

EU project aims to increase SME participation in FP6

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General Information:

The European Commission is funding a project aimed at increasing the number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) participating in the Sixth Framework Programme (FP6).

Although European SMEs generate the majority of radical innovations and technological breakthroughs, there are several factors that curb SME innovation and R&D activities, as well as their participation in the framework programmes. These include the lack of necessary in-house knowledge and skills to handle the research and technological development (RTD) process; the fact that SMEs tend to have short term objectives and the lack of awareness-raising activities on the benefits and opportunities for SMEs in RTD and innovation. Furthermore, those SMEs who do participate in EU RTD projects tend not to be prepared for the administrative and financial burden inherent in participation in framework programmes.

The project, DETECT-IT, is therefore targeting more than one thousand SMEs across Europe in three main sectors: information society technology (IST), food quality and safety, and sustainable environment and energy, to help them exploit their innovation potential.

'With nearly two million industrial SMEs in Europe, almost half of which are market innovators, they are the backbone of the European economy,' explained Linda Slack, from one of 62 partners in the project. 'They employ nearly two-thirds of the EU's private sector workforce and are responsible for the creation of one in every two new jobs. DETECT-IT aims to help them tap into the 2.2 billion euro that has been earmarked for SME participation in research under FP6. This project will help develop established channels between SMEs and appropriate research opportunities to help turn SMEs' ideas into commercial realities,' she added.

The network of partners will provide SMEs with information, support and guidance to allow them to access various networks of resources and information. Regional and national events will be organised to enable SMEs to meet other players in their field, and research project leaders will be given the chance to present opportunities for SMEs to join their project.

A network of 30 European Business Innovation Centre (BIC) incubators will be put in place to identify and encourage SMEs in this direction.

'The longer term goal of the project is to put in place a sustainable deal-flow mechanism to channel the SME clients of the BICs to the appropriate research opportunity using the intermediary mechanism of the relevant NCP [National Contact Point]. Improving NCP-BIC cooperation is seen as an important outcome of the project,' explain the project partners.

Furthermore, the development of regional networking models for RTD support in the newly associated countries will be given special attention.

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