

European SMEs develop their internationalisation skills thanks to F2F Health Matters support

Nitra, September 10th, 2024. Since September 2021, F2F Health Matters project has targeted European SMEs specialised in healthy food, sustainable bio-solutions, and bio-based techno-functional ingredients and solutions willing to internationalise their expertise and products in new and overseas markets.

The F2F Health Matters has been acting as an internationalisation accelerator providing complete package of services to promote international collaboration and commercial development to the SMEs.

During three years duration, the five clusters in the project consortium had closely collaborate to reach that main goal. Therefore, they had foreseen also financial support for SMEs to further develop their skills for the third countries targeted by the project consortium: Canada, Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In addition, project has organized various online activities (targeting also Vietnam and South Korea) complementing the aim to support the international business development of European SMEs and to maximise interregional cooperation and leverage collaborations with relevant regional stakeholders. The initiatives developed within these three years include organisation of open webinars, training and coaching sessions, or the creation of a business intelligence repository.

Internationalisation support for SMEs

Throughout the project, the consortium provided three types of internationalisation support to SMEs. Firstly, the **Commercial Lead Support** covered the consultancy services of commercial prospection on Canadian, Japanese or UAE market. SMEs could get personalized support from external services' providers with excellent market knowledge, financed by the consortium in the amount of up to EUR 3 000.

Secondly, the SMEs could apply to **Travel Aid** to support their participation in a collective internationalisation mission to Canada, Japan or the UAE. SMEs could reimburse their travel costs up to EUR 2 000 and met potential business partners, leading to new business agreements and promising collaborations.

In total, 16 SMEs were selected for financial support (either Commercial Lead Support or Travel Aid) for Canadian market, 17 SMEs for Japan and 15 SMEs received the financial support targeting the United Arab Emirates. During individual calls, the applicants expressed the largest interest for travel aid - for the physical participation in the international trade missions, and as a result, **3 successful missions** were organized in total - to Canada in November 2022, to Japan in June 2023 and to the United Arab Emirates in February 2024. The experience and feedback of SMEs joining individual missions in a form of short videos is available at the [project Youtube channel](#) - it can help and encourage other companies to start their own internationalisation journey.

Complementary to the financial support, SMEs could become part of the **Elite Programme**, which consisted of tailor-made training and coaching on technical, innovation and market-oriented topics and provided the access to online community

to skill up on various international topics. Given programme was targeting the same countries – Canada, Japan and the United Arab Emirates and was attended by 57 SMEs in total.

As was mentioned above, the F2F Health Matters consortium organised also various **online events** complementing the aim to support the international business development of European SMEs, e.g. 3 Panorama online events focused on increasing SMEs' self-confidence in expanding their activities internationally by sharing an overview of support tools available, or the series of matchmaking/networking events targeting 5 countries – Canada, Japan, the UAE, Vietnam and South Korea (each country was targeted twice, via thematically organised webinars).

Continuity of cooperation between the consortium members

Maintaining cooperation between the clusters of F2F Health Matters after the successful completion of the project is essential for sustaining the momentum and maximizing the benefits of collaboration. To efficiently ensure the continuation of F2F Health Matters' efforts, it has been necessary to:

- Develop long-term objectives and common areas of interest, where joint efforts can yield benefits for clusters and their members
- Share best practices, lessons learned, success stories and outcomes of project activities
- Maintain efficient communication channels
- Promote cross-cluster networking
- Identify new opportunities for clusters and their members to drive innovations

Given aspects are pivotal for leveraging the overall success of F2F Health Matters project.

How to get information for your internationalisation journey?

F2F Health Matters project has come to its end, but the project website and its social media remain available, containing the information related to the target countries. Also, inspiring market studies, business intelligence documents and success stories of the SMEs supported by F2F Health Matters project can be found within the section [Markets](#) of the main menu of the website.

All information about the past calls (including application and selection process), planned events and other project activities can be found on the project website in [NEWS](#) and [GET INVOLVED sections](#).

The European project F2F Health Matters is an internationalisation accelerator for innovative agri-food SMEs. It is driven by an alliance of five European clusters: [Wagralim \(Belgium\)](#), [Clusaga \(Spain\)](#), [Bioeconomy Cluster \(Slovakia\)](#), [InovCluster \(Portugal\)](#), and [Valorial \(France\)](#). It is funded by the [European Programme for the Competitiveness of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises \(COSME\)](#) within the framework of the [European Strategic Cluster Partnerships - Going International \(ESCP-4i\)](#).