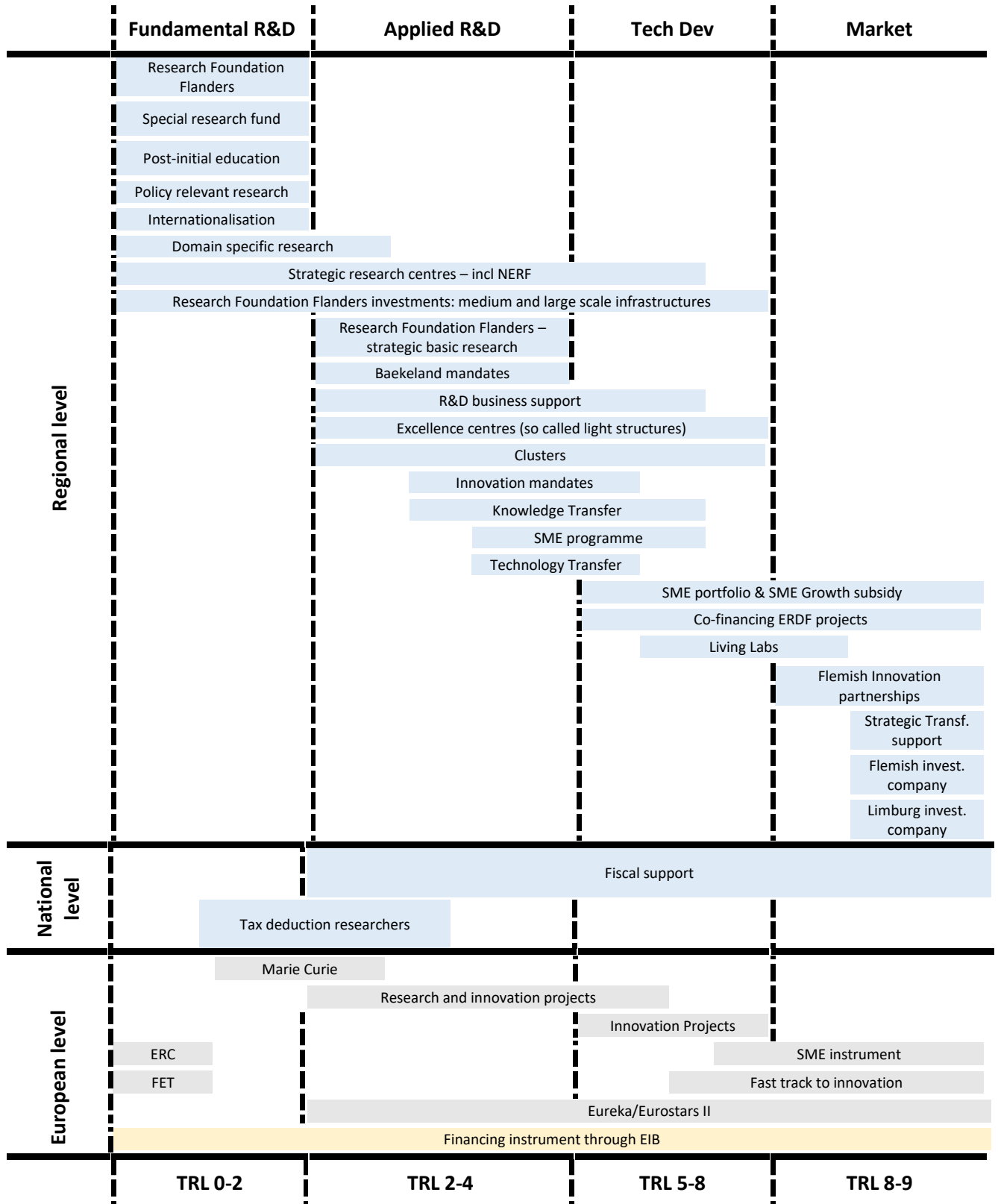


Policy Brief – Flanders OSDD

Flanders funding instruments scheme



The On Site Deep Dive in Flanders took place from the 13th to 14th of March 2018 in Ghent. All the partner regions participated to this OSDD.

The focus of this OSDD was showcasing Flanders' innovation policy as well as the local pilot/demonstration facilities to realize its Smart Specialisation Strategy, with a particular focus on industry 4.0, agrifood and bio-economy. In addition, a substantial part of the visit was dedicated to the presentation of each region's draft action plan. This provided an opportunity to discuss potential synergies and joint actions.

