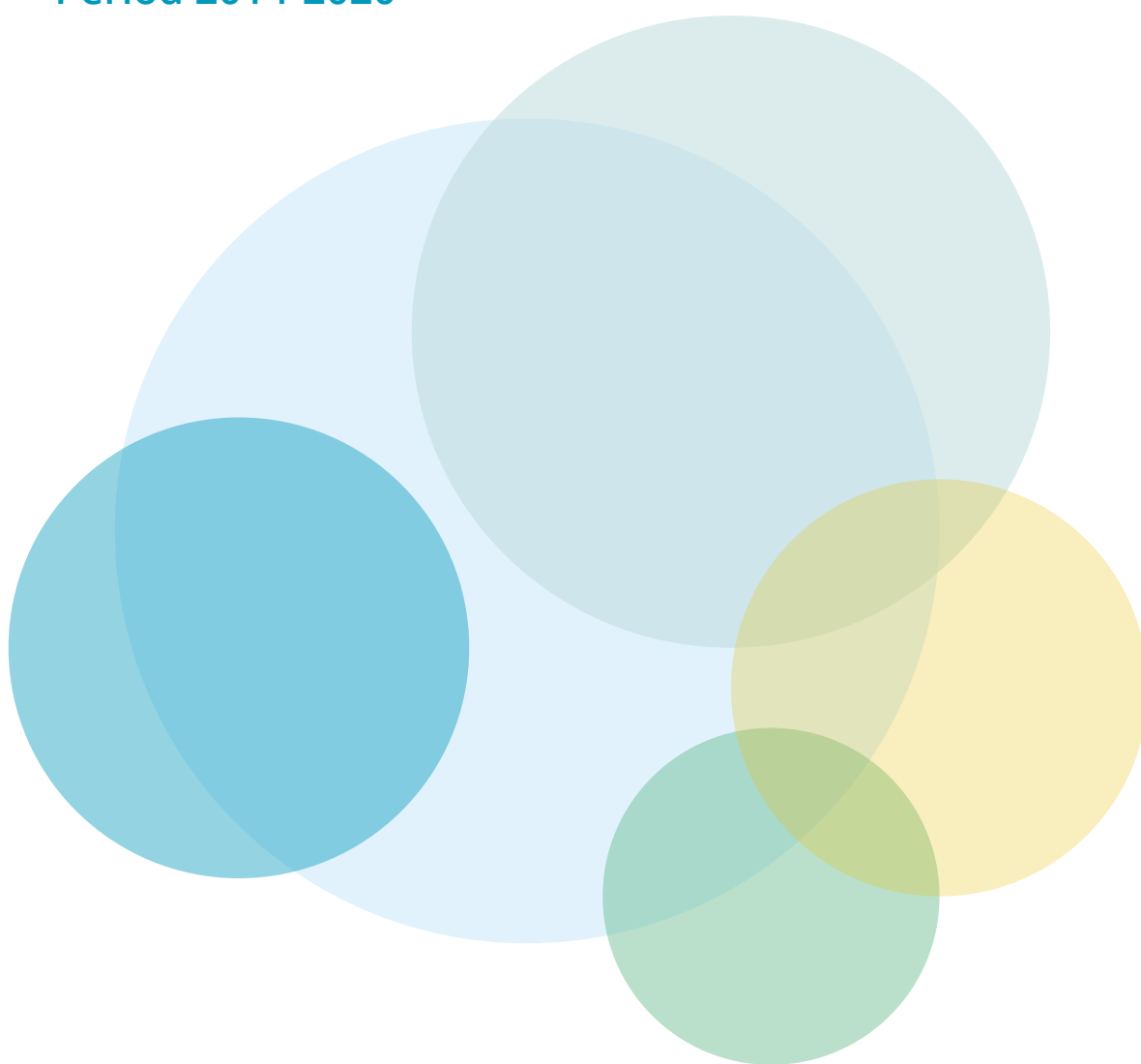


Skills for a quality job

made by Interreg

Period 2014-2020



Interact



Co-funded by
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Interreg

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Publisher: Interact Programme

Date: 18.07.2023

Authors: Interact & Dataly

[interact.eu](https://www.interact.eu)

