

# European programmes

The SOWALFIN Group is actively involved in various European support programmes for SMEs, whether through specific financial instruments set up and managed within the framework of the ERDF operational programmes for Wallonia, or more recently through various entrepreneurship-promoting initiatives supported by the ESF and previously monitored by the Belgian Agency for Business and Innovation. SOWALFIN is also a partner in projects funded by the INTERREG cross-border development programmes.

Whether acting as an intermediate body, a delegate of the managing authorities of various Walloon ERDF operational programmes, a project portfolio leader or a direct beneficiary, SOWALFIN has for many years been renowned as a key driving force behind a number of European support policies for SMEs in Wallonia.



## 1. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

### 1.1 FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

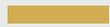
By the delegation agreement of 26 May 2016, SOWALFIN was appointed the Intermediate Body (within the meaning of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds) by the Walloon Region, the Managing Authority for the Walloon ERDF Operational Programme (OP) for 2014-2020 ('Wallonie-2020.eu'). The Programme measures will run until 31 December 2023.

In this capacity, SOWALFIN represents the Managing Authority and, on its behalf, ensures that financial engineering measures 1.1.2, 2.3.1 and 4.2.2 of the abovementioned OP, as implemented by SOCAMUT S.A., NOVALLIA S.A. and the dedicated subsidiaries of Invests Walloon, are correctly put in place, monitored and complied with.

#### 1.1.1. SOCAMUT

SOCAMUT S.A. provides support and assistance to micro and small companies (VSC, self-employed individuals). In particular, within the framework of the ERDF OP measures, it works alongside banks granting micro-credits (of up to EUR 25 000) to micro-enterprises, by offering additional subordinated loans of up to 50% of the amount of each micro-credit. Further information on this process can be found here.

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Moreover, in response to the difficulties faced by so many SMEs during the Corona virus pandemic, specific products have been developed with the support of the ERDF funds, such as the *Ricochet* loan. This loan provides 0% financing to (V)SCs looking to replenish their working capital, together with a bank loan, up to a maximum of EUR 45 000 (for more information, click here: <https://www.sowalfin.be/financement/pre-ricochet/>), and the *Ricochet – Relance* loan.

## 1.1.2. SOWALFIN Innovation and SOWALFIN Eco-Transition

SOWALFIN Innovation is the SOWALFIN Group subsidiary that focuses on financing innovation in the broadest sense. SOWALFIN Eco-Transition is responsible for implementing the 'Easy Green' initiative, which is centred on financing eco-innovation, the circular economy and short supply chains, by providing every conceivable type of loan to eligible SMEs. Some of its activities are jointly financed by the ERDF. More details on this specific form of funding can be found [here](#) for Eco-Transition and [here](#) for all aspects related to innovation.

## 1.1.3. The 2014-2020 ERDF subsidiaries of Investis Walloon

During the 2014-2020 ERDF programming period, a financial engineering measure was put in place in the Walloon Region to implement measures 1.1.2 'Capital and credits in businesses, spin-offs and spin-outs – Risk capital' (Priority Axis 1, 'Economy 2020') and 2.3.1 'Funding of innovative businesses' (Priority Axis 2, 'Innovation 2020') of the 'Wallonie-2020.eu' Operational Programme.

These two measures resulted in the creation of eight new investment funds financed jointly by the European Regional Development Fund and the Walloon Region, whose role is to provide SMEs (that are not in difficulty) with funding (in capital or in loans of all types) as part of their investment, research and development or innovation projects, in particular.

More details on these schemes and their eligibility criteria can be found here:

- [Noshag Europe 3 S.A.](#)
- [Wapi 2020 S.A.](#)
- [FCR 2020 S.A.](#)
- [IMBC 2020 S.A.](#)
- [Namur Innovation & Growth S.A.](#)
- [MOVE INVEST S.A.](#)
- [Luxembourg Développement Europe 2 S.A.](#) (see also [here](#))
- [B2START S.A.](#)

### ■ *Directly implemented measures*

The SOWALFIN Group directly benefits from certain measures co-financed by the ERDF. One such measure is the '*Circular Economy Business Awareness and Collective Workshops*' project forming part of the '*Towards a Circular Economy 4.0*' portfolio, details of which can be found [here](#).

### ■ *Economic development projects*

SOWALFIN is also the lead partner in several economic development projects selected as part of the Walloon ERDF OP for 2014-2020 (Wallonie-2020.eu). In that capacity, it coordinates the activities of the operators involved, provides them with advice and support, draws up annual implementation reports, and serves as a link between the programme's managing authority and the operators.

