

13/06/2013, Brussels: Digital Agenda: European Commission to give €77 million boost for high-tech manufacturing sector and SMEs

The European Commission is launching a new € 77 million innovation initiative for the manufacturing sector, designed to help high-tech small & medium size enterprises (SMEs) exploit the potential of ICTs to grow their businesses.

The “I4MS” initiative, (ICT for Manufacturing SMEs), will help 200 SMEs across Europe who either are attempting to reduce the risk involved in being an early adopter of advanced technology, or are trying to cross the “the valley of death” that separates the development of an innovative prototype from a successful product in the market.

I4MS officially kicks off in July 2013 and will conduct more than 150 innovation experiments over the next 3 years. It targets suppliers and users of ICT solutions and covers innovation in four areas: advanced robot solutions, high performance cloud-based simulation services, intelligent sensor-based equipment and innovative laser applications. SMEs across Europe will benefit in three ways:

1. Direct financial support to improve their products or manufacturing processes;
2. Acquisition of new technologies and knowledge;
3. Access to new markets and partners outside their local ecosystem.

These experiments are implemented with the help of pan-European networks of competence centres, providing the knowledge and support for partnering beyond national borders. SMEs will be able to apply for funding through Calls for Experiments launched by these centres in 2014 and 2015.

European Commission Vice-President Neelie Kroes says: *“As the Commission noted last week, Europe needs a strong industrial sector in order to resist downturns. Europe’s research community must be at the forefront of ICT research in the manufacturing sector. And it is even more important to translate this research leadership into productivity gains and increased competitiveness of our products and industrial actors. By stimulating targeted innovation and investing in our highest assets in that sector, namely SMEs, I4MS is bridging this gap.”*



Dr. Rainer Zimmerman (head of unit at DG Connect) speaking at ImagineFOF2020

This is part of the Commission’s wider efforts to strengthen industry and the EU’s manufacturing sector. The Commission has put investments in new technologies & innovation as the top priority of its Industrial Policy strategy to reverse the declining role of industry in Europe from 15,6% of GDP (in 2011) to as much as 20% by 2020. (see [MEMO/13/505](#))

Background:

Key stakeholders from industry and academia of on-going ‘Factories of the Future’ projects are meeting at the “Imagine FOF2020” event this week in Geneva to discuss progress and future challenges.

I4MS is part of the Public Private Partnership ‘Factories of the Future’ (PPP FoF) launched in November 2008 within the European Economic Recovery Plan to respond to the global economic crisis. This partnership aims

at helping EU manufacturing enterprises, in particular SMEs, to adapt to global competitive pressures by improving the technological base of manufacturing across a broad range of sectors. The I4MS initiative is a first pilot for wider integration of research and innovation under Horizon 2020.

I4MS will receive €77 million in EU public funds (40% are likely to go to SMEs, the rest is split among large industries, and competence centres. Industrial partners contribute at the level of a total share of 25% (SMEs) or 50% (large industries) of the overall cost. The European Union contribution to this innovation initiative denotes around 30% of the ICT share or 13% of the total budget of 600M€ for the FoF PPP.

In the initial phase of the initiative, participants are coming from 25 countries, of them 18 are from the EU. The initial set of SMEs originates from 12 EU Member States (AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, FR, IT, LI, NL, SE, SI, UK) and 5 Associated Countries (CH, IL, MK, NO, TU). Coverage of Europe is expected to increase with the Calls for Experiments to be launched in 2014 and 2015.

Useful links:

[ICT Research and Innovation in FoF PPP](#)
[Factories of the Future on Europa](#)
[imagineFOF2020 conference in Geneva, 13 June 2013](#)
[EFFRA European Factories of the Future Research Association](#)
[Digital Agenda](#)
[Neelie Kroes](#)

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[Digital Agenda Assembly Group on Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#)

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For more information about the FoFdation project visit <http://www.fofdation-project.eu> and the project's social media pages, including Facebook ([#fofdationproject](#)) and Twitter ([@FoFdation](#)).

Acknowledgements:

This project is co-funded by the European Commission as part of the European Economic Recovery Plan (EERP) adopted in 2008. The EERP proposes the launch of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in three sectors, one of them being Factories of the Future (FoF). Factories of the Future is a EUR 1.2 billion program in which the European Commission and industry are collaborating in research to support the development and innovation of new enabling technologies for the EU manufacturing sector.

For further information please visit:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/industrial_technologies/factories-of-the-future_en.html