %	21	The Netherlands	0 %
22	Lithuania	3 %	22	Estonia	0 %
23	Poland	3 %	23	Malta	0 %
24	Ireland	3 %	24	Croatia	0 %
25	Malta	2 %	25	Portugal	0 %
26	Bulgaria	2 %	26	Sweden	0 %
27	Croatia	2 %	27	Czech Republic	0 %
28	Czech Republic	2 %	28	Bulgaria	0 %
29	Portugal	1 %	29	Hungary	0 %
30	Denmark	1 %	30	Iceland	0 %
31	The Netherlands	1 %	31	Liechtenstein	0 %
32	FYROM	0 %	32	Romania	0 %
33	Iceland	0 %	33	Turkey	0 %

Source: EC, 2010, p 67

What kind of public support do SMEs use most often?

Among financial services, 'subsidies and grants' are by far the most used and are also considered the most useful by SMEs that do international business. Of the available non-financial support services, the six mainly used by SMEs and therefore worth concentrating on (EC, 2011 (1), p 51) are:

- information on rules and regulations;
- information on market opportunities;
- exhibiting in international trade fairs;
- identifying potential foreign business partners;
- business cooperation and networking;
- 'matchmaking' events.

3.3. How to support SME internationalisation

Successful help with internationalisation depends primarily on building capabilities inside the SME, with individual support and access to training and consultancy services playing a central role. This requires scoring, selecting and analysis of companies before providing any support and adapting the mix of (usually)

standardised support programmes to create a company-specific support plan. Also, to boost competitiveness and growth, programmes have to support all types of internationalisation, not only exports (EC, 2007, p 32).

The main internationalisation programmes should attract the widest number of SMEs possible (EC, 2007, p 32). It is recommended that special attention be paid to micro enterprises and small enterprises, i.e. SMEs with a workforce below 50 employees, turnover of below EUR 10 million and a balance sheet total below EUR 10 million. These form the bulk of all EU SMEs and are especially vulnerable. Efforts should be directed at expanding capacity for both innovation and international business simultaneously, since the two tend to go hand in hand (see previous chapters). E-commerce is another component worth focusing on: with the internet readily available as a distribution channel to even the smallest SMEs, cross-border e-commerce provides enormous growth potential for these companies (EC, 2010, p 71-75).

Concerning the seven target markets Brazil, Russia, India, China, Japan, South Korea and Ukraine, the types of public support from which European SMEs expect most effect generally relate to (EC, 2011 (1), p 7):

- assistance with identifying business partners in these countries;
- providing adequate information on market opportunities;
- providing adequate information on rules and regulations.

However, not all public support is equally effective.

First, public support must target areas in which there is a market failure, so avoiding any undue competition with private service providers. It must also set clear quantitative objectives and targets, introduce monitoring and assess the results. This is to guarantee that support reaches the intended recipients, obtains the required results and does not waste public resources (EC, 2010, p 70).

There are a number of business centres, help-desks, websites, databases and other services managed or supported by the European Commission that are designed to help SMEs internationalise. They are also a rich source of information for SME support organisations. These measures and actions are listed in annex 1.

In addition, a broad range of business support activity in and for markets outside the EU is offered by private, semi-public and public service providers in the Member States (e.g. national chambers of commerce, business associations, commercial consultants, SME agencies and trade promotion organisations), all of which have a wealth of expertise in helping SMEs to do international business.⁸

Such programmes can provide individual support or support through networks and clusters.

Individual support

Individual support is based on an analysis of the individual SME and the areas in which it needs support; support is then tailored to its specific resources and capabilities (EC, 2007, p 22).

These programmes usually start by assessing the SME's 'internationalisation readiness' and follow up with long-term consultancy to help companies build the management capabilities required for international business. These programmes are usually complemented by a series of measures to provide for the other areas of commonly required support: information and sometimes support on financing international business, access to information, networks, etc.

Individual support programmes are both holistic in their view of the company and tackle the specific barriers that the individual SME faces in doing international business. They are in fact a 'programme of programmes' whose focal point is to devise a sustainable internationalisation strategy for the individual SME (EC, 2007, p 22).

⁸ Chapter 5 gives some examples of good practice, intended to provide inspiration for practical measures to help European SMEs do business internationally and grow.

Networks and clusters

Networks expand the capacity of individual SMEs to internationalise and continue to be a vital component of such support. There are two types of networks: support networks and cooperation networks (EC, 2007, p 24-5).

Support networks tend to be managed by the government (e.g. commercial offices abroad) or big business associations. They play a key role in supporting any type of internationalisation as they provide access to information that is directly usable by the SME. In this role, they cover one of the areas of greatest demand and need in relation to SMEs (EC, 2007, p 24-5).

Cooperation networks focus on promoting direct cooperation between companies. Studies indicate that cooperative approaches, alliances and networks involving SMEs will increase in the future (EC, 2007, p 24-5).

Clusters, business networks and export consortia can play an important role in helping SMEs acquire a more international outlook. In particular, export consortia play a specific role by representing groups of businesses working together on an export development project. For instance, recent studies have found that newly created SMEs that develop new products and services within a specific niche are often active from the start in international markets and membership of a cluster boosts their export capacity (EC, 2011 (2), p 13).

SMEs hosted in **clusters and business networks** can benefit from contacts, business connections and formal and informal knowledge flowing within a cluster and a business network, as well as from customised services provided by cluster and network organisations. Such benefits facilitate, for example, the development of partnerships abroad so that SMEs have easier access to global value chains, develop strategic alliances with research organisations in counterpart clusters or networks, expand their commercial activities abroad, including public procurement, and obtain appropriate skills and tailored professional advice (EC, 2011 (2), p 13).

Member States should recognise cluster and network organisations as important facilitators and include them in business support schemes aimed at fostering SME internationalisation (EC, 2011 (2), p 13).

Sectoral programmes

The sector in which a company operates plays an important part in 'exposure' to foreign markets, as not all industries are equally affected by globalisation. High-technology and medium high-technology industries are on average generally more internationalised than less technology-intensive industries. In this respect there is no fundamental difference between product sectors and service sectors. Companies in high-technology sectors must be particularly specialised and niche-oriented in order to compete. Tailor-made support programmes are therefore highly recommended (EC, 2007, p 25-26).

4

How the European Structural and Investment Funds can be used for internationalisation projects

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Of the different sources of funding available for internationalisation programmes, these guidebooks focus on the largest: the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs). (For other funding opportunities, please see the latest edition of 'An overview of the main funding opportunities available to European SMEs'⁹ on the European Commission's website.)

The ESIF regulations list thematic objectives and investment priorities linked to the 'Europe 2020' objectives of boosting jobs and growth throughout the EU.

Programmes are formulated and managed at national and/or regional level. In formulating programmes, the Member States pick the objectives most relevant to them in the light of their development needs and of European priorities such as country-specific recommendations under the 'European Semester' economic policy coordination round and general principles such as the need for concentration, focus on results and additionality (no substitution for national funding).

To ensure the appropriate level of ownership, commitment and resource-effectiveness, the

Member States involve all relevant administrative levels and socio-economic stakeholders.

In practical terms:

- Based on the 'Europe 2020' strategy, a Partnership Contract is being agreed between the Commission and each Member State for the period 2014 to 2020, bringing together all of the respective Member State's individual commitments to delivering European objectives and targets.
- Each Member State will translate its Partnership Contract into several operational programmes which set out the funding priorities for 2014-2020. These programmes are run by managing authorities appointed at regional or national level by the different Member States.
- Over the programme period (i.e. from 2014 to 2020) each managing authority will publish a series of calls for proposals for projects to be financed at regional level. It may also be possible to present a new project as part of an ongoing programme.

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=5778.

Of the funding instruments set up to support the EU's regional and cohesion policy, the ERDF is by far the largest benefiting SMEs. Its aim is to reduce disparities in the development of regions and to support social and economic cohesion in the EU.

To encourage the creation of SMEs and boost their competitiveness, the ERDF co-finances activities in a broad range of areas (EC, 2012, p 2, 10):

- entrepreneurship, innovation and competitiveness for SMEs (e.g. entrepreneurial mentoring, innovative technologies and management systems in SMEs, eco-innovation, and better use of information and communication technologies);
- improving the regional and local environment for SMEs (e.g. access to capital in the start-up and growth phase, business infrastructure and support services, regional and local research, technical development and innovation capacity, and business cooperation and innovation capacity);
- interregional and cross-border cooperation for SMEs;
- investment in human resources (along with funding from the European Social Fund).

