DIGITAL REGIONS
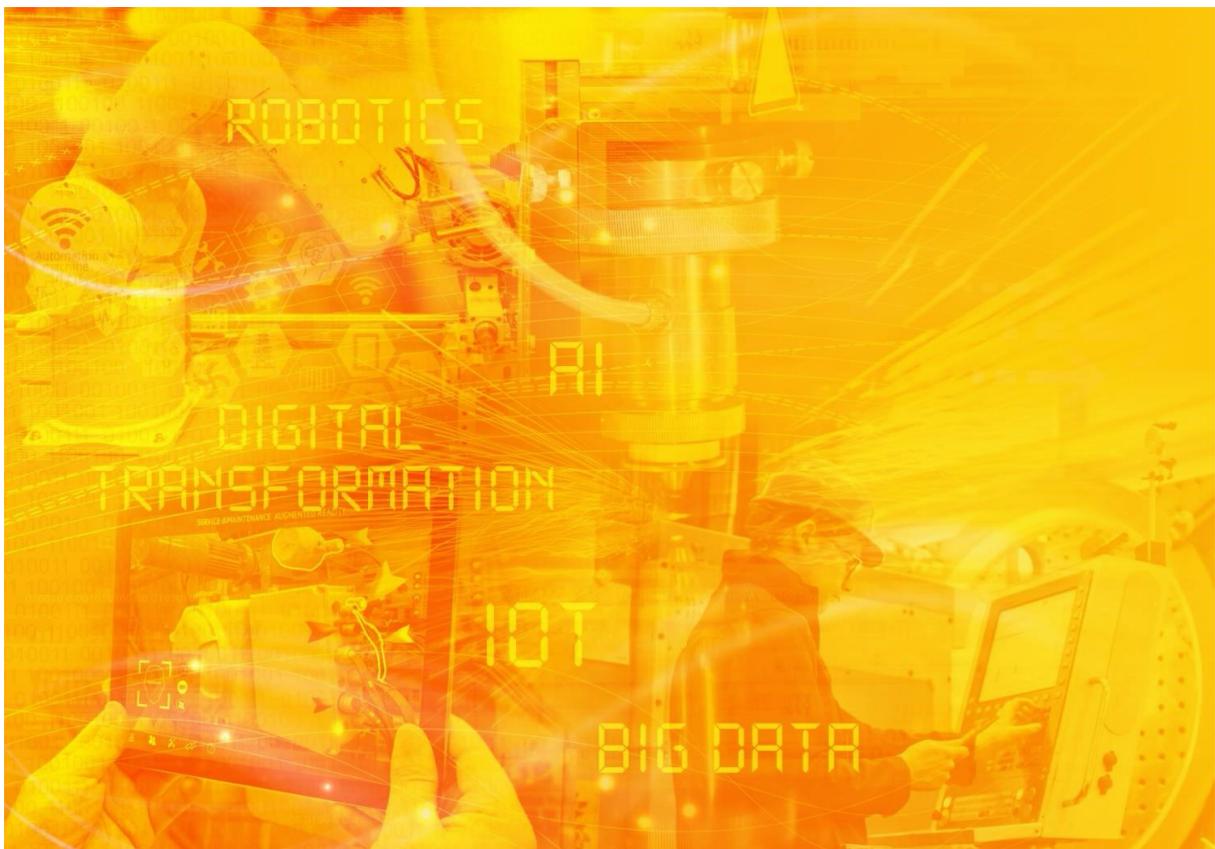# Action Plan template
Partner: West Regional Development Agency (WRDA)

Contents

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Joining Digital Regions project emerged due to the main industries (automotive and ICT) of West Region Romania, who rise the challenge to explore the complementarities between them. The approach was focused on Industry 4.0 implementation, especially in the context of the two cluster initiatives launched by West Regional Development Agency: Automotivest Cluster (www.automotivest.ro) and The Regional ICT Cluster (www.digivest.ro).

Digital Regions Project 1st phase helped us to better understand the ecosystem by performing a micro-analysis and a macro-analysis which allowed us to see deeper onto the regional and national levels. Following this exercise, performed by each partner, an interregional assessment report was compiled, contributing to a comparative and inspiring image of the partner regions approach.

The mechanism from behind the Action Plan proposed, is meant to consolidate and facilitate the capacity of the regional technology suppliers (partners of European Digital Innovation Hub - EDIH), to respond to the market created by the funding of the West Regional Operational Program - West ROP 2021-2027.