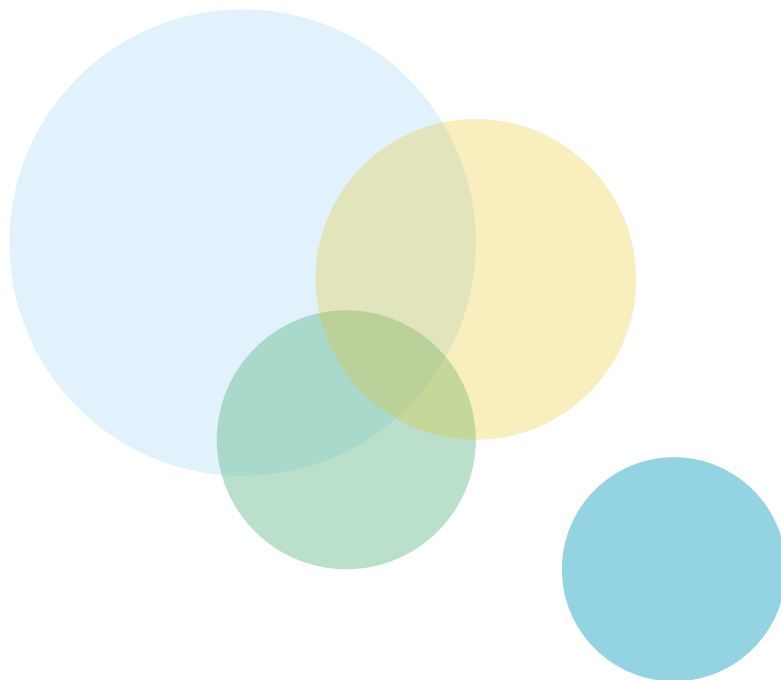
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Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Mapping & clustering	6
3	Interreg contribution to skills	36
4	Synergies opportunities with other skills related to eu instruments and funds	39
5	Recommendations to interreg programmes	48



INTRODUCTION

The world of work is increasingly complex and dynamic, and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation (Cedefop 2023). According to ILO (2017), “There are both economic and social reasons to look at how to better use skills and talent in the workplace”. Skills are a crucial part of the labour market, both for employers and workers. They play a vital role in raising a country’s economic competitiveness. In an increasingly globalized and knowledge-based economy, nations with a skilled workforce are better positioned to attract investment, promote innovation, and drive productivity growth. The labour market is continually evolving, driven by technological advancements, automation, and globalization. Many tasks in traditional and not so traditional jobs are being replaced by new ones requiring different skill sets. To ensure employability and reduce unemployment rates, individuals must possess the skills that match the demands of the evolving labour market.

Also, equipping individuals with relevant skills promotes social inclusion and reduces inequalities. By improving access to quality education and skill development, the European Commission aims to empower individuals from diverse backgrounds and create equal opportunities for all. Also, in a rapidly changing world, skills can quickly become outdated. Lifelong learning is essential to adapt to evolving job requirements and stay employable throughout one’s career.

Regarding innovation and entrepreneurship, skills are also essential: by cultivating a skilled workforce the European Commission enables individuals to contribute to the development of new ideas, products, and services. This is key to ensure that the economic recovery as well as the green and digital transitions are socially fair and just.

Specifically, the terms skill and competence can be distinguished according to their scope and are used as synonyms in many contexts. The term skill refers typically to the use of methods or instruments in a particular setting and in relation to defined tasks. On the other hand, the term competence is broader and refers typically to the ability of a person —facing new situations and unforeseen challenges— to use and apply knowledge and skills in an independent and self-directed way (European Commission 2023). **Other concepts related to skills are the ones related to upskilling and reskilling. Upskilling is a short-term targeted training typically provided following initial education or training, and aimed at supplementing, improving, or updating knowledge, skills, and competences. Reskilling is the training enabling individuals to acquire new skills giving access either to a new occupation or to new professional activities** (Cedefop 2023).

The term skill refers typically to the use of methods or instruments in a particular setting and in relation to defined tasks

WHY A YEAR OF SKILLS?

The European Year of Skills is an initiative of the European Commission that aims to address the skills shortage in the European Union and to strengthen the EU's skills strategy. Its main objective is to help individuals acquire new skills, especially in the field of digital and green technologies, in order to improve their employability. In addition, the initiative aims to provide support to businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, by presenting national efforts and various EU initiatives and funding opportunities. The Year will start on the 9th of May and will run for 12 months, with many actions and initiatives to be launched and promoted (European Commission2023).



The main objectives of the European Year of Skills are the following:

- **Promoting investment in training and upskilling, enabling people to stay in their jobs or find new ones.**
- **Ensuring skills match the needs of employers, by closely cooperating with social partners and companies.**
- **Matching people's aspirations and skill sets with opportunities in the job market, especially for the green and digital transitions and economic recovery.**
- **Attracting people from outside the EU with the skills needed.**

The European Year of Skills will provide a new force to reach the EU 2030 targets of at least 60% of adults in training every year, and at least 78% in employment. The initiative will also help achieve some of the 2030 Digital Compass targets such as achieving at least 80% of adults with basic digital skills and 20 million employed ICT specialists in the EU. At present, over 75% of employers in the EU say they have difficulties finding workers possessing the required skills, whereas merely 37% of adults engage in regular training activities. Also, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index, 40% of adults and one-third of the European workforce lack fundamental digital skills. The representation of women in technology-related fields and studies is also inadequate, with only 1 in 5 ICT specialists and 1 in 3 graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) being women.

For the European Year of Skills, the EU will build on many ongoing initiatives, including the European Skills Agenda, the Pact for Skills, the Council Recommendations on Individual Learning Accounts and Micro-credentials helping people to update or complete their skill-sets in a more flexible and targeted way, the EU Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, the European Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, the Structured Dialogue with the EU Member States on Digital Education and Skills and many more. Significant EU funding and technical support are available through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, among others.

MAPPING & CLUSTERING