SME competitiveness is one of the 11 thematic objectives of the new cohesion policy. Its investment priorities to enhance SME competitiveness are:¹⁰

- promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators;
- developing and implementing new business models for SMEs, in particular with regard to internationalisation;
- supporting the creation and the extension of advanced capacities for product and service development;
- supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets, and to engage in innovation processes.

More information can be found on the website of the European Commission's

Directorate-General for Regional Policy.¹¹

Under 'In your country' you also will find:

- a list of the managing authorities for the Structural Funds in every Member State;
- a summary of the programmes available in every region.

Under 'What we do / the Funds', you will find:

- information on accessing the funds.

Under 'Information sources / Publications / Brochures and Factsheets' you will find:

- a guide for ERDF managing authorities on how to design suitable support measures to help SMEs maximise the benefits of regional 'smart specialisation' strategies.

How to apply for EU assistance?

Projects may be proposed for EU co-financing by businesses, educational institutions, research institutes, municipalities, and other organisations or combinations of the above. If you belong to one of these groups and you have an idea for a project to help SMEs become more competitive by doing international business:

1. Ensure your project is limited in time and scope if you want to obtain EU funds. You will need a project plan which includes the substance of the project, objectives and stages, the division of work, the budget and financing plan, and a timetable for implementation.
2. Find out about the operational programmes for your region and who your managing authority is. The managing authority usually has a website that sets out the procedures for applying for funding, the deadlines and the rate of co-financing.
3. Submit your project in response to a suitable 'call for proposals'.

For further information on access to EU Structural Funds, please refer to the guidebook 'How to use Structural Funds for SME and Entrepreneurship Policy'.¹²

¹⁰ See Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 ('common provisions regulation'), and the fund-specific regulations at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information/legislation/index_en.cfm.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.cfm.

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/regional-sme-policies/index_en.htm.

5

Examples of good practice

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This chapter aims to provide inspiration by giving examples of good internationalisation programmes run by various Member States and regions. Please note that measures proposed for ESIF funding need to comply with the relevant provisions of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), the fund-specific regulations and the co-financing rules of the specific operational programmes.¹³

In 2008, the European Commission published a brochure on good practice in this area: 'Supporting the Internationalisation of SMEs — Good practice selection'.¹⁴ It covers 27 examples and can be downloaded from the Europa website. You'll find some of these examples in the first group below. The second group features projects co-financed by EU Structural Funds between 2007 and 2013 (EC, 2013). The third group consists of support projects evaluated in a 2011 study (EIM 2011, p 67-77).

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information/legislation/index_en.cfm.

¹⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/documents/internationalisation/>.

	Good practice	Country	Good practice for the following support tasks*:
GROUP 1			
A	Training programmes: regional programme to promote SMEs' exports and internationalisation	Norway	3, 8
B	SMEs and cross-border finance	The Netherlands	2, 4
C	PIPEnet	Spain	6, 8
D	Industrial research and development contracts (IRDCs)	Norway	4, 6, 7
E	Move or stay and improve	Sweden	2, 7, 8
F	First flight	Ireland	2, 3, 8
G	Incubation programme	Italy	8
H	Transnational network — skilled crafts in the Greater Region	Luxembourg	2, 8, 9
GROUP 2 — CO-FINANCED BY EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS			
I	BioFix	Estonia	9
J	Growing business clusters across Central Europe	several	3, 5
K	Baltic Sea innovation	several	4
L	Baltic clusters set to expand	several	3, 5
M	A Scandinavian model for women-led companies	several	1, 5, 7
N	Sustainable wood energy from North Carelia	Finland	3, 5, 6
O	Digital investments in the Greek tourism sector	Greece	4, 7
P	Drive for growth	several	5
Q	Smart marketing platform for small design firms	UK	2, 3, 6, 8
GROUP 3 — EVALUATED SUPPORT PROJECTS			
R	Export partner groups as facilitators of Internationalisation	Finland	2, 3, 8
S	Export Initiative for 'renewable energies'	Germany	2, 4
T	Prepare2start	The Netherlands	2, 4, 8
U	Netherlands business support offices	The Netherlands	2, 8
V	Swedpartnership	Sweden	4
W	UK Trade & Investment's tradeshow access programme	UK	4
X	Scottish development international policy	UK	2, 4, 8

*** Support tasks:**

1. Raising awareness
2. High-value information
3. Human resources development programmes
4. Supporting the financial needs of internationalisation
5. Promotion of networks
6. Supporting the internationalisation of services
7. Using internationalisation to enhance competitiveness
8. Individualised support
9. Border zones and cross-border cooperation

5.1. Support projects, group 1

A	Norway
Training programmes: Regional programme to promote the SMEs' exports and internationalisation	

Issue, objective and geographical area

This regional programme is aimed at increasing SMEs' competitiveness by encouraging and supporting exporting and internationalisation.

Brief description of the practice

The programme is based on a concept developed for SMEs that have the potential and capabilities to increase their global competitiveness through innovation and internationalisation. It is a business development programme, in which companies participate in a development process over 12 to 14 months. Innovation Norway gives companies grants for a business development project.

The programme is divided into four phases:

1. identifying and assessing the needs and life phases of interested companies, i.e. if they are willing, able and ready and can benefit from the programme;
2. analysing the company's ability in innovative market and technology development; this constitutes the basis for the market and technology projects to be implemented;
3. planning: assisting the company in developing a plan for its market and/or technology project;
4. implementing: helping the companies implement their projects through tailor-made support using various competence, advisory, networking and financing services.

Additional information

In 1999, the counties of Sor-Trondelag and Nord-Trondelag took the initiative to set up a stronger and more coordinated programme helping companies in the region to do international business. On the basis of a prior study, a three-year programme started in 2001 financed by the counties and Innovation Norway. The programme was continued after 2003 based on a positive evaluation of the first three years. The programme has set up and is running a number of sector networks in the counties. By the end of 2005 there were five different networks: environment, health, energy, ICT, oil and gas.

Evaluation/results

From 2001 to 2003, over 300 enterprises participated in one or more activities in the programme, and more than 170 companies have undergone in-depth analysis. The companies participating increased their export sales by an average of 7 % in total. The close cooperation between the regional chamber of commerce, export associations, Innovation Norway, private consultants, research and education institutions, communities and county councils has resulted in higher-quality and more targeted support for SME internationalisation.

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Training programmes:
SME and cross-border finance

Issue, objective and geographical area

Information on financial products and issues is fragmented and non-transparent. This is a particular problem for SMEs that want to internationalise and need both financing and a roadmap on how to prepare for it. Our goal is to improve access to finance for SMEs by gathering the information available and to offer it in a web file. To do this we cooperate with the private sector, including confederations of banks (NVB) and SMEs (MKBNI), so it is demand-driven. The web file is applicable worldwide and targeted at Dutch SMEs and their partners. The practice was started by the Dutch Trade Board, DTB (a public-private advisory board to the government) and is implemented by our agency for international business and cooperation, EVD.

Brief description of the practice

The web file (www.internationaalondernemen.nl/mkb-financiering) presents on the internet the products of the private financial sector, the state, the EU and multilateral institutions. It includes special products like export credit insurance and international credit ratings and others such as factoring, venture capital, payment habits, leasing and roadmaps, which can be very useful for cross-border finance. Seemingly heterogeneous products are homogenised, i.e. grouped together and presented in a simple and user-friendly way, comparing terms and pricing. So the visitor can find the information as quickly as possible, we provide short but detailed pages and 'deep links' to the right page on the provider's website. The EVD is still upgrading the information: simple roadmaps, business cases and, soon, references to financial/legal advisors for SMEs (auditors, lawyers), etc.

Target group

The target group is Dutch SMEs that export, invest and are engaged in cross-border cooperation. It consists of about 75 000 firms (of which about 70 000 are exporters). The majority (estimated at 80 %) have no need of external information/advice on financing as they can manage on their own or together with their foreign clients. So the potential target group consists of about 15 000 SMEs. Our experience is that advisors to SMEs (auditors, chambers of commerce, lawyers, etc.) also find the information very useful.

Results expected or achieved

The response from the financial sector, chambers of commerce, the SME confederation, etc. is very positive. We seem to have discovered a niche in the market. This is confirmed by:

- **the number of visitors counted.** The EVD has refined its instruments for measuring the number of visitors in order to correct the 'hits' from web crawlers (search engines). This gives a clear picture of the number of unique visitors. The results: approximately 3 900 unique visitors in 2007. This is a good result in relation to other parts of the website, especially when taking into account the 'specialist' niche that it covers;
- **the page rank in Google.** The file has about 80 pages and in 85 % of cases you will find them in the first three hits when 'Googled'. This indicates its popularity. It also means that a 'customer' finds the issue in the web file almost at once.