Envisaging the new **EDIH** in development, this Action Plan contributes to the consolidation of this hub in the first 6 months of existence. By using the best practice "Digital Innovation Hub Slovenia", we intend to tackle the barriers to digital transformation by learning from our Slovenian partners experience.

Having a **unique action addressed to our Digital Innovation Hub pre-operational phase**, this plan will have 3 main activities as follows:

1. **Mapping** of digital and technological infrastructure of universities, companies, clusters and research institutes (based on questionnaires)
2. **Meeting** with the above organizations (mainly companies and clusters) with the scope to build the service delivery design
3. **Promotion** of EDIH, draft communication concept created

The new regional operational program, West ROP 2021 – 2027, will be the main instrument to finance the ecosystem, and the process of transferring the management of this programme to the regional agencies will definitely change the way our innovation ecosystem will be addressed.

Digital Regions project is, implicitly, a vehicle to deliver sound and functional policies to all innovation ecosystem players. In particular, West ROP 2021 – 2017, has an

investment component for the manufacturing sector (described in the next section of this document), therefore, this is the policy instrument targeted by this Action Plan.

2 GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Project: DIGITAL REGIONS**
- **Partner organization: WRDA – West Regional Development Agency**
- **Country: Romania**
- **NUTS2 region: West Region**
- **Contact person:**
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  - o **Phone number: +40 746 156 520**

3 POLICY CONTEXT

The Action Plan aims to impact:

☐ Investment for Growth and Jobs programme

☐ European Territorial Cooperation programme

☒ Other regional development policy instrument

Name and reference of the policy instrument addressed:

West Regional Operational Programme - West ROP 2021 – 2027

The West Regional Development Agency (West RDA), as the Managing Authority for the West Regional Operational Program - West ROP 2021-2027 , is in the process of developing the new funding program, whose financial allocation exceeds 1.1 billion euro.

This Action Plan is targeting the two financing measures of the above program, targeting the manufacturing sector, under:

- ▪ Objective1 - A more competitive Europe

- Priority 1 - A competitive region through innovation, digitalization and dynamic enterprises
- Specific objective 1.3 - Increasing the competitiveness and productivity of SMEs

The two financing measures are:

1. Support for microenterprises
2. Productive investments

4 ACTION

4.1 BACKGROUND

The Regional Development Agency of West Region Romania (West RDA) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization for public use, having legal powers in the field of regional development. Its main focus is the implementation of the regional development policy.

West RDA is also in charge of regional planning, authoring the Regional Development Plan, the RIS3 and several studies and assessments for the regions' smart sectors: ICT, automotive and food. As main promoter of the regional innovation policy at regional level, the agency is the founder and coordinator of a regional innovation center and two clusters in the automotive and ICT sectors.

Since 2015, West RDA is also leading the Ro- Boost SMEs Consortium, partner of EEN, being one of the main regional players providing business and innovation support. West RDA has carried out, at regional level, several international initiatives together with relevant local stakeholders in areas such as green energy efficiency, green energy and sustainability, entrepreneurial ecosystems, RIS3 monitoring, Industry 4.0., digitalization of regional smart sectors, development of innovative food value chains.

West RDA's main mission is to ensure strategic planning of the economic and social development of West Region Romania; to manage the programs and projects funded under the structural funds allocated for regional development; to develop new collaborations synergies with organizations at international level; to attract new resources to create impact on the wellbeing of the community. Currently, West RDA is phasing out as Intermediate Body, the 2014 – 2020 Regional Operational Programme.
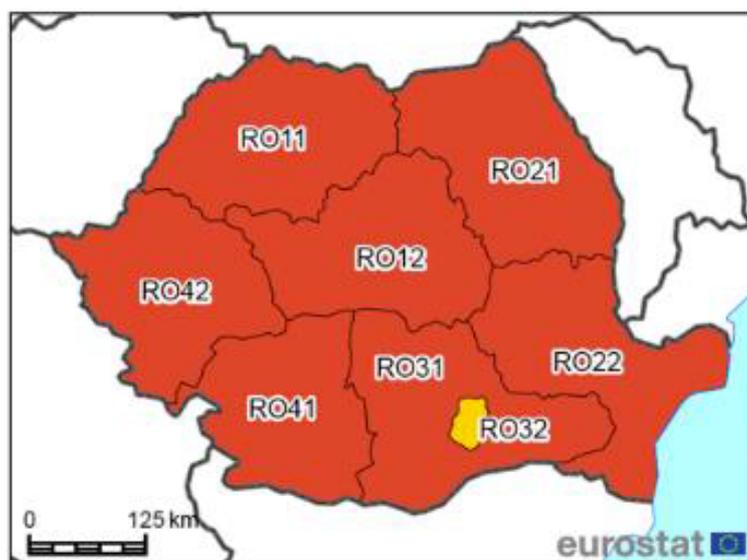
In February 2020 the Romanian Government drafted a law that would grant more responsibilities to the regional development agencies, transforming them in Managing Authorities. Learning on-site from existing practices form other European regions would be the 1st step in order to ensure a smooth transition for becoming a managing authority.

