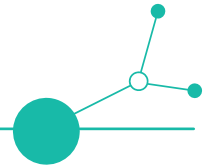


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Report on SMERF Memorandum of Understanding



Version 1
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1. Introduction

This deliverable has been prepared within the framework of the project CE0100383 SMERF - SME ready for the future, co-funded by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2021-2027. Its purpose is to document the establishment of a formal post-project cooperation concept based on the SMERF Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the project partnership and additional organisations from the participating countries. The deliverable responds directly to the project requirement to demonstrate how the results of SMERF will remain relevant and supported after the end of the funded implementation period.

The preparation of the MoU was an important element of the sustainability logic of the SMERF project. During project implementation, the partnership jointly developed a range of methods, tools, and knowledge resources aimed at supporting SMEs in becoming more future-ready. In particular, the project generated such key outcomes as the SMERF Inspiration Knowledge Base, the SMERF Diagnosis Tool, the Model for supporting SMEs in the transformation process towards a company of the future, and the SMERF Handbook. Since these outputs were designed to provide practical value beyond the project lifetime, it was necessary to create a cooperation framework that would support their continued use, promotion, and further uptake after project closure.

The MoU reflects the shared intention of the involved organisations to continue cooperation after the end of the project. It confirms that the cooperation achieved during SMERF created not only tangible outputs, but also a transnational peer-learning network, exchange mechanisms, and institutional relationships worth maintaining in the longer term. In this sense, the MoU does not merely serve as a formal declaration but as a strategic instrument supporting continuity, knowledge transfer, and future collaboration across regions.

This report, therefore, presents the rationale, development approach, and substantive goals of the SMERF MoU. It explains how the document was designed to serve as a lightweight but structured cooperation framework for the period after project completion, involving the 8 Project Partners (PPs) and at least 8 additional organisations from the partners' countries willing to cooperate across borders after the end of SMERF. In line with the official description of the deliverable, the report also presents the formal cooperation concept defined in the MoU and its relevance for the long-term sustainability of project results.

2. Methodology and approach to signature parties

The preparation of the SMERF MoU followed a practical and partnership-oriented approach, aimed at ensuring both formal clarity and realistic post-project applicability. The methodology combined three key dimensions: analysis of project sustainability needs, translation of these needs into a structured cooperation concept, and targeted involvement of organisations expected to play an active role in the continuation of SMERF-related cooperation after the project end.

In the first step, the partnership identified the main areas that required formal post-project anchoring. This analysis was based on the recognition that SMERF had generated valuable outputs and collaborative mechanisms that should remain operational and visible beyond the funded period. Particular attention was devoted to those project outcomes that have a direct practical relevance for external stakeholders, especially SMEs and innovation support actors. As a result, the MoU was designed to explicitly refer to the continuation, use, and promotion of the key outputs developed during the project, including the SMERF Inspiration Knowledge Base, the SMERF Diagnosis Tool, the SMERF Handbook, and the broader SMERF support model for SME transformation.



In the second step, these sustainability needs were translated into a formal but non-binding cooperation document. The partnership intentionally adopted a voluntary and flexible model of cooperation. According to the final MoU, the agreement is based on mutual interest, does not create legally enforceable obligations or direct financial commitments, and allows each party to undertake activities within the limits of its own capacities, resources, and strategic priorities. This approach was particularly important in the context of transnational cooperation involving organisations with different institutional roles and operational conditions. It allowed the MoU to remain sufficiently formal to structure future collaboration, while also being accessible and acceptable for a broad group of signatories.

A further methodological aspect concerned the design of the signature structure. The MoU was addressed not only to the core SMERF partnership, but also to external organisations connected to the project ecosystem. Consequently, the signature process was organised to include two main categories of parties. The first group consisted of the PPs, whose participation ensured continuity of the original transnational consortium and preserved institutional ownership of the project legacy. The second group consisted of Associated Partners and/or other external organisations from the partners' countries, whose inclusion broadened the cooperation network and strengthened the territorial embedding of the post-project concept. This dual approach was fully aligned with the deliverable requirement that the report should document the MoU signed by the 8 PPs and at least 8 additional organisations cooperating across borders after the end of the project.

The approach to signature parties was therefore based on the assumption that long-term sustainability requires both internal continuity and external multiplication potential. Internal continuity is ensured through the commitment of the PPs, who possess direct knowledge of the project's logic, outputs, and tested approaches. External multiplication is reinforced through the involvement of additional organisations capable of integrating SMERF results into their own services, stakeholder activities, educational formats, advisory offers, or regional development actions. In this way, the signature process was not treated as a merely administrative step, but as a strategic mechanism for extending the life and reach of SMERF outcomes beyond the initial consortium.

The methodology also included the definition of a simple governance arrangement to make post-project cooperation operational. The final MoU established a light coordination model based on a designated Coordinator, nominated contact persons in each participating organisation, and periodic coordination meetings, ideally held once per year. This governance formula was incorporated already at the design stage of the document so that the invited signatories could clearly understand not only the intention to cooperate, but also the practical mode in which such cooperation would be organised after project completion.