More information about these initiatives can be found [here](#).

In addition, SOWALFIN is the lead partner in the '*Towards a Circular Economy 4.0*' portfolio referred to in section 1.2 above.

## 2. European Social Fund (ESF)

When the activities of the Belgian Agency for Business and Innovation [AEI] were resumed, SOWALFIN became a beneficiary of two projects co-financed by the ESF as part of the 'Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020.eu' Operational Programme for 2014-2020:

- *Ongoing Teacher Training in Entrepreneurship [FCEE]*

The aim of this project is to provide training and support to all teaching staff (including head teachers) in order to instil a true entrepreneurial spirit in schools (encompassing team spirit, a sense of responsibility, self-confidence, creativity, initiative, perseverance, and other similar qualities) and thus uncover future talents.

These training courses are based on three different pathways:

- entrepreneurial teaching (integrating creativity, developing an entrepreneurial teaching approach, using the premises to initiate projects, etc.);
- the entrepreneurial school (communicating both externally and internally, launching and managing a project, managing and monitoring information, leading a team, assessing others, etc.); and
- setting up viable businesses (embracing technological advances, the Business Model Canvas, initiating a design-thinking approach, promoting social or sustainable entrepreneurship, understanding and supporting young entrepreneurs, etc.).

This training scheme allows teachers to develop their own entrepreneurial skills and become ambassadors for entrepreneurial education by focusing on empowering, experience-based, cooperative and reflective learning.

The project is being rolled out across Wallonia, and will provide training to almost 1 000 teachers.

- *Strategic Intelligence Training Hub [PFIS]*

SOWALFIN is committed to supporting SMEs as they grow and expand. To meet this objective, it offers group workshops to managers and directors, which focus on growth levers as part of the PFIS project.

Strategic Intelligence (SI) is a managerial approach that involves understanding and protecting strategic information. It supports the business strategies of SMEs based in Wallonia, and helps them to develop both domestically and internationally. Using monitoring and influence techniques, it provides a specific response to any company seeking to expand and position itself in a rapidly changing world.

The group workshops cover a wide variety of topics, including digital transformation, human resources, innovation, governance and decision-making. They also meet specific quality criteria:

- Willingness to grow on the part of the participating director.
- Time devoted to peer-to-peer exchanges.
- Workshop format incorporating immersive activities (Business Games, role-plays, etc.).
- Theoretical and practical input from experts.
- Tools and Quick Wins provided to every participant at the end of each workshop, which they can use straight away.
- Workshops are complemented by support services for promoting growth in Wallonia.

The project covers the 'transition' area of the Operational Programme, namely the whole of Wallonia excluding Walloon Brabant. A total budget of EUR 1 054 852.86 has been allocated, including EUR 527 426.43 from the ESF.

Anyone interested in taking part in the group workshops can contact SOWALFIN at the following address: [croissance@sowalfin.be](mailto:croissance@sowalfin.be).

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## 3. 'Interreg' cross-border programmes

SOWALFIN is also a partner in the following projects, selected within the framework of the Interreg V 'Euregio Meuse-Rhine' and 'France-Wallonia-Flanders' cross-border programmes, and co-financed by the Walloon Region, among others, alongside those programmes:

### 3.1 QRM 4.0 (INTERREG EMR)

If they are to survive in an ever-changing market (in which complex and tailor-made products must be produced in small batches), SMEs need to reduce their manufacturing times. Making the transition from traditional to lean manufacturing is far from straightforward, but it is essential for ensuring survival and future growth. The recent progress made in human-centred process innovation (Quick Response Manufacturing) and the development of innovative digital technologies have made it possible to completely revamp manufacturing processes in order to achieve ultra-short lead times. Such a transformation requires self-managed teams to be formed, supported by digital technologies.

To support SMEs in their transformation, a new project entitled QRM4.0 has been launched, with the aid of the Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) programme. SOWALFIN is one of the partners in this project, which aims to make manufacturing SMEs (active in the metalurgy, agri-food, mechanical engineering sectors, etc.) in the EMR more competitive.

The 'QRM 4.0' project is based on a number of key initiatives:

- Providing information and inspiration about the principles and benefits of QRM 4.0.
- Training, coaching and supporting companies seeking to put those new manufacturing processes in place.
- Exchanging best practices on these issues through a learning and exchange network between companies, and exchanging knowledge between regions.