Managing the new ROP 2021 – 2027 as managing authority requires more involvement in the durable development of the regional innovation ecosystem. As ROP funds manager, West RDA is now ready to host a European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH). The EDIH application was submitted to European Commission in February 2022, and we estimate that at the end of this year the implementation will start.

European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) will function as one-stop shops that help companies dynamically respond to the digital challenges and become more competitive.

Therefore we believe that further promotion and implementation of Industry 4.0 tools should be done via an EDIH instrument. For this we will use the Slovenian best practice: Digital Innovation Hub Slovenia to consolidate the operationalization of our EDIH.

Back in 2019, at the time Digital Regions analyses were made, Romania and its regions in the Regional Innovation Scoreboard ranking (RIS 2019) looked like this: **West Region Romania** was a **Modest Innovator**. Still, the employment medium and high-tech manufacturing & knowledge intensive services' indicator scored 187.26.

NUTS	Region	RII	Rank	Group	Change
RO11	Nord-Vest	29.7	232	Modest –	-9.8
RO12	Centru	27.3	233	Modest –	-10.8
RO21	Nord-Est	21.5	236	Modest –	-19.0
RO22	Sud-Est	22.1	235	Modest –	-19.5
RO31	Sud – Muntenia	18.4	237	Modest –	-16.8
RO32	**Bucuresti – Ilfov**	**51.6**	**200**	Moderate –	-7.9
RO41	Sud-Vest Oltenia	14.3	238	Modest –	-16.4
RO42	Vest	32.8	230	Modest –	-5.7

Performance improved in RIS 2021(Regional Innovation Scoreboard) – see below - during the pandemic period, bringing West Region in the "Emerging –" group from "Modest –" in 2019 (see above). Performance change reached a positive 8.8 from minus 5.7 in 2019.

NUTS	Region	RII	Rank	Group	Change
RO11	Nord-Vest	31.4	232	Emerging –	9.2
RO12	Centru	26.5	235	Emerging –	5.4
RO21	Nord-Est	20.9	237	Emerging –	-1.0
RO22	Sud-Est	17.4	239	Emerging –	-2.7
RO31	Sud – Muntenia	18.0	238	Emerging –	1.3
RO32	**Bucuresti – Ilfov**	**56.9**	**197**	Emerging +	12.4
RO41	Sud-Vest Oltenia	16.7	240	Emerging –	4.4
RO42	Vest	30.3	233	Emerging –	8.8

RII: performance in 2021 relative to that of the EU in 2021. Rank: rank performance in 2021 across all regions. Group: respective sub-group. Change: performance change calculated as the difference between the performance in 2021 and 2014 relative to that of the EU in 2014.

The change in performance was possible exclusively due to the private companies investments regarding the innovation activities, especially in the manufacturing sector.

Combined with the future changed work environment, based more on "remote" labor, the above performance shows that the approach of the innovation ecosystem

must be taken to another level. The EDIH fits the new ecosystem by helping companies to use the available digital and technological resources and implement the Industry 4.0 trends.

4.2 KNOWLEDGE APPLIED FROM DIGITAL REGIONS

Describe in this section how you are applying the knowledge acquired and lessons learnt from the exchange activities in DIGITAL REGIONS, in the development of your action plan.

