Regional Digital Transformation Policies towards Smarter Regions (Re-DIGIT)

An Interreg Europe project concept

KONTAKT

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1 General information

Interreg Europe call 4 (Deadline 22 June 2018)

Priority axis 1: Strengthening research, technological development and innovation

Specific objective 1.1: Improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes for Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, European Territorial Cooperation programmes, in the field of research and innovation infrastructure and capacities

2 Project Concept

2.1 Summary

Regional policies need to have impact on the development of digital ecosystems in order to reap the full benefits of digital technologies and create smarter regions. In practice, however, policies either neglect this or lack adequate focus and supporting instruments. Re-DIGIT project focuses on regional policy improvement for creating a digital transformation ecosystem. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, however, different governance mechanisms as well as supportive instruments will be exchanged among regions with valuable learning effects. Re-DIGIT does this through cluster management and by targeted training. The aim is to improve the capacity of actors and develop a set of policy recommendations to support regional stakeholders in their digital transformation mission. In the second phase, selected partner regions will test Regional Digital Offices with the aim of providing in place advice, setting up collaborative leadership to foster and drive digital strategies.

2.2 What is the challenge?

The digital revolution is profoundly changing our society and puts extra pressure on regional actors and organizations to embrace new digital opportunities towards improving the regional competitiveness. If Europe does not want to lag behind at global level, digital transformation needs to speed up. In this regard, the provision and exploitation of fast and ultrafast internet services is crucial for Europe's future economic development and competitiveness as well as for the progress and cohesion of society as a whole. For Europe to fully take advantage of the 2025 gigabit society targets and thus to realise the full potential of digital development, all regional stakeholders need to maximise their efforts. Member States have to provide appropriate incentives and means for increasing investment whilst local and regional actors and the ICT industry need to make use of these instruments. Regional policy shall foster the development of ICT infrastructure and innovative uses of ICT especially in less developed, periphery and remote areas, where digital opportunities can fill in the gap induced by geographical barriers.

2.3 Re-DIGIT concept

Pressure on regions is rising to adapt and harness the potential of ICT and to stimulate digital growth and competitiveness. This potential stems both from stimulating ICT as a growing economic sector and as an enabler for other areas such as public services. In order to reap the full potential benefits of ICT in regions towards creating smarter regions, regional policy shall endeavour to create a regional digital ecosystem that includes a harmonized development of ICT infrastructure as well as an environment to flourish the benefits of ICT in all regional socio-economic dimensions. In practice, however, often regional policies miss to cover such measures, and if covered, the measures are not fully integrated or lack concrete supporting instruments for the relevant stakeholder group. In other words, there are often significant gaps between the design and the implementation of digital transformation policies. Moreover, regional actors should be enabled to translate policies into concrete operational plans paying particular attention to the development of instruments and procedures meeting the challenges and needs identified both in the strategies and by involved stakeholder groups.

Re-DIGIT project tackles the abovementioned gaps and focuses on regional policy improvement for creating a digital transformation ecosystem. To do so, it emphasizes on the following dimensions:

- **Measures to promote the development and exploitation of high-speed internet infrastructure**

A proper broadband infrastructure is crucial for the development of the digital economy. Without this it is impossible to use ICT services both at public and private scales. In order to build-up the infrastructure, regional governance need to analyse the local situation to identify the intervention areas and priorities. The regional policy shall provide measures to foster the engagement of all relevant stakeholders (public and private sector) as well as measures to improve the funding and regulatory environment. Besides infrastructure, the regional policy requires to provide guidance, inspiration, advice and tools to support local firms, entrepreneurs and communities in their digitalisation efforts.

- **Measures to improve the governance and stakeholders' participation**

In the context of regional digital transformation, several actors could potentially become game changers by bringing different skills and understandings of reality to the policy development process to harness the potential of ICT for regional growth. Regional policy makers should engage with these actors and different communities to facilitate communication and to sustain long-term cultural change. For policies to be successful, it is vital to adopt a governance mechanism with an inclusive approach involving relevant stakeholders that can manage and balance bottom-up and top-down processes and interests. Therefore, appropriate governance and stakeholder involvement mechanisms are vital for the success of digital transformation strategies.

- **Measures to improve the inter-regional collaboration**

Digital infrastructure and services do not stop at the regional borders. Regional Policies should explore ICT development activities and priorities of other regions in order to establish collaborative relationships, which can potentially improve inter-regional synergies. There are a number of areas where regions can benefit from collaborating in ICT, including synergies for developing the digital infrastructure as well as joint R&I projects, public procurement, test beds as well interoperable open data solutions and platforms. Regional policy shall identify these opportunities and provide measures and instruments for collaborative inter-regional innovation.

2.4 Re-DIGIT Priority?

Some EU regions have tackled the ICT challenges better than others, demonstrating that success depends on implementing key policy statements. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, however, different governance mechanisms and attitudes as well as supportive policy instruments can be exchanged among regions as the key towards regional digital transformation. Re-DIGIT does this exchange through cluster management and by organizing regional workshops as well as targeted training. The main output is a set of common policy briefing recommendations to support regional stakeholders towards boosting their digital transformation. These, policy learnings and recommendations will be streamlined to improve the national digital strategies in the participating member states.

Examples of policy recommendations are:

- Measure to enhance the use of state aid and funding Instruments

- Policy measure for incentivizing the investment

- Policy measures to improve the regulatory environment

- Measures and instruments to improve the capacity of the involved local and regional actors

In the second phase, selected partner regions will test Regional Digital Offices with the aim of providing in place advice and setting up collaborative leadership to foster and drive digital development and innovation strategies.

2.5 Required partners

- Ministries responsible for digital strategies

- Regional representatives of digital ministries

- Regional authorities aiming at improving their regional digital environment

- Broadband Competence Offices