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C

Spain

Training programmes:
PIPEnet

Issue, objective and geographical area

To promote international business strategies for individual companies by using personalised consultancy services and the most appropriate technology tools. PIPEnet optimises new information and communication technologies (ICTs) for participating SMEs. The measure covers the whole of Spain.

Brief description of the practice

The measure was devised and is run by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade with the financial backing of the European Commission (co-financing). It provides a strategic plan through meetings with the company carried out by a consultancy. The plan includes two research projects: the first on the situation of new technologies in the target countries and the second on leading companies in the internet sector. It also considers the company's technology, budget and staffing needs. For the first year after delivery of the final documentation, the consultancy is at the SME's disposal to offer technical assistance with the plan. Participating companies pay 20 % of the cost of the customised consultancy service and ICEX funds 80 % of the remaining cost, up to a total of EUR 6 000.

Target group

All sectors, including services, and companies from all regions of Spain. Only for SMEs that export less than 30 % of their turnover.

Results expected or achieved

In just over two years that PIPEnet has been running, around 1 500 companies have had an initial consultancy meeting with an expert and more than 300 have completed the full consultancy programme.

Testimonial

Julio Gabriel Esteban, Export Manager, NIKAI

'We were aware of the opportunities offered by [the] internet, but did not know how to take advantage of them [...]. It is a help in increasing efficiency, boosting the commercial network, building a strong brand and differentiating ourselves from competitors.'

CREYCONFE, Madrid

'It has been a remarkable experience for the company. It will help us to take advantage of [the] internet more efficiently (...) We are currently improving our website with new content. In the near future we are planning to implement B2B tools.'

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D

Norway

**Training programmes:
Industrial research and development contracts (IRDCs)**

Issue, objective and geographical area

The aim of the programme is to stimulate and strengthen the ability of small and medium-sized suppliers to carry out market-oriented research and development for new and innovative products and services in close cooperation with a demanding customer. Since foreign activity in terms of collaboration on innovation generates higher innovation input, foreign companies are particularly welcome as partners.

Brief description of the practice

There is a growing international awareness of the great business potential that lies in close cooperation between a supplier and a large demanding customer with a common interest — to develop a unique new product or service. An industrial research and development contract (IRDC) is a binding agreement between two or more companies to cooperate on the development of a new state-of-the-art product, process or service. The customer must be a market leader, professionally acknowledged and with broad market access. The parties themselves define the substance of the agreement in such a way that they obtain the maximum benefit from the support scheme. An IRDC contract can only be granted to projects of an exceptional level of innovation and value creation, clearly defined market potential and high additionality.

Enterprises are required to complete and submit a formal application to Innovation Norway. In an IRDC project, one party, the 'supplier', must ordinarily be classed as a smaller development company (SME). If a company meets these requirements, a contract may be granted up to 35 % of the eligible costs. If the supplier is not an SME, only up to 25 % of the project costs may be granted.

Target group

SMEs with domestic and/or foreign customers.

Results expected or achieved

An evaluation in 2007 of more than 1 200 projects financed in the period 1995–2005, showed that 44 % were commercial successes. Only 12 % of the projects failed. Companies with a highly educated staff, innovation strategy and international partners were the most successful. The projects have created substantial turnover and exports equivalent to at least the total grants over the last 10 years (over NOK 1.4 billion in 1995–2005). IRDCs are considered to be one of Innovation Norway's most successful support schemes, encouraging both innovation and internationalisation at the same time.

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(Source: EC, 2008, p 33)

E

Sweden

**Training programmes:
‘Move or stay and improve’ — a tool for profitable calculation of SME internationalisation**

Issue, objective and geographical area

This measure aims to give SMEs in-depth information on more variables than just labour cost in other countries in order to secure sounder decisions in international business. The calculation tool in combination with consultancy has been used in manufacturing companies all over Sweden.

Brief description of the practice

‘Move or stay and improve’ was created by the Development Agency ALMI and 35 consultants have been trained on how to use the tool. It is a computerised tool relying on the SMEs’ own result report and balance sheet. Figures for 18 different factors are filled in to compare the situation in 10 different countries. The calculation shows how the company’s revenue will change if they move the business to different countries. The tool is currently being developed to simulate different improvement activities if the company chooses to stay at home and to see what effect these activities should bring to the company’s revenue. The figures in the tool are updated every year. This tool makes companies work with their productivity instead of moving production. This strengthens the European dimension because the companies are encouraged to think about ways of cooperating with European companies instead of focusing on Asian production.

Target group

SMEs thinking of moving their business outside Sweden or companies wanting to check their international competitiveness.

Results expected or achieved

A total of 104 companies have used the computerised tool to evaluate if they would win or lose by moving production. Of those, 52 chose to make their production more efficient and 12 chose to move all or part of their production abroad. Forty companies have used the tool for other purposes like competition analysis, profitability analysis or simply as a document for internal strategic discussions. A total of 128 events were held to inform people about the tool.

Testimonial

‘We now have an excellent decision basis to take the next step in our development.’

‘This should be a useful tool for many companies even if they are not thinking of moving their production.’

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(Source: EC, 2008, p 32)

Training programmes:
First flight

Issue, objective and geographical area

'First flight' is aimed at assisting companies — by assessing and developing key capabilities — to manage the risks, time and expenses associated with going international.

Brief description of the practice

'First flight' is a process designed to assist clients with their international development needs, as developing new markets is an essential aspect of business development which is expensive and time consuming. The 'First flight' programme assists the company's management team to structure the planning process into a systematic and consistent order by introducing the broad range of issues to consider.

A questionnaire evaluates the company in the following areas and is completed by the company with the assistance of a development adviser (DA): overview of company, company's performance, management resources, market knowledge, the business case, and budgets and funding.

Following this, an action plan is drafted with the company and can draw on a wide range of Enterprise Ireland (EI) support, including:

- access to EI services from its overseas network, e.g. market research;
- development of management capability through participation in various training programmes;
- access to the 'mentor network' on areas identified, e.g. financial planning, market development, etc.;
- participation in trade missions;
- injection of key people (with required skills) if appropriate.

Target group

'First flight' is an Enterprise Ireland service aimed specifically at companies that are new exporters or early-stage exporters (with exports of less than EUR 30 000).

Results expected or achieved

'First flight' provides high-impact and high-value information that can be directly used by participating SMEs. The process is managed to minimise risk to the company and is tailored to the needs of the company. 'First flight' is viewed as the first step to a long-term internationalisation and exporting strategy.

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G

Italy

Training programmes: Incubation programme

Issue, objective and geographical area

This programme is an innovative approach to SMEs' needs, starting with direct contact with companies through a 'listening campaign' and then offering to share with them the risks and successes. This measure is applicable throughout Italy.

Brief description of the practice

The Specialist Assistance Service (SAS) is aimed at providing assistance completely tailored to the client's needs: searching for clients, selecting partners, market and competitiveness analysis. The Incubation Service for Internationalisation (SIPI) aims to support SMEs unable to afford the challenge of internationalisation. The service offers to share the risks and successes. In particular, it aims to act as an incubator, developing the companies' sales in the target market. There is a cooperation agreement with national associations of managers with the aim of providing well-trained experts/mentors.

Target group

The most frequent users are small and micro-sized companies, with no limitation on sector, dimension or turnover.

Results expected or achieved

Since the service started, 261 companies have been assisted with internationalisation: 249 under the SAS, and 10 under the SIPI and two under the agreement with managers' associations.

Testimonial

Dott.ssa Barbara Calvani, Export Manager, Centerglass Line, spa '...following the trade mission in Casablanca, arranged through the support of the specialist services for internationalisation, Centerglass Line is developing a business with some Moroccan operators and selling its products in the market. Let me express my satisfaction with the specialist services staff and I hope to continue this collaboration.'

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**Training programmes:
Transnational network — Skilled crafts in the Greater Region**

Issue, objective and geographical area where it is applicable

The goal of this programme is the development of cross-border activities of SMEs in the skilled craft sector through information, support, network activities and accompanying skilled craft enterprises on cross-border markets, namely the Greater Region: Saar–Lorraine–Luxembourg–Wallonia–Rhineland Palatinate, including the border regions of Luxembourg, Germany, France and Belgium.

Brief description of the practice

The Greater Region encompasses German, Luxembourgish, Belgian and French regions, and is adjacent to two other important border regions: one comprising Maastricht in the Netherlands, North Rhine-Westphalia and the province of Liege, the other including Alsace, Baden-Wurtemberg and Basel (Switzerland). This great variety poses a competitive and commercial challenge for skilled craft businesses. Entrepreneurs in the individual trades in the sector have to cope with administrative, legal, technical, linguistic and cultural complexities. This project, comprehensive in scope, draws on modern communications technologies to develop an ‘information and advice network’.