Partner good practice/experience (please, detail: good practice name, short description and location)	How this good practice/experience has contributed to the actions developed in your Action Plan (detail any transfers, full or partial of good practice)
Digital Innovation Hub Slovenia *The DIH Slovenia is a central national one-stop-shop to provide, connect and support knowledge, business and technology expertise, technologies, experimental and pilot environments, best practices, methodologies and other activities necessary to fully enable Slovene Industry in building digital competencies, innovation models and processes, support their digital transformation and raise their competitive advantages based on digital.*	*This good practice was influencing our Action Plan action by supplying us a model of wide partnership and the example of how to make this work as a whole.* *Topics discussed with the Slovenian partners were:* · *Overcoming barriers to digital transformation* · *Creating a digital ecosystem* · *How did you reach to such a high number of beneficiaries (600 companies)?* · *Are your DIH partners financed? Is financing a solution and leads to a faster commitment?* *The voucher system used was also of interest, since it have been translated and adopted into our service delivery design for EDIH application.* *The translation was made by transforming money into services. The vouchers will grant services to*

	companies, delivered by an individual expert (several).The expert will do an analysis of the company technology needs.	

4.3 ACTION DESCRIPTION

Description of the action planned, including at least:

Main objectives	Value brought by this action into the region	Players involved and role in the implementation and collaboration between them
The activities in this action plan are serving to one objective action: the contribution to the operationalization of West Region Romania EDIH.	The EDIH role is to support SMEs for: 1. digital transformation 2. access to finance 3. international networking 4. "test before invest" services 5. increase digital skills EDIH in West Region has as focus the manufacturing sector. Digital Regions WRDA Action Plan will have only one action: **the contribution to the operationalization of West Region EDIH, by supporting the technology suppliers to deliver services towards EDIH clients.**	WRDA is the orchestrator of the EDIH and will act as a facilitator to organize all the workshops and meetings necessary to accomplish the activities. Other Players involved are the members of the EDIH consortium and the members of the Digital Regions project Regional Stakeholder Group - RSG. EDIH partners (stakeholders) are the West Region ICT Cluster members who represents the main regional digital technology suppliers. Some members of the Digital Regions RSG are also members of the EDIH consortium. The two associated parties (EDIH and RSG) are composed

of the main research and digital and other technology solutions suppliers from the region (several state universities, ICT companies reaching about 80% of the industry regional turnover, consultants, small SME's active in advanced technologies. This involvement will produce an accurate mapping of the digital and technological infrastructure and nevertheless, the best support for the service design as well as a draft communication strategy base concept.

4.4 TIMEFRAME AND FUNDING

Project/Action Investment Line/Funding Source + Amount (please state each source of funding)	Submitted For Funding	Funding Decision	Project Start Date / Finish date	Other key milestones
The implementation coordination of the action plan will be supported by the	NA	NA	Phase 2 of Digital Regions Project: Start: 1st of August 2022	

Digital Regions project phase 2 funding. *Budget: 14500 Euro*			*Finnish: 31st of July 2023*	
The organization of the meeting and other action activities will be supported by the EDIH budget, project financed by: European Digital Innovation Hubs (DIGITAL-2021-EDIH-01), Digital Europe Programme. *DIGITAL-2021-EDIH-INITIAL-01* *Project co-financed by: Intelligent Growth, Digitization and Financial Instruments Operational Program - POCIDIF*	*yes*	*In evaluation*	*Estimation of EDIH operationalization phase: January 2023 – August 2023*	

4.5 WORKPLAN

Include an outline of the Work-plan for each project. A suggestion could be to breakdown the Work-plan in work packages and tasks as below:

WP	Tasks

Work Package 1: Coordination and management	Task 1.1 coordination of the implementation
	Task 1.2 reporting
Work Package 2: Mapping of digital and technological infrastructure	Task 2.1 questionnaire construction
	Task 2.2 questionnaire deployment and collection
	Task 2.3 structuring the information
	Task 2.3 mapping results aggregation
Work Package 3:	Task 3.1 meeting with the ecosystem resource suppliers
	Task 3.2 engagement structuring
	Task 3.3 service design methodology draft creation
Work Package 4:	Task 4.1 communication strategy draft creatin
	Task 4.2 main promotion messages creation
	Task 4.3 meetings with financing calls design team and suggestion creation and delivery

Targeting **digital transformation, access to finance and international networking**, West Region EDIH will offer access to valuable service and international presence of the local companies.

Digital Regions WRDA Action Plan will have only one action: **the contribution to the operationalization of EDIH** by performing the following activities:

1. **Mapping** of digital and technological infrastructure of universities, companies, clusters and research institutes (based on questionnaires)

The digital and technological infrastructure available at the ecosystem level is unanimously unknown by companies. Besides random cooperation projects with some multinational companies, universities have tried to promote their digital and technological capabilities in different ways. There is no planned approach.