An additional methodological component was the assignment of responsibility for the maintenance of the two most important digital tools created within SMERF. In order to ensure their continued availability and usability after project completion, the MoU specifies that the SMERF Inspiration Knowledge Base will be maintained by the Technical University of Kosice (TUKE), while the SMERF Diagnosis Tool will be maintained by the Centre of Research and Technological Innovation s.r.l. (CRIT). Including these arrangements directly in the MoU strengthened the credibility of the post-project cooperation concept and provided signatories with a concrete assurance that key project tools would remain supported after the formal end of the project.

Overall, the methodology used for preparing the MoU and approaching the signature parties can be described as inclusive, sustainability-oriented, and implementation-focused. It combined strategic thinking about the durability of project results with a realistic understanding of how transnational cooperation can be maintained on a voluntary basis after external funding comes to an end.



3. Goals of SMERF Memorandum of Understanding

The SMERF MoU was created to provide a clear and shared framework for continuing cooperation after the completion of the SMERF project. Its overarching goal is to preserve and further develop the value generated through the project by maintaining the relationships, knowledge exchange mechanisms, and practical outputs created during implementation. In the final MoU, this overarching intention is expressed as the common will of the signatory organisations to continue cooperation beyond the project lifetime and to support the ongoing use and promotion of key project outcomes.

A first major goal of the MoU is the **continuation of transnational cooperation**. The document seeks to maintain the partnership framework established during the project and to prevent the loss of momentum that often follows the end of externally funded cooperation. By confirming the willingness of the parties to remain connected and active after project closure, the MoU helps transform a time-limited project consortium into a longer-term cooperation network. This is particularly important in the context of SME transformation, where exchange of experiences, practices, and support models across regions remains highly valuable beyond the duration of a single project.

A second key goal is the **continued use, integration, and promotion of SMERF outputs**. The MoU explicitly refers to the need to promote, apply, and disseminate the main outcomes developed within the project. These include the SMERF Inspiration Knowledge Base, the SMERF Diagnosis Tool, the Model for supporting SMEs in the transformation process towards a company of the future, and the SMERF Handbook. Through this objective, the MoU ensures that the project's tangible results are not treated as closed deliverables, but as resources intended for further application in institutional practice, stakeholder support, learning formats, advisory services, and regional innovation ecosystems.

A third goal of the MoU is to sustain **peer learning and knowledge exchange** among the parties and their stakeholder communities. The final document underlines that future cooperation should support regular learning processes related to SME transformation topics addressed by SMERF. This objective is essential because the project was built not only around tools and outputs, but also around the exchange of know-how, good practices, and implementation experiences between organisations operating in different regional contexts. The MoU, therefore, aims to preserve SMERF as a living knowledge network rather than only a completed project archive.

Another important goal is **capacity building**. The MoU is intended to strengthen organisational and regional capacities to support SMEs using approaches aligned with the SMERF concept. This means that the agreement is not limited to maintaining existing knowledge, but also supports its practical embedding into regular institutional activities. The parties are encouraged to integrate SMERF approaches into their own services, programmes, advisory formats, curricula, and outreach activities. In this way, the MoU contributes to multiplying the project's impact and supports the practical transfer of the SMERF methodology into long-term institutional use.

The MoU also has the goal of creating a foundation for **future joint initiatives**. The final text indicates that the parties may cooperate in identifying new funding and collaboration opportunities, including the preparation of new initiatives and project proposals. This objective gives the cooperation a forward-looking dimension. Rather than focusing only on preserving existing achievements, the MoU opens space for scaling up, adapting, or further developing the SMERF concept in future international or regional initiatives.

Finally, an important operational goal of the MoU is to provide a **clear and workable cooperation concept** for the post-project phase. This includes a light governance model, annual coordination meetings, nominated contact persons, consensual decision-making, and the designation of organisations responsible for maintaining the two main digital tools. These elements make the agreement more than a symbolic statement. They provide a structured basis for ensuring that cooperation remains active, visible, and manageable over the three-year applicability period defined in the document.



Taken together, the goals of the SMERF MoU can be understood as combining sustainability, continuity, dissemination, institutional embedding, and future-oriented cooperation. The MoU translates the achievements of the SMERF project into a formal post-project framework that supports the lasting use of results and the continued cross-border collaboration of organisations committed to helping SMEs become ready for the future.

4. Annexes

- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Lead Partner (PP1) - Wrocław University of Science and Technology
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Project Partner PP2 - Business Upper Austria
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Project Partner PP3 - Centre of Research and Technological Innovation s.r.l.
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Project Partner PP4 - Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Project Partner PP5 - Pannon Business Network Association
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Project Partner PP6 - STEP RI Science and Technology Park of the University of Rijeka Ltd.
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Project Partner PP7 - University of Genoa
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Project Partner PP8 - Technical University of Kosice
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - Instytut Transferu Technologii Sp. z o.o.
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - AGS-Engineering GmbH
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - ART-ER S.Cons.p.A.
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - Steinbeis Zi GmbH
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - Gépipari Tudományos Egyesület / Scientific Association of Mechanical Engineering
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - Rijeka development agency PORIN
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - Curl Robotics s.r.l.
- SMERF Memorandum of Understanding signed by other external organization - Innovation center of the Kosice region



Quality Assurance Approval

Partner	Member of the Quality Assurance Team	Result of the quality check	Date of the quality check
BIZ-UP	Jennifer Quoc	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> accepted <input type="checkbox"/> rejected	27.03.2026
UNIGE	Federico Manara	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> accepted <input type="checkbox"/> rejected	31.03.2026

Comments (in case of rejection):