For this purpose a CD-ROM and a website for skilled crafts in the Greater Region have been produced. They cover the procedures, regulations, and application forms that skilled craft businesses should be aware of for their specific trades, to gain access to cross-border markets. The main areas covered are:

- developing a common ‘diagnostic method’ for skilled crafts to provide businesses with information, based on network-related, individual advice;
- implementing awareness campaigns through ‘exchange forums’;
- making use of an accompanying system for surveying companies with cross-border experience (structural surveys and comparative cyclical surveys);
- structured and summary presentation of thematic information content related to skilled crafts in the Greater Region.

Target group

SMEs in the skilled crafts sector in the five regions of the Greater Region, totalling 156 975 enterprises: 4 258 in Luxembourg, 11 155 in Saarland (Germany), 47 027 in Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany), 27 535 in Lorraine (France) and 67 000 in Wallonia (Belgium).

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CD-ROM: ‘Transnational markets — Skilled crafts without borders’

5.2. Support projects, group 2: co-financed by EU Structural Funds

The following projects do not all focus on internationalisation but they directly contribute to it.

I	Estonia
<p style="text-align: center;">Training programmes: BioFix — Pure water and sound business</p>	

This programme enabled an innovative SME to develop an environmental procedure and successfully introduce it into the markets of its neighbouring countries.

Context

In Estonia, the governmental agency Enterprise Estonia (Ettevõtlike Arendamise Sihtasutus / EAS) is one of the institutions responsible for managing Structural Funds in the EU. With the help of the European Regional Development fund (ERDF), it is piloting various business support programmes, aimed respectively at research & development, exporting and start-ups. EAS offers advice on all issues regarding patents, technologies and innovative services, business development, competition, etc., be it at the preliminary studies stage or before the main project is submitted.

BioFix Project

Established in 1992, Fixtec is a small company working in the field of environmental technology, which it develops in-house or imports. It started producing small organic waste water purifiers, called 'BioFix', for private homes, retirement homes, hotels, etc. The idea was sparked by very high demand in the Finnish market. Well-known for its very strict environmental regulations, Finland has required biochemical waste water purification since 2003, even for private homes. However, Fixtec realised that most manufacturers did not offer this type of purifier, hence its project to develop the product and export it to the Finnish market.

Finland is the main market for the moment, but Fixtec also produces for the Estonian and Latvian markets, both countries in which waste water has to be treated before being released into the natural environment.

Partners

Two Estonian consultants (a researcher and an engineer/designer) were recruited to pilot the project. It worked in close cooperation with a number of foreign companies. Water analyses were conducted by authorised laboratories in Estonia. The requisite tests to obtain the EC label were conducted in Finland.

Results

The BioFix initiative is an example of the way funding can be put to good use in a regional context. With the help of a programme funded jointly by the EU, Fixtec successfully developed this new product and new processes, whilst entering new markets. In 2006 BioFix had already been sold to several hundred customers in Finland. EAS helped work out the business plan to export the product on a large scale.

Technical information

Programme: Objective 1 Estonia 2004-2006

Total Investment: EUR 43 460 - EU Investment: EUR 14 380

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¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=EE&the=51&sto=1533&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defL=EN.

J

Italy, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia

Training programmes:

Growing business clusters across Central Europe to enhance competitiveness and innovation

The concept of industry clusters of interconnected businesses and suppliers working together in similar or related industries is seen as an important means of increasing productivity and delivering economic development and innovation. Clusters can play an active role in boosting a region's competitiveness by making it more attractive, encouraging research, sharing good practice and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.

The transnational 'Cluster and Network Cooperation for Business Success in Central Europe' (CNBC) project, which is operational in seven countries in Central Europe, aims to help clusters and cluster managers to improve their management skills, optimise their service portfolio and expand internationally. These aims have been achieved partly by organising training for cluster managers with the aim of developing a joint curriculum and a detailed training manual for them.

Although the CNCB project is mainly aimed at clusters in Central Europe, it is also open to educational institutions, policy makers and innovation agencies.

Wide range of sectors

Although business clusters were at different stages of organisational development throughout Europe, a wide range of industrial sectors took part in the CNBC project including alternative energy, clothing, design, aviation, plastics and automotive clusters. The project funds were mostly spent on the staff costs involved in organising surveys of participating companies, on communication and dissemination activities (including establishing a website) and on organising conferences at which survey findings were presented.

In addition to the creation of a training manual, the project will also lead to the publication of a handbook on cluster optimisation and a third handbook on internationalisation.

Between 10 and 20 jobs are expected to be created as a result of the project, mainly in cluster organisations.

Technical information

Programme: ERDF for the 2007-2013 programming period

Total Investment: EUR 2 129 157

EU Investment: EUR 1 715 630

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¹⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=IT&the=51&sto=2821&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defl=EN.

K

Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Norway

**Training programmes:
Baltic Sea innovation boosted with new tools of the trade**

The Baltic Sea region is recognised for its strong knowledge-based and innovative economy, with SMEs playing a key role in this innovation process. SMEs often have difficulties securing financing for innovation and transnational projects. To address this issue, the JOSEFIN (Joint SME Finance for Innovation) project is offering integrated financial services to SMEs in the Baltic Sea region, including individual coaching and tailor-made advice.

Seizing the innovation potential

The JOSEFIN partnership includes the main players in the innovation process: incubators, business development agencies, such as partners of the Enterprise Europe Network, public authorities in charge of policy development and implementation, public financial institutions and research and technology development organisations. They jointly developed models and approaches as well as concrete tools and instruments in the countries involved boosting access to finance and cooperation and internationalisation of businesses.

The project set up new loan guarantee funds to back up SME loans with integrated coaching services, thus reducing the credit default risk of banks financing innovation and transnational projects of SMEs. Moreover, new agreements have been signed to utilise EU initiatives such as JEREMIE and the SME-guarantee facility of the CIP-programme administered by the European Investment Fund. Until the end of the project in January 2012, the JOSEFIN loan guarantees helped to generate loans to SMEs of around 150 million EUR in total and many more beyond the project end.

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Draft date: 04/01/2010, updated in 2014

(Source¹⁷)

¹⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=LV&the=51&sto=1661&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defL=EN.

L

Denmark, Latvia, Sweden

**Training programmes:
Baltic clusters set to expand**

Clusters offer ideal opportunities for combining talent and resources when producing services and products. To improve how clusters operate in Denmark, Latvia and Sweden, the project 'Baltic Sea Region — Capacity Building Programme' (BSR-CBP) has designed a common framework for cluster policies and transnational innovation programmes.

'As a self-made cluster facilitator, I found the three advanced courses in cluster facilitation in the BSR-CBP project covered the challenges I face in my daily work. Through the lectures and group discussions, I became much more aware of how to facilitate a cluster and gained knowledge of several practical tools which I can apply in my daily work.'

Hans A Pedersen, Project Director, Danish Cooling Cluster

Filling the pool of resources

The project partners come from what is referred to as the Triangle Region, namely Denmark (founder of REG X, the Danish Cluster Academy), Sweden, through VINNOVA the Swedish governmental agency for innovation systems, and Latvia, via LIAA the Latvian Investment and Development Agency. Transfer of knowledge and experience in terms of managing clusters is a key feature of the project and will add to the pool of resources available in the region.

Training for growth

The partners have recognised the need to design and pilot training modules on cluster facilitation, support programmes, management, design and implementation. The target groups of the project are players in the public sphere such as managers from cluster organisations, business support organisations and civil servants at local, regional and national level. The project involves the design and piloting of two modules on basic training for use at regional or national level, three modules on advanced training for the transnational level and three modules on public cluster support programmes also for use at transnational level. The aim is for the training modules to subsequently be merged into a transnational cooperative strategic platform for the Baltic Sea Region.

Technical information

Programme: ERDF over the period January 2009 — January 2010

EU Investment: EUR 300 000

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Draft date: 15/02/2010

(Source¹⁸)

¹⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=LV&the=51&sto=1792&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defL=EN.

M

Denmark, Sweden, Norway

Training programmes:
A Scandinavian model for women-led companies

Female entrepreneurs in three Nordic countries have joined forces to boost women-led small and medium-sized companies. Their aim is to strengthen the competitive conditions for the Kattegat/Skagerrak region through innovation, development and viable growth. The network includes regional authorities, female entrepreneurs and scientists from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. A key part of their work is six seminars focused on growth.