As a practice, some universities are trying to centralize their capabilities in one center and narrowing a unique pipeline of potential cooperation projects. This signalizes a lack of the intermediate tissue of consultancy in delivering and matching the academia and other suppliers' capabilities with the industry.

A real mapping of functional capabilities was never compiled at the regional level. The mapping we intend to do, will be based on questionnaires. The questionnaires will extract the ecosystem resources infrastructure, by surveying the members of the West Region ICT Cluster and universities capabilities.

The map resulting will bring valuable capabilities in front, exposing the ecosystem resources to the general public through the EDIH services.

Deliverables: questionnaires and mapping information

2. A Meeting with some of the above organizations (mainly companies and clusters) with the scope to build the service delivery design

The service design will be important for the future EDIH, and the early research regarding the needs, expectancies, the way of work imagined by the parties of the ecosystem, are fundamental to the construction of the service delivery system.

Deliverables: a draft of DIH service delivery methodology and stakeholders'(Regional ICT Cluster, Universities and RSG) engagement established (who does what), in order to support digital adoption by manufacturing companies who are in fact, the EDIH clients.

3. Promotion of EDIH, and communication strategy concept draft created

The EDIH communication Strategy will have a construction based on visibility and accessibility, with the vision always in front, competent and professional, relevant and honest, focused, clear and based on feedback.

The messages will be reflecting the results, and will be constant and oriented to building the trust in the EDIH capacity of impact.

Deliverables: EDIH Communication strategy concept draft and main messages based on existing capacities.

Policy impact deliverable: engagement with the Managing Authority financing calls design team with suggestions coming from the regional ecosystem. We intend to create a bridge between stakeholders (suppliers) in digitalization and the management authority whose funding creates the market for digitalization requests through EU funds.

The 2 calls we target, as part or West ROP 2021 – 2027, are:

1. Support for microenterprises
2. Productive investments

Overall we wish that the applicants of these policy instruments to benefit from direct support of EDIH in the process of digital transformation:

▪ understanding the technology

and

▪ "hands on" experiencing technology (access to testing)

4.6 BUDGET BREAKDOWN FOR THE ACTION

Detailed budget associated to the action. It can be presented using different costs categories. You can also use the budget headings used in your applications for funding. Below is an example

Category of funding	Expenditure Amount
Salaries	7740
Overheads (i.e. calculated at x % of staff costs)	1161
Travel & Subsistence	1500
External expertise	4099

Building/renovation / refurbishment	
Equipment	
TOTAL	14500

4.7 VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

On the medium term, the action and the activities will be carried out and transformed into real services by West Region EDIH. This Action Plan and the EDIH further on, will contribute to preparation of both the applicants and the digital technology suppliers to meet within the regional ecosystem in sync with the West POR 2021-2027 funding opportunities.

4.8 IMPACT EXPECTED

The self-defined indicator: % of manufacturing companies supported by organizations funded under the ROP to increase innovation through the diffusion of Industry 4.0 approaches, will be measured under the new 2021 – 2027 West ROP programme.

We estimate that, innovative calls to be launched by West RDA as Management Authority, to be among the first ones launched at the end of 2022, or beginning of 2023.

The impact expected by the single action of this plan is to be evaluated by the duration of the EDIH operationalization phase and the increased degree of understanding Industry 4.0 instances by the ecosystem resource suppliers.

Without this preparation activities of the action plan, EDIH West Region will perform redundant activities and will not benefit from the experience of this project and its partners. We think it is a natural synergy among the two projects and a perfect sync with at least 6 months of overlapping, which must be used for the benefit of the regional ecosystem.

4.9 MONITORING ACTIVITIES IN PHASE 2

The monitoring of the regional action plans' implementation is part of Digital Regions project phase 2 implementation and is evaluated through a survey, once per semester, according with the monitoring methodology (still in development).

The survey is sent to all project partners to report the status of implementation and actual results of the implementation.

Each action is reported separately.

Approval of Action Plan:

I, Sorin Maxim, as Director General of West Regional Development Agency, responsible with the elaboration and implementation of regional development policy for West Region, agree to implement the Action Plan for the Digital Regions project as detailed above. I confirm that I have the required authorisation of to do so and that the required authorisation process has been duly carried out.

On behalf of: West Regional Development Agency

Signed: _____

Name: Sorin MAXIM

Position in Organisation: Director General