

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002843/24
to the Commission
Georgios Aftias (PPE)
(10 December 2024)**

Subject: Measures to support Western Macedonia

As you know, Western Macedonia is facing major problems in terms of new jobs, creating new medium-intensity enterprises, retaining young workers in their local area and attracting innovative business plans. Significant efforts have been made in all these directions in recent years but your support would be pivotal for the region. The exodus of young people needs to be contained and local businesses need to be supported.

Local stakeholders, regions, municipalities and workers are sounding the alarm and asking for full financial backing for the region. The Commission should strengthen essential infrastructure in Western Macedonia that will be instrumental in the evolution of the production model and the smooth transition towards a permanent process of economic growth.

In view of the above:

1. What steps, besides the Just Development Transition programme, can the Commission take for the creation of new businesses in Western Macedonia?
2. How can new jobs be financed?
3. Does it intend to adopt policies to support youth entrepreneurship to encourage young people to stay in their area/region?

Submitted: 10.12.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Fitto on behalf of the European Commission
(11 February 2025)**

Cohesion Policy supports the creation of new small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) in Greece, through the 'Competitiveness' programme, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) ⁽¹⁾, and horizontal employment actions also covering Western Macedonia, through the 'Human Resources and Social Cohesion' programme, co-funded by ESF+.

The programme 'Western Macedonia' allocates some EUR 20 million ⁽²⁾ for the creation of new and existing SMEs along with EUR 13.2 million ⁽³⁾ for employment initiatives.

The Greek Recovery and Resilience Plan ⁽⁴⁾ with EUR 2.9 billion supports job creation, youth employment, education, and entrepreneurship in Greece, while an additional EUR 619 million aims to foster economic development in Western Macedonia ⁽⁵⁾.

The ESF+ finances employment actions, active labour market policies, training initiatives, and social economy projects aimed at job creation. Eligible individuals and entities can apply for financing through relevant calls.

⁽¹⁾ Indicatively, some EUR 2.7 billion from the ERDF is available to support small and medium-sized enterprises in Greece.

⁽²⁾ Co-funded by ERDF.

⁽³⁾ Co-funded by ESF+.

⁽⁴⁾ Components 3.1 and 3.2.

⁽⁵⁾ The plan also includes two investments contributing to the economic development in Western Macedonia. Measure 16871 (Revitalization actions of the most affected territories (Just transition territories)) supports land rehabilitation in the areas of former lignite mines to alleviate its transition towards a climate-neutral economy. Measure 16628 (Central Greece Highway E-65: Trikala-Egnatia Section) finances the construction of a motorway, connecting Southern Greece, Thessaly and Western Macedonia with the Western Balkans and the rest of Europe to improve connectivity for residents and businesses in the region.

The Just Transition Fund allocates resources to employment initiatives and fosters entrepreneurship for youth, promoting green skills development ⁽⁶⁾ while the Just Transition Platform manages initiatives on youth mobilisation and young people's skill development.

The 'Human Resources and Social Cohesion' programme supports entrepreneurship initiatives for the socioeconomic integration of young people in Greece ⁽⁷⁾ ⁽⁸⁾.

The Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme ⁽⁹⁾ allows new entrepreneurs to learn from experienced business owners in other countries.

Also, they can enhance their skills via the European learning platform Entrepreneurship4All ⁽¹⁰⁾ and participate in the European Enterprise Promotion Awards ⁽¹¹⁾.

⁽⁶⁾ For example, the Just Transition Platform (JTP) runs a JTP Working Group on Equal Opportunities to provide a forum for vulnerable groups to share good practices, exchange knowledge and discuss concerns and achievements. In addition, the Just Transition Platform manages since 2023 initiatives on youth mobilisation, re-skilling and up-skilling measures for young people. Support through the Just Transition Platform also promotes the development of green skills for youth to enhance entrepreneurship and development of the SMEs and start-up.

⁽⁷⁾ Including the region of Western Macedonia.

⁽⁸⁾ In 2014-2020, the Youth Employment Initiative mobilised over EUR 500 million to finance training, work experience and entrepreneurship support programmes for unemployed young people in Greece. Similar measures are being funded by the ESF+ allocation for the period 2021-2027 with a budget of EUR 860 million.

⁽⁹⁾ <https://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/>

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://entrepreneurship4all.eu/why-e4all/>

⁽¹¹⁾ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/learn-and-plan-entrepreneurship/european-enterprise-promotion-awards_en