Power of partnership

Only one third of all new firms set up in Norway, Sweden and Denmark are started by women. In response, a total of 10 different partners from these three countries came together in 2007 to 2008, to create the Women in Business project. Partly funded by the EU, it will last three years.

One goal of the new project is to stimulate more women to start their own companies in the Kattegat/Skagerrak region, **working across the borders of the three countries** involved in the project. Several successful women entrepreneurs, who are sharing their knowledge and expertise, support them.

The lead partner is Föreningen Norden, a politically independent organisation (NGO) with approximately 60 000 members throughout the Nordic countries. Other partners include four regional authorities. The project includes several groups with members from all three countries, and cooperates with various academic institutes to assess barriers to female entrepreneurship in the region.

Knowledge and expertise

Ultimately their mission is to develop a Scandinavian model for female entrepreneurship, after testing best practice methods that can be applied in all three countries. The activities should also lead to new knowledge of the factors that help the expansion and development of female-led companies, calling on innovation and novel approaches to business.

Technical information

Programme: ERDF for the 2007 to 2013 programming period

Total Investment: EUR 724 990

EU Investment: EUR 362 490

Contact details

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Draft date: 16/03/2011

(Source¹⁹)

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=NO&the=51&sto=2087&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defL=EN.

N

Finland

Training programmes:
Sustainable wood energy from North Karelia

Eastern Finland is a world leader in forestry technology. That is where Wenet Centre — a sustainable energy expertise network — was born, **giving the regional expertise in this field an international boost.**

The Wenet Network in the North Karelia region has exported wood energy expertise since 2004. The EU-funded cross-regional project, Wenet Centre, which kicked off in 2009, aimed at further strengthening the region's position on the renewable energy market. Consisting of sustainable energy companies, plus research and education and training institutes, the Centre searched for the most suitable solutions in energy services for its clients, and enabled networking among experts.

More international opportunities for regional energy actors

With the aim of bringing together the best sustainable expertise in eastern Finland, the Wenet Centre wished to help local companies to become strong international players in the field. The project focused on improving the international marketing of energy products and services. It also devised projects to boost export opportunities and arrange export and internationalisation visits to eastern Finland.

Covering the entire production chain

With a network of nearly 30 companies working with sustainable energy, and more than 15 organisations from eastern Finland and beyond, the Wenet Centre managed to bring together energy expertise and technology covering the entire energy production chain: energy wood harvesting, transportation, district heating, the customer interface, converting wood ash into fertiliser, etc. The Centre also provided related research and training services, plus environmental impact assessment reports.

'The outcome of the project was that companies and organisations working with sustainable energy created a tighter network; we managed to create international partnerships and transferred our knowledge and technology to Canada, Russia and EU countries,' Jouko Parviainen, the project manager, summarises the benefits of the project. 'Thanks to the project, eastern Finland has gained visibility as a pioneer in the field, boosting the competitiveness of the local experts, especially within wood energy and forest bioeconomy.'

Technical information

Programme: European Regional Development Fund 2007-2013

Total Investment: EUR 464 000

EU Investment: EUR 162 400

Contact details

(not provided)

Draft date: 23/09/2013

(Source²⁰)

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=FI&the=51&sto=2787&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defL=EN.

0

Greece

Training programmes: Digital investment in the Greek tourism sector

Digi-lodge is a state-supported initiative in Greece designed to accelerate 'digital' investments in the country's tourism sector, especially at state-licensed lodging facilities (hotels, lodges, motels, rented rooms, etc.). The widespread introduction of modern ICT tools in hotels and other tourist facilities is attracting greater numbers of higher value-added visitors from both Greece and abroad and is also improving hotel management efficiency.

The Greek tourism sector has been slow to embrace the advantages of modern internet technologies and services to attract higher volumes and higher value-added tourism.

Small and medium-sized hotels are typically geared towards holidays for Greek families, while many larger hotels are strongly dependent on tour operators. As a result, hotels and boarding houses in Greece have been failing to directly access a broader clientele of tourists and visitors from abroad.

Only 74 % of Greek hotels have access to the internet and this number falls to 37 % for small guest houses. Only 63 % of hotels have a web page (30 % for smaller lodges); some 71 % of available hotel websites do not have online details of room availability; some 77 % lack data on prices; while more than 67 % of bookings are made through traditional channels.

A spur to technology-related investment

One of the key objectives of the initiative is to spur technology-related investment even at the smaller lodges and family-run hotels across Greece. Digi-lodge offers to co-finance private investments in information and communication technologies to help them:

- enhance their internet presence and international exposure;
- increase online bookings with fully automated online transactions;
- reduce seasonal variations and increase the flow of tourists throughout the year;
- increase overall service quality by providing facilities such as wifi, digital entertainment, etc.;
- and considerably improve business efficiency by modernising back office operations.

1 500 hotels and lodges now offer online services.

Digi-lodge supports ICT investments that range between EUR 7 000 and EUR 40 000 in total, and co-finances them at a level of 60 %. The total eligible investment budget is directly correlated to the type of state licence and the 'star rating' of the hotel. Each investment proposal has been submitted and screened through an automated electronic portal, which has simplified the process.

Under the Digi-lodge scheme, digital investment agreements have been concluded so far with nearly 1 500 hotels and lodges, which are now able to offer online transactions and e-services.

Technical information

Total Investment: EUR 75 000 000 – EU Investment: EUR 36 000 000

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Draft date: not available

(Source²¹)

²¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=GR&the=51&sto=2401&lan=7®ion=ALL&obj=ALL&per=2&defl=EN.

Training programmes:
DRIVE for Growth

Directing Research into Viable Enterprise for Growth (DRIVE for Growth)

This project addresses the need to better network the existing knowledge base in EU regions. To facilitate this, each partner region set up a Group for Regional Innovation and Development (GRID) to promote and support greater linkages, interaction and productivity between research communities, support agencies and industry. At transnational level, these groups help to foster a single space where SMEs and research institutions in north-west Europe can benefit from a critical mass of resources in relation to market development, available research, production capacity and networks.

Dynamic web-based platform

An important innovation in the project is the development of a dynamic fully automated web-based platform, which is implemented across all the partner regions. Once an individual or organisation is registered, the tool will automatically track developments of interest, such as new research or sub-supply opportunities. It also helps researchers to find industry partners and networks companies in a range of sectors.

Results

Some concrete outcomes of the project as in 2007 included:

- the completion of business innovation benchmarking surveys in each partner region, involving a total of 350 respondents;
- the establishment of four regional GRIDs, with the participation of the public sector, business development agencies / networks, research organisations and the private sector;
- the development of a new web-based platform to promote exchange and collaboration between public authorities, business support agencies, research institutions and industry;
- the registration of over 170 businesses on this DRIVE for Growth platform, with over 200 regular users and a target of 600 users by the end of the project;
- the participation in the project, to date, of 10 research institutes;
- the participation of over 600 businesses in regional events organised within the framework of the project;
- the registration of over 4000 businesses from across the partner regions on the project mailing lists.

Technical information

Programme: INTERREG IIIB NWE Programme

Total Investment: EUR 1 075 000

EU Investment: EUR 516 000

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²² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/details_new.cfm?pay=UK&the=45&sto=1507&lan=7®ion=544&obj=ALL&per=2&defL=EN.

Q

United Kingdom

**Training programmes:
Providing a 'smart' marketing platform for small design firms**

Hidden Art is a not-for-profit organisation that sets out to assist disadvantaged design micro-enterprises in the London area to gain access to the competitive, global marketplace. It provides a dedicated network and business-to-business (B2B) platform for designers, and supports them with training, information, and business collaboration opportunities.

The Hidden Art project 'Innovative Collaboration Networks for Smart Growth' aims to stimulate smart growth for the local design community in London through service innovation, collaborative networks and training. It provides the infrastructure and support to help designers, who are often sole traders, to market their products globally via the Hidden Art e-Shop, pop-up shops, international trade fairs, the company website and press coverage.

Integrated support network

The Hidden Art project offers an integrated support network and sets out to provide designer micro-enterprises with the resources and access normally only available to larger companies.

Alongside the dedicated B2B platform, designers are offered customised guidance provided through monthly networking events and one-to-one counselling sessions. The support model focuses on a menu of tailored progression routes, to raise their commercialisation skills as well as offering platforms for collaboration, production and the distribution of their work.

Product development programmes

Product development programmes are also organised to help participants develop their ideas into a product and get them into the marketplace.