In order to co-fund this project (40%), Wallonia has joined forces with the Dutch provinces of Limburg and North Brabant, the Belgian province of Limburg and the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy. Other associate partners include the Sirris and Technifutures Competence Centres, Lower Meuse Development, the 'Zuyd' and 'Fontys' Universities of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, the 'Workitects' Centre of Expertise, the 'brightlands' incubator and the Limburg Provincial Development Corporation in Belgium.

All information about this project can be found on the following websites: <http://qrm4.eu/> and <https://www.interregemr.eu/projets/qrm40-fr>.



### 3.2 GOTOS3-PILOT (INTERREG FWL)

GoToS3 is a portfolio of 17 projects centred on smart specialisation. It brings together 95 different entities active in six specific areas of smart specialisation that are common to the cross-border region (new materials and chemistry, textiles, health and care, agriculture and food, cultural and creative industries, and mechatronics and mechanical engineering), with an approach designed to be as open as possible to the participating companies, through group workshops, customised support, business clubs and development committees. SOWALFIN is involved in the portfolio's pilot project, aimed at enhancing cross-border research and innovation through the emerging interactions and synergies from portfolio projects and to foster the economic development of SMEs in the cross-border region.

The other financial partners are the Hauts-de-France Regional Development and Innovation Agency (the lead partner) and the West Flanders Provincial Development Corporation. The associate operators in Belgium include IDETA, UMONS, Ghent University and the Materia Nova Competence Centre.

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All information about this portfolio of projects can be found on the following websites: <http://www.gotos3.eu/fr> and <https://www.interreg-fwvl.eu/fr/gotos3-pilot>.

## 3.3 ET2SMES (INTERREG EMR)

The Einstein Telescope is a unique research project that will have a major global impact and place Europe at the forefront of a new field of research worldwide: the latest, third-generation gravitational wave observatory will provide ground-breaking new information on how the universe was formed and how galaxies, stars and black holes have developed. This 'cutting-edge' technology not only represents a major leap forward in the quality of European research, but will also create 500 direct jobs and 1 150 indirect jobs. To date, at least EUR 1.7 billion have been invested in this large-scale research facility, and it is estimated that a further EUR 2 billion will be invested to ensure that it continues to operate until 2080.

The Euregio Meuse-Rhine, together with Sardinia (IT), is the latest region in Europe to have applied for this facility to be installed in its territory.

The new Euroregional initiative, ET2SMES, is supported by the Interreg VA programme of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. Its aim is to bring the Einstein Telescope closer to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the region, in particular, and to encourage their direct participation in terms of technology development and economic exploitation. The most important concern is to stimulate cross-border innovation-oriented cooperation between technology-oriented companies and to produce targeted innovations that are significant not only for the Einstein Telescope, but also for other demanding applications and markets.

In all, seven economic development and innovation agencies in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine work closely together as part of the ET2SMES initiative:

- (Germany) AGIT mbH, the economic development agency for the Aachen Region; in North Rhine-Westphalia, the national cluster Nano-MicroMaterialsPhotonics (NMWP.NRW).
- (Netherlands) LIOF, the provincial economic development agency.
- (Flanders) POM Limburg.
- In Wallonia, Interface Entreprises-ULiège, the technology transfer office of the University of Liège, the aeronautics cluster SKYWIN and SOWALFIN, working alongside Walloon entrepreneurs, are actively involved.

The following partners also provide the project with an extra dimension: RWTH Aachen University, ZENIT GmbH, IHK Trier, SBP Bitburg-Prüm, WFG Vulkaneifel, PhotonDelta, Brainport Development, EEN, AGORIA, the competitiveness clusters MecaTech and Greenwin, SPI and WFG Ostbelgien.

60% of the project is co-financed by Interreg EMR, and the remaining 40% by the Walloon Region, the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, the Belgian and Dutch Provinces of Limburg, and VLAIO.



For more information on this project, please visit: <https://et2smes.eu/> and <https://www.interregemr.eu/projets/et2smes-fr>.

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## 4. Collaboration with the EIF

As part of the European initiative programmes COSME and INNOV'FIN, SOWALFIN has concluded agreements with the European Investment Fund (EIF), a subsidiary of the European Investment Bank (EIB), in order to guarantee portfolios of investments in innovative SMEs, or to counter-guarantee guarantee portfolios from its traditional activities.

These agreements have made it possible for the SOWALFIN Group to continue establishing itself as a key financial partner for SMEs in Wallonia, and to provide the support needed to ensure their growth.

- <https://www.interregemr.eu/projets/et2smes-fr>

