



Daring to succeed, entrepreneurship for better growth*

**Smart sustainable and inclusive*

AER position on Entrepreneurship

Edirne (TR) 3-4 April 2014

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The Assembly of European Regions (AER) is the largest **independent** network of regions in the wider Europe. Bringing together nearly 230 regions from 35 countries and 15 interregional organisations. **The AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.**

Considerable work has been carried out within the AER on the topic of Entrepreneurship in particular through the angles of education and training, youth entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial diversity, social inclusion and innovation-based job creation and the green economy. This position is based on the findings, recommendations and best practices gathered during a series of activities on this topic including: the AER summits on regions and the economic crisis, thematic conferences, the AER European Citizens Fora, thematic working groups, breakfast briefings, Training Academies, Summer Academies, the AER Eurodyssey programme for international mobility, the RIA and MYFER awards - Regional Innovation and Most Youth Friendly European region-, the SWOT analyses carried out in projects such as ENTRE:DI¹ –Entrepreneurial Diversity- and YES¹ -Youth Entrepreneurship Strategies-, the Regional Peer Reviews carried out in projects such as PYE² –Promoting Youth Employment-, ECREIN+¹, SMART EUROPE¹, and REGIONS4GREENGROWTH¹, the mutual learning workshops from the ENGAGED³ project, the REALM⁴ project -Regional Adult Learning Multipliers and the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives-, as well as the AER political reports and regular surveys amongst AER members.

Building on the above, as well as on the AER Conference celebrated on 3 April in Edirne (TR), this position has a double objective:

¹ INTERREG IVC projects

² PROGRESS programme

³ ICT PSP project

⁴ Lifelong Learning Programme project

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1/ To engage the European Institutions and stakeholders on the need for further support for entrepreneurship: with unemployment rising and the ongoing challenges facing the European regional territories, in particular those with permanent handicap, the future success of the European economy is inextricably linked to the capacity of citizens to innovate, and to identify new solutions for sustainable development. These actions thus need urgent support.

2/ To showcase and advocate for the key role regions already play in the support and promotion of a dynamic and innovative ecosystem necessary for an entrepreneurial culture. This active role must be thus recognised at EU level: multilevel governance is essential to create ownership and regions must be involved both in the definition and the implementation of national and European policies. Given its extensive experience and the dynamics the AER already created within and between regions by sharing good practices, the AER is ready to contribute and provide advice on how to best engage with regions on this topic.

Growing talent

- Regions need to develop a vision, identify their competitive advantage, set strategic priorities and develop policies to maximise the knowledge-based development potential of their territory in an inclusive and sustainable way.

-An environment, where stakeholders meet each other formally and/or informally, needs to be created to generate mutual understanding, the circulation of ideas and the stimulation of partnerships.

- True exchange and collaboration between stakeholders is essential to bring about innovation and business ideas and avoid a mismatch between curricula and the market. Incubators, science parks, clusters, SMEs, chambers of commerce, regional development agencies, non-profits, NGOs, universities and research institutes, as well secondary education institutions, need to work together.

- Attitudes and skills leading to self-employment need to be promoted within the education system and throughout lifelong learning. These include creativity, responsibility, risk-taking, problem-solving and team-working.

- Education curricula should integrate project education and entrepreneurship programmes from an early stage, to generate motivation and provide students with a good insight into the required skills and competences.

- Technical and vocational education should be valued, developed and integrated in innovation and smart specialisation strategies.

- Specific training for teachers is needed both in terms of initial training as well as continuous professional development to ensure adequate entrepreneurship education.

- User-based approaches and co-creation should be further developed across sectors.

- International mobility should be supported to foster the creation of international networks and knowledge transfer and the cross-fertilisation of ideas. This is achieved through student and staff mobility.

- Regional strategies to attract and retain young talents via the creation of a stimulating socio-economic and cultural environment, thus combating brain-drain, are essential to the future of Europe's territories.

Removing barriers

- The fear of failure is one of the main barriers to entrepreneurship, higher acceptance of failure needs to be fostered across Europe and support systems for a fair second chance need to be available for entrepreneurs.

- Ensuring economic participation for all is essential to promoting sustainable economic development.

- In this respect female entrepreneurship should be promoted by encouraging gender equality in education at an early stage, increasing gender diversity in different stakeholder groups in charge of evaluating and supporting business ideas, fighting stereotypes.
- Social entrepreneurship should be promoted across Europe, by providing the public sector, the civil society, universities, businesses and policymakers and the general public with evidence & practice-based elements allowing for better support, recognition, legitimacy and visibility of the sector.
- Real digital development (infrastructure and services) is crucial to unlock the economic and social potential of rural areas and regions with permanent handicaps.
- Adequate social infrastructure should be developed in the regions to ensure all citizens are in a position to contribute to economic development. Care and more specifically child care services need to be accessible to avoid the loss to the economy of valuable human resources.

- Educational and occupational mobility for all will ensure the resilience and adaptability of the workforce and the sustainability of the economic tissue.

- Specific indicators need to be developed and used to allow accurate monitoring and measurement of the success rate and economic, social and environmental impacts.

- End-user-friendly administrations allow for increased motivation and productivity.

- Taxation systems should be designed in a manner to not discourage entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs, in particular for regions with geographical and demographical constraints.

- Inclusive role models are instrumental in conveying a positive message about entrepreneurship and the possibilities it offers, thereby cultivating a positive attitude and reducing the fear of failure. They should therefore be developed and disseminated.

- Developing leadership at regional level is key to fighting resistance to change.

Supporting entrepreneurs

- Strong political commitment at the regional level is essential to ensure entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs get adequate support.
- A holistic and socio-economic approach that matches the regional needs is necessary to foster entrepreneurship in Europe.
- A lively and visible interface between business owners/ potential entrepreneurs and support organisations is needed to attract skills to a territory.
- Adapted support is required according to the entrepreneur's needs: taking into account the diversity of entrepreneurs and enterprises when developing financial instruments and intermediaries will ensure businesses can develop their potential to its full extent.
- Clustering and incubation need to be supported.
- Creating dynamic business infrastructures is key to effectively supporting entrepreneurs.
- Different financial instruments need to be available throughout an enterprise's life-cycle.
- Extensive up to date information on funding possibilities, and guidance on how to access these funds should be easily and quickly available for entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs.
- The use of public procurement for the acquisition of innovative services and products, and support to social enterprises should be further developed.
- The role of the Region in assisting SMEs and entrepreneurs to access new international and European markets should be further exploited.

Telling the world

- Sharing good and bad practices across Europe allows increased efficiency of policies, benchmarking, performance measurement and the eventual transfer of successful practices.
- Mutual learning activities and peer-reviewing should be encouraged, both at regional and interregional level.
- International partnerships in education, research, business and policy making should be simplified and fostered to allow for stronger and more productive networks as well as increased visibility.
- Developing a comprehensive international communication strategy, including for instance a branding strategy based on a region's strengths will increase awareness of its potential and attract skills and investments.
- *Entrepreneurs should be engaged, empowered, connected and celebrated.*