The Hidden Art network is open to all designer-makers and currently numbers around 2 000 members of which 67 % are women. Around 100 designers have their products featured on the Hidden Art e-Shop (<http://hiddenart.co.uk/shop/>) and around 300 have their directory page on the Hidden Art website (<http://hiddenart.co.uk/>).

Joint marketing collaborations, events and programmes are brokered or administered by Hidden Art to maximise commercialisation opportunities. To date, support has been provided to 450 businesses. Some 150 businesses have been involved in the collaboration networks.

The project has increased confidence in the London-based designer-maker community. Role models have been created for the industry, as the case studies show a number of individuals who have succeeded in growing their businesses with the aid of the project.

Technical information

Total Investment: EUR 1 490 000

EU Investment: EUR 750 000

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5.3. Support projects, group 3: evaluated projects

R	Finland
Training programmes: Faster, further and more effective? Export partner groups as facilitators of internationalisation	

The goal of the Export Partnership measure is to ease companies' entry to target markets by forming synergetic export clusters. It is a cooperation project of SMEs, heading together to a selected target market or markets, with a minimum of four companies forming a synergetic export cluster.

The executing agent will recruit an external export manager for the group, who acts as an extra resource to the companies and offers a local presence in the target market, alongside their network. The export manager may also be based in Finland, if the operation mode supports that. The participating companies have an active role in the project. This way of working also offers them an excellent learning and growth opportunity. The job description of the export manager can be designed according to company needs. Primarily it is about door opening, market study, partner search and coaching.

Finpro has the role of project management, and manages approximately 30 export partnerships annually targeting various markets and different lines of industry. The maximum duration of government aid is three and half years. However, the commitment and financing are always for one year at a time. In the early phase a six-month-long preparatory period is possible.

The target group are Finnish SMEs with a special emphasis on growth companies. Larger companies may participate as well, but depending on the company size the amount of government aid may be reduced or may not be available at all.

Budget Around 3.7 million euro (annual)

Measure in operation since 1993 (Finpro)

Executing agent Trade association: Finpro

Evaluation period 1998-2002

Methodology

Several sources were used:

- telephone interviews with 226 enterprises, and with 51 joint export managers
- face-to-face interviews with 7 case company representatives.

Activities for which the measure is used

The participating companies used the measure for various internationalisation activities. In general, the activities can be divided into financial and non-financial. The primary purpose was to find new customer contacts and to start or increase export trade. Other aims were (in order of importance): access to a new target market, acquisition of knowledge about markets and competition, finding a new distribution network, sharing the risks and costs of internationalisation with other participating companies, and improving the company's export qualifications and readiness. The measure was also aimed at finding international partners other than customers or distributors, developing joint deliveries and developing a plan or strategy for the internationalisation of the company.

User satisfaction

90 % of all participating companies would recommend the measure to other companies. However, their satisfaction with the export partnership varied: 38 % considered that the financial aims of the partnership were met either fully or partly, while 64 % of respondents were fully or partly happy with the non-financial outcomes.

S

Germany

Training programmes:
Export Initiative for 'Renewable Energies'

The export initiative aims to help German companies in exporting renewable energy technologies by providing information, leveraging existing initiatives and activities and actively supporting projects abroad. One of the initiatives' central tasks is to showcase German renewable energy technology products and companies abroad. Several support packages are financed by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology and are implemented by various service providers in Germany and abroad.

The export initiative uses the following support measures:

- trade fairs (partly integrated into the Foreign trade fair programme of the Federal Republic of Germany)
- business trips to potential business partners abroad and organisation of special thematic conferences abroad (supported by the Network of German Chambers Abroad)
- information and contact events (included in the programme for foreign trade related information and contact events coordinated by Germany Trade and Invest)
- trips by foreign decision makers to Germany to find out about German renewable energy technologies 'on the spot' and conclude business contracts
- installation of lead or flagship projects abroad at German official institutions together with accompanying PR measures
- B2B platform
- provision of information on foreign markets and marketing abroad (German Energy Agency — *dena*)
- Public financial support (e.g. *KfW Bankengruppe*).

All in all, the main aim of the measure is to provide market information and to establish business contacts. The measure is aimed at enterprises, mainly SMEs engaged in renewable energies like solar energy, wind power, bio fuels, geothermal energy and hydropower.

Budget In 2006 implementation of the various export initiatives cost around EUR 8.8 million

Measure in operation since 2003

Website www.exportinitiative.de

Executing agent Various special agencies coordinated by Germany Trade and Invest.

Evaluation period 2003-2006

Methodology

A survey amongst participating enterprises (244), and interviews with trade associations and experts. The results of individual measures were set out as well as the overall findings. In this meta-analysis the focus is on the overall findings.

Activities for which the measure is used

The measures most used were those supporting business trips (Network of German Chambers Abroad), trade fairs, information on foreign markets and marketing abroad (*dena*).

User satisfaction

74 % of the enterprises interviewed knew of the initiative and 53 % had taken advantage of some of the measures. They judged the initiative to be quite good: the overall average score was 2.2 on a scale from 1 (very good) to 5 (unsatisfactory). However, they had some criticisms of its organisation (too complex, not transparent enough).

T

The Netherlands

Training programmes:
Prepare2start

The objective of the measure is providing advice and assistance in drawing up and implementing an internationalisation plan, and a 50 % subsidy for activities such as partner search, trade fair participation and legal advice. Prepare2start is the continuation of the former PSB-measure: Programme Starters in Foreign Markets (1999-2007). The target group is comprised of SMEs with less than 100 employees, with little or no international experience, and wishing to start exports to a (new) foreign market.

Budget Around EUR 12 million (2010)

Measure in operation since 1999 (since 2007 it has a new name)

Website <http://www.rvo.nl/>

Executing agent Special agency: *Agentschap NL* (formerly EVD)

Evaluation period The evaluation covered the years 2002-2006.

Methodology

The following research activities were carried out: desk research; telephone survey among users; in-depth interviews with policy makers, executing agents, stakeholders and other organisations that promote trade; focus groups of entrepreneurs that participated.

Activities for which the measure is used

The activities for which the support measure is mostly used — next to drawing up an internationalisation plan together with an advisor — are product presentation, market orientation and presentation material.

User satisfaction

70 % of the interviewed participants stated that the subsidised activities in the support measure were well linked or very well linked to the needs of their company. The execution of the measure appears to have been generally satisfactory, and was perceived as professional and fast.

(Source: EIM, 2011, p 70)

U

The Netherlands

Training programmes:
Netherlands Business Support Offices

The measure aimed at supporting internationalisation of Dutch firms in promising but relatively inaccessible markets, but was extended a few years later to include closer markets. It is flexible: once opened, NBSOs may be and have been closed following internal evaluations of their effectiveness. In 2010 the Dutch NBSO network consisted of 24 offices in 11 countries: including six in China, two each in India and Brazil, and one in Russia. NBSOs are aimed at both large and medium-sized enterprises.

Budget Around 2.5 million euro (2007)

Measure in operation since 1997

Website <http://www.rvo.nl/>

Executing agent Special agency: *Agentschap NL* (formerly EVD)

The NBSOs offer general information and (regional) economic reports of the local market, facilitate local contacts with government or businesses, and support visits by Dutch firms.

Evaluation period The period evaluated was 2001–2006.

Methodology

The evaluation study used material from different sources: desk research, in-depth interviews with insiders and stakeholders, focus group with employees of NBSOs, Internet survey among employees of NBSOs, and a survey among users of NBSOs.

Activities for which the measure is used

The services most frequently used are (1) facilitating local contacts (2) general information of the NBSO region (3) (regional) economic report of the particular market (4) supporting visits to an NBSO region (5) specific research for the enterprise.

User satisfaction

The majority of users considered the information received from NBSOs useful: the information was considered useful or very useful by 82 % of the users interviewed. The NBSOs in China scored highest (88 %). Both the locations of the NBSOs and the services offered were appreciated by Dutch firms: they described NBSO employees as accessible and responsive.

(Source: EIM, 2011, p 71)

V

Sweden

Training programmes: Swedpartnership

In April 2010 Swedfund started a programme called Swedpartnership, which specifically targets Swedish SMEs with intentions to do business with countries in developing countries, i.e. India, China, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova. Swedfund is Sweden's risk capital company specialised in investments in developing countries. The support is a loan that can be written off after the project is completed and approved. The maximum support for a project is EUR 75 000. Financial support can be given up to 40 % of the cost of the project.

The forerunners of Swedpartnership, the programmes STARTsouth and STARTeast, were evaluated. These measures focused on Swedish SMEs that wanted to invest in countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern and Central Europe. The loans and conditions were comparable to those of Swedpartnership.

