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€10 million EU project to help kick-start 1,100 new businesses

The EU will inject millions of pounds into a new cross-border training programme to help social housing residents set up their own micro-businesses or achieve other forms of employment.

Known as 'Increase', the project will aim to help train 6,000 participants, creating up to 1,100 new businesses and helping a further 2,000 people into employment.

The project will be led by South East based housing association, Optivo, in partnership with seven other housing associations and will receive 6.9 million euros from the EU funded Interreg France (Chanel) England programme.

Typically, social housing residents face higher than average unemployment with 53% of residents in the UK unemployed or economically inactive, compared with the 30% national average⁶. In target areas of France this figure is 39.5% against a national average of 36%⁷.

Project Increase will aim to tackle this problem by working closely with housing associations in 38 neighbourhoods in France and the UK to deliver one-to-one training sessions for residents. It is the first large-scale micro-enterprise training programme tailored specifically for social housing residents and communities. Participants will learn all the necessary skills to launch their own businesses, including how to trial and market test business ideas and how to manage their finances through micro-loans.

Once the project has ended, Increase will continue to support participants and other housing association residents by creating a number of community ambassador roles in each of the 38 neighbourhoods. These ambassadors will provide on-going support to micro-entrepreneurs and continue to engage future participants, ensuring the long lasting legacy of the project.

William Miller, Community Development Director at Optivo, said: *"We're delighted to have been chosen as the lead partner in this project. Optivo has a long and successful history of providing innovative schemes to tackle unemployment and job skills in our communities. In the last two years this has included trialling micro-enterprise training for our residents. The Increase Project is a brilliant opportunity to take this to the next level in a super partnership with French and UK housing and training specialist agencies."*

The project budget will total 10 million euros with 69% funded by the Interreg France (Channel) England programme, representing a European Regional Development Fund budget of 6.9 million Euros. A total of 11 organisations from France and the UK will be involved in the project which will last three years.

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For further information, please contact:

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Notes to Editors

1. The Interreg FCE Programme is a European Territorial Cooperation programme that aims to fund high quality cooperation projects in the Channel border region between France and England. It focuses on a range of specific objectives including supporting innovation, improving the attractiveness of the FCE area and developing low carbon technologies. The Programme has a total of €223 million of ERDF funds to distribute by 2023 and is managed by Managing Authority Norfolk County Council.
2. The Programme operates within a clearly defined eligible area, covering the South and East Coasts of England from Cornwall to Norfolk, and the North Coast of France from Finistère to Pas-de-Calais. The programme area can be found [here](#).
3. Project Partners:
 - *Lead Partner: Optivo* (UK)
 - Clarion Housing Group (UK)
 - Radian Housing (UK)
 - Société Anonyme d'habitations à Loyer Modère Logement et Gestion Immobilière Pour La Région Parisienne-Loire (France)
 - University of East Anglia (UK)
 - Enterprise Cube (UK)
 - Maison de l'Emploi, de l'Insertion et de la Formation du Bassin d'Emploi de Rennes (France)
 - Archipel Habitat : Office Public de l'habitat de Rennes Métropole (France)
 - NEOTOA (France)
 - Le Comptoir de l'Innovation (France)
 - Pas-de-Calais habitat (France)
4. Project approval is subject to the Grant Offer Letter being signed.
5. More information about the Programme can be found at <https://interreg5a-fce.eu/>.
6. National Housing Federation: Work & Welfare
7. Targeted research on social housing neighbourhoods carried out by NEOTOA.