Based on the presentations, discussions and policy acceleration sessions of the OSDD, as well as on post-elaboration of information performed by Regions after the meeting, the following main critical conclusions can be derived in terms of advantages of cooperation, barriers, and recommendations that can be input for the Action Plan.

Advantages and opportunities of inter-regional cooperation deriving from the extension to other Regions of the instruments/tools/practices presented

- The BBEUPP - Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant is an interesting best practice to be shared with other Regions. In particular, the model behind the pilot plant is really interesting for both its sustainability as well as its synergic exploitation of private, regional, national and European funding. In particular, the Interreg Flanders - the Netherlands programme made was presented as one of the main source exploited. Within S34Growth project, partners started the identification of the ongoing interreg programme that can be exploited for the same purpose in the context of Vanguard Initiative
- Pilot infrastructures (like the Bio Base Europe Pilot Plant) are a good example of facilities opened to companies or other organisations located in the territory or in other regions. The model can be shared with other interested partners and could be the basis for a cross-regional cooperation targeted to service providers and companies willing to share, use and test machines and processes.
- The Industry 4.0 programme adopted in Flanders is very well structured and support organisations have a clear role in providing support to companies toward this transitions. In particular, VLAIO, the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Agency is in charge of guiding the transition and it has been presented a well-structured Vision toward 2050 which encourages businesses to be agile in their use and investment in *business models*, *technologies* and *people*. Having structured approach toward Industry 4.0 will facilitate the identification of synergies and consequently the implementation of targeted cooperation actions and the sharing of best practices. Besides the vision, it emerges that having a programme to concretely support industrial transitions it is extremely important. Also in this case cooperation can serve to share best practice, models and methodology.
- 'Living Labs' are an interesting concept applied in Flanders to demonstrate and inspire companies across a range of sectors with the aim of ensuring a more open contact with innovative ideas and a better introduction to real applicable technologies. These infrastructures are "softener" solutions with respect to Pilot Plants, where companies can access the demonstrators even using the funding coming from R&D&I programmes. In this sense, these infrastructures are a good instrument to be exploited in the context of interregional cooperation.
- Including "People" as a pillar of Industry 4.0 programme emphasise the need of working on skills development for new economy while looking at digitalisation and innovation in SMEs. This topic needs to be addressed with specific policy and the impact of these policies can be amplified if implemented in cooperation among several EU Regions.

Barriers and difficulties to face for the introduction of new instruments/tools/practices in a coordinated and synergic way

- The mapping of Vanguard Initiative regions per demo-case and the respective Interreg funding schemes highlighted the shortcomings of the geographic scope of Interreg Programme (Interreg B, in particular).
- Interregional actions require a validation from the regional authorities for their implementation, especially when budget needs to be secured for the purpose. In these cases the challenge is articulating to decision makers that the investment occurred outside of a particular partner region area, will impact on the territory in the longer term.
- Discrepancies in the budgets of different regions which might interfere with the coordination and implementation of cooperation measures. Similarly, budget limitations can impact on the implementation timeframe from region to region.
- Misalignment or divergencies among Regions on views and goals related to Industry 4.0 programme, DIH and demonstration infrastructures can hamper the definition of a shared plan of activities to be implemented and consequently can impact on the allocation of budget.
- When dealing with companies needs timing it's fundamental. The timeframe needed for the definition of a specific policy or the coordination among different regional authorities is longer than what expected by industrial stakeholders.
- Rules, regulations and legal aspects differ among regions and it might hamper the implementation of a shared action plan.

Recommendations and suggestions proposed to overcome such barriers and difficulties

- In order to support partner Regions in building the basis for future concrete cooperation actions, it is fundamental to have a clear understanding in what partners are doing and implementing in targeted fields. This can help in reducing the misalignments on some concept or event can guide the definition of actions targeted to shared interest and shared goals. To this end, the work done and the documents elaborated within the project (OSDD presentations, host reports, policy briefs and good practices) should be analysed and discussed at regional level with key local actors.
- An interregional voucher scheme for facilitating and coordinating the access to pilot plants, living labs and field labs infrastructures is an essential part of a coordinated European effort to fasten the innovation cycle.
- Besides the application in the context abovementioned, vouchers can be a useful instrument exploitable in other fields such as: DIH and talents and skills development. In the first case, DIHs can act as intermediaries to connect companies with service providers and voucher can be spent for the realisation of a specific project. In addition, instruments like vouchers can be used to foster the exchange of experts among partners as well as for technology transfer among the experts of different companies and different regions.