Budget EUR 3 million

Measure in operation since 2009 (forerunners since 2002)

Website www.swedpartnership.se and www.swedfund.se

Executing agent Government: Swedfund International

Evaluation period Users of the programmes in the period 2002–2005 were interviewed.

Methodology

A telephonic survey amongst 169 participating enterprises with a response of 109 enterprises.

Activities for which the measure is used

This was not evaluated.

User satisfaction

The majority were satisfied with their contacts with the relevant agencies. Few were unsatisfied. 95 % of participating enterprises said their expectations had been met.

(Source: EIM, 2011, p 72)

W

UK

**Training programmes:
UK Trade & Investment's Tradeshow Access Programme**

UKTI's Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) provides grant support for trade shows overseas. Participation is available in two forms — the TAP Group or TAP SOLO. The TAP Group offers businesses the option of participating as part of a group of UK businesses led by an accredited trade organisation (ATO). TAP Group grants vary from £ 1 000 — £ 1 800. TAP SOLO supports a smaller number of companies on an independent or 'solo' basis who wish to exhibit at trade shows where there is no ATO-led group. They receive a fixed grant of £ 1 000. In March 2010, grants were available for over 400 trade shows in many markets. These included specific events in China, India, Russia, Ukraine, Japan and Brazil. The key objectives of the TAP scheme are to:

- help new exporters overcome initial barriers to export;
- help high technology businesses and firms that are new to emerging markets learn how to use overseas trade fairs as part of their trade development plans; and
- help UK firms maximise the benefits from exhibiting at overseas trade fairs.
- The target group is as follows:
 - o SMEs or UK publicly funded centres of higher learning or UK publicly funded research organisations that are:
 - o new-to-export (based on a percentage of turnover resulting from exports) and
 - o have had less than three TAP grants (involving more than one market) — in 2009 this was increased to six.

Budget £ 8 million per annum

Measure in operation since 2006

Website <http://www.ukti.gov.uk/>

Executing agent Government: UK Trade and Investment (UKTI)

Evaluation period January 2005 — March 2006.

Methodology

- Use of existing material: the TAP database, the UKTI Performance and Impact Monitoring Survey (PIMS) and Amadeus financial database, and a literature study on trade show attendance.
- Collection of new material: a telephone survey on funded and non-funded firms (investigating the counterfactual; considering a control group), and telephone interviews with Accredited Trade Organisations (ATOs) who organise delegations to trade fairs (TAP Group) and International Trade Advisors that administer the individual participation of firms to trade fairs (TAP SOLO).
- Descriptive and econometric analysis.

Activities for which the measure is used

About 30 % of the trade fairs are so-called 'global trade fairs': trade fairs not focused on a particular national market but on the industry sector globally or regionally. Around 20 % are 'high priority trade fairs' focusing on markets identified as of particular strategic importance by UKTI (e.g. Japan, South Korea, China, India, Brazil and Russia). About half of the grants were used for trade fairs on other markets.

User satisfaction

The enterprises receiving services were in general satisfied with them. Seven aspects were rated. 70 % or more judged the support in 'aiding preparation', 'practical arrangements', 'event quality' and 'quality of contacts made' as good or very good. 'Profile of the UK delegation: activities held' scored less well.

X

UK

**Training programmes:
Scottish Development International Policy**

Scottish Development International (SDI) is a governmental body and a joint venture between the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise (SE) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) providing services to support inward investment and internationalisation for the whole of Scotland. To support business internationalisation the following services are offered:

- preparing to do international business
- developing international strategy
- international mentoring
- overseas market support
- support to take part in exhibitions, missions and learning journeys, international accommodation packages.

The figures presented do not include the TAP SOLO trade fairs.

Budget About GBP 5 million for SDI internationalisation services per annum, average for the period 2005/06 to mid-2009

Measure in operation since 2002 (OMS), and 2003 (ELMJ)

Executing agent Government: Scottish Development International (SDI)

Overseas Market Support (OMS) provides Scotland-based businesses with customised support for developing new markets internationally: e.g. market reports and information, identification of potential business contacts and partners, and the design of promotional material to support entry into an overseas market. Up to 50% of eligible costs can be covered, where funding is provided. Support follows a company's international strategic plan as agreed with SDI. The target group consists of Scotland-based businesses looking to expand into new global markets and with a turnover of £ 400 000 or more.

The international exhibitions, missions and learning journeys (EMLJ) initiative from SDI can help companies network with overseas buyers and prospective business partners. SDI organises group stands at key international exhibitions, and run sector-based overseas missions and learning journeys. Subsidies may be offered to companies participating in an exhibition, mission or learning journey with Scottish Development International. The measure has the same target group as OMS.

Evaluation period 2006-2009 (econometric analysis data: 2003-2006).

Methodology

The main elements of the evaluation were:

- interviews with 250 businesses receiving internationalisation support
- econometric analysis on a database including 1 480 businesses receiving SDI-services in 2003-2006
- 10 case studies
- consultations with the agency, stakeholders and external partner organisations.

Activities for which the measure is used

Most enterprises made use of the support for overseas exhibitions and missions (53 %), and some form of market support (50 %). The EMLJ and OMS measures are used relatively often.

User satisfaction

In general, around 70 % of the users of the SDI are (very) satisfied with the services received. The quality and relevance of the information and the usefulness of advice are appreciated most.



Annexes

ANNEX I — SUPPORT MEASURES AND ACTIONS TAKEN AT EU LEVEL

A number of business centres, helpdesks, websites, databases and other services managed or supported by the European Commission can help SMEs internationalise.

Below we list (1) services covering only the EU market; (2) services covering non-EU countries too, and (3) services focusing solely on growth markets outside the EU.

Internationalisation within the EU

Your Europe Business Portal

This portal provides companies that are planning for cross-border activities with information and interactive services that help them expand business inside the EU.

<http://europa.eu/youreurope/business/>

European IPR Helpdesk

The European Commission's IPR Helpdesk provides free-of-charge, first-line advice and information on intellectual property (IP) and intellectual property rights (IPR). The service is targeted at researchers and SMEs participating in EU-funded collaborative research projects. It also addresses SMEs involved in international technology transfer processes.

If you need assistance on a specific IPR issue, or information about the latest developments or training on IPR, contact the European IPR Helpdesk.

<https://www.iprhelpdesk.eu>

European network of national intellectual property offices

Supported by the EU.

<http://www.innovaccess.eu/>

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

This cross-border exchange programme gives new or aspiring entrepreneurs the chance to learn from experienced entrepreneurs running a small business in another European country. The host benefits from fresh perspectives on his/her business and gets the opportunity to cooperate with foreign partners or learn about new markets. The stay is partially funded by the European Union.

<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/>

Solvit

Solvit helps the public and companies to solve disputes with government bodies in other Member States without going to court and free of charge.

http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/site/index_en.htm

Internationalisation within and beyond the EU

Enterprise Europe Network

Typically, when an SME plans to go international, it will look for business support and guidance on its doorstep. The Enterprise Europe Network helps European SMEs to make the most not only of the Internal Market but also of growth markets abroad. It is a true one-stop shop, helping SMEs to

- develop their business in new markets;
- source or license new technologies;
- access EU finance and EU funding.

Additionally, the Network organises matchmaking events and its online database provides international 'business to business' contacts for network clients.

Close to 600 partner organisations — chambers of commerce and industry, technology centres, universities and development agencies — with more than 3 000 experienced staff form the Network and provide these services across all EU Member States and also via presences in 26 third party countries, including the US, Russia, China, India and Brazil.

<http://een.ec.europa.eu/>

European Small Business Portal

This portal provides information on EU policies, programmes and initiatives to help SMEs.

http://ec.europa.eu/small-business/index_en.htm

EUREKA: Eurostars programme

Offers funding for international research to EU SMEs that devote 10 % of their turnover or total full time equivalent (FTE) staffing to research.

www.eurekanetwork.org/activities/eurostars

European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)

The ECCP is a web-based platform that facilitates cluster cooperation within and beyond Europe. It currently counts over 900 registered cluster organisations from across Europe and represents the main instrument for cluster organisations in Europe to profile themselves, exchange experience and identify potential partners for transnational cooperation for the benefit of their SME members.

The Platform is also instrumental in promoting international cluster cooperation. It has signed a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with partners in Japan, India, Brazil, South Korea, Tunisia, Morocco, Mexico, and Chile establishing a framework for long-term cooperation between the Platform and peer organisations in non-EU countries. These MoUs facilitate exchange of information on cluster mapping, initiatives, and events, and support the organisation of cluster matchmaking missions in Europe and in non-EU countries.

www.clustercollaboration.eu

International cluster matchmaking events

Cluster matchmaking events are being organised to support cluster organisations and their SME members in their efforts to access global value chains and develop international strategic partnerships and business cooperation. Each event brings a delegation of European cluster organisations and SME members from Europe to meet international partners and initiate strategic cooperation.

Three events have been organised, notably in Japan on green materials and cleantech,²⁴ in Brazil on biotech²⁵ and in India on resource efficiency.²⁶ More of such events are planned for 2014 and 2015.

Participation is open to cluster organisations from Europe and their European SME members. The cluster organisations have to be registered on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP). Participants are selected through calls for expressions of interest published on the ECCP.

Internationalisation beyond the EU

Doing business with Asia

IPR Helpdesks

Advice for SMEs on intellectual property rights (IPR) is provided by the EU's IPR Helpdesks for China, south-east Asia (the ASEAN region) and Latin American countries (Mercosur). The helpdesks offer a first-line expert advice on IPR matters, liaison with outside experts and preparation of general and customised training. EU SMEs can make 'confidential case' inquiries directly to the Helpdesk, either in person, by e-mail, phone, or fax, and receive a speedy reply — free of charge.

ASEAN IPR SME Helpdesk

The ASEAN IPR SME Helpdesk supports EU small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to both protect and enforce their IPR in ASEAN countries, through the provision of free information and services.

<http://www.asean-iprhelpdesk.eu/>

China IPR SME helpdesk

This helpdesk provides free information, advice and training for European SMEs to help them protect and enforce their intellectual property rights in China.

<http://www.china-iprhelpdesk.eu/>

Mercosur IPR SME Helpdesk

The helpdesk offers free of charge first-line support on IPR matters in order to facilitate the expansion of European SMEs in the Mercosur region, in Chile and in other Latin American countries.

www.mercosur-iprhelpdesk.eu

EU Business Centres

To date, three growth markets outside the EU are covered by EU Business Centres: the European Business and Technological Centre in India, the EU SME Centre in China and the European ASEAN Business Centre in Thailand advise European SMEs on how to invest and seize business opportunities in the respective countries.

The European Commission is establishing further structures under the name SEBSEAM (Support to European Business in South-East Asia Markets) in Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos based on support structures that already exist. The overall objective of these SEBSEAM structures is to increase trade and investment flows between the EU and the individual economies they are located in, as well as the wider ASEAN region.

²⁴ <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/japan-2012>.

²⁵ <http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/brazil-2013>.

²⁶ http://www.clustercollaboration.eu/documents/2736637/2817350/EU+India+Matchmaking+Event+on+Resource+Efficiency+and+Clean+Technologies_Article.pdf/24ddb6de-dd8c-44e6-9d51-da3557403a2a?version=1.0.

European ASEAN Business Centre, Thailand

This European trade organisation is situated in Bangkok, Thailand, and aims to contribute to the improvement of trade and investment for European companies in Thailand.

<http://www.eabc-thailand.eu/>

European Business and Technology Centre in India

The Centre assists the business, science and research community in Europe and India, generating new business opportunities and technology transfer and promoting European clean technologies in India.

It is located in New Delhi, with antennae to be opened in Mumbai, Calcutta and Bangalore. Co-financed by the European Commission, it opened in January 2009. The centre is run by Eurochambres, in partnership with 16 business and research organisations from 4 sectors (biotech, energy, environment and transport). Its objective is to become the point of reference for European companies and research entities that wish to enter the Indian market.

The activities carried out cover a wide range of actions: information and intelligence services, assistance and specific sector activities (EC, 2012).

<http://www.ebtc.eu/>

EU SME Centre China

The EU Centre for Support to European SMEs ('EU SME Centre') is funded by the European Commission and provides information, advice, training and matchmaking opportunities for European SMEs wishing to export to or invest in the Chinese market (EC, 2012).

<http://www.eusmecentre.org.cn/>

http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/china/documents/projects/eu_sme_centre.pdf

Quiz: EU SME Centre — Are you ready for China?

This online quiz allows SMEs to gauge their readiness in developing business in China, enabling them to diagnose whether they are heading in the right direction.

<http://www.eusmecentre.org.cn/quiz/>

Understanding China

This training programme was run by Eurochambres and other stakeholders and co-financed by the European Commission. It trained business organisations to help European companies better understand the Chinese economy and increase their competitiveness in that market. The programme is finished but the website still provides useful information about the Chinese market.

<http://www.understandingchina.eu/>

EU Project Innovation Centre (China)

(supported by the EU)

EUPIC is a comprehensive platform promoting trade, investment and technical cooperation between the EU and China.

www.eupic.org.cn

EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation

This organisation encourages exchanges of experience and know-how between EU and Japanese businesses and helps them improve their competitiveness and cooperation.

<http://www.eu-japan.eu/>

EU Business in Japan

This website comprises several chapters covering every aspect of doing business in or with Japan. The site also has a database with public service providers. Some parts of the website are accessible to members only.

<http://www.eubusinessinjapan.eu/>

Step in Japan

'Step in Japan' is a free logistic support initiative for SMEs, which acts as a landing pad for EU-based SMEs planning on entering into or expanding within Japan.

<http://www.eu-japan.eu/other-activities/step-in-japan>

Training sessions

Training sessions are available in Japan for EU companies of all sizes. They include scholarships for participants from small firms.

<http://www.eu-japan.eu/business-programmes/programmes-organised-by-the-centre>

EU Gateway Programme — Opportunities for EU Companies in Japan and South Korea

This programme is for EU companies in specific sectors that want to develop business cooperation with Japan and South Korea. It funds and organises business missions related to high-technology and design in these two countries.

<http://www.eu-gateway.eu/home>

Executive training programme in Japan and South Korea

This programme aims at helping European firms, including SMEs, succeed in the Japanese and South Korean markets. It offers and funds an intensive training scheme for executives combining lectures, language training and internships.

<http://www.euetp.eu/>

European Business Council (Japan)

(supported by the EU)

Provides indirect support for SMEs, aims at improving the trade and investment climate through trade policy.

www.ebc-jp.com

Doing business with the Americas

EU-US transatlantic IPR portal

This website encourages SMEs on both sides of the Atlantic to access a wide range of resources on intellectual property rights (IPR).

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/ipr/index_en.htm

Databases

SME Internationalisation Portal

In 2014 the EU will launch the 'SME Internationalisation Portal'. SMEs that plan to extend their business beyond the EU will find in the portal's database a list of (semi) public support service providers with contact details and details on the services offered. <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/smeip/>

Market access database

The database gives key information to EU exporters on applied tariffs, import formalities, statistics and trade barriers and allows trade barriers to be reported to the European Commission.

<http://madb.europa.eu/madb/indexPubli.htm>

Taxation and Customs: electronic databases

This website provides a list of all Commission databases related to customs and taxation

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/common/databases/index_en.htm

Information / Feedback tools for SMEs: Trade Defence Instruments and Technical Barriers to Trade

Trade Defence Instruments — ensuring fair trade for EU SMEs

Find out how to protect SMEs against trade defence measures, including subsidised and low-priced imports from non-EU countries, and what to do if an SME exporting to a non-EU country is affected by anti-dumping, anti-subsidy or safeguard measures applied by that country.

http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2013/april/tradoc_151015.pdf

Studies and news on internationalisation, provided by the European Commission

Promoting international activities of SMEs

This website links to a list of studies that deal with SME internationalisation.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/market-access/internationalisation/index_en.htm

Going global

Opportunities await European small firms beyond the Single Market. Read more on market access, competition in the global marketplace and trade liberalisation.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/international/index_en.htm

ANNEX II — SOURCES

European Commission (EC), 2013. *Regional Policy — Projects database*. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/index_en.cfm

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ANNEX III — OTHER USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

The guidebook series 'How to support SME Policy from Structural Funds' is available for download from http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/regional-sme-policies/index_en.htm:

- Nr. 1 Building Entrepreneurial Mindsets and Skills in the EU
- Nr. 2 Using standards to support growth, competitiveness and innovation
- Nr. 3 Facilitating Transfer of Business
- Nr. 4 The Smart Guide to Service Innovation
- Nr. 5 SBA implementation at regional level
- Nr. 6 How to use Structural Funds for SME & Entrepreneurship Policy
- Nr. 7 Supporting the Internationalisation of SMEs

A series of guides related to regional policy and smart specialisation, including SME support, can be downloaded from <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/guides>.

This series includes amongst others:

- Regional policy for smart growth of SMEs
- Smart Guide to Innovation-Based Incubators (IBI)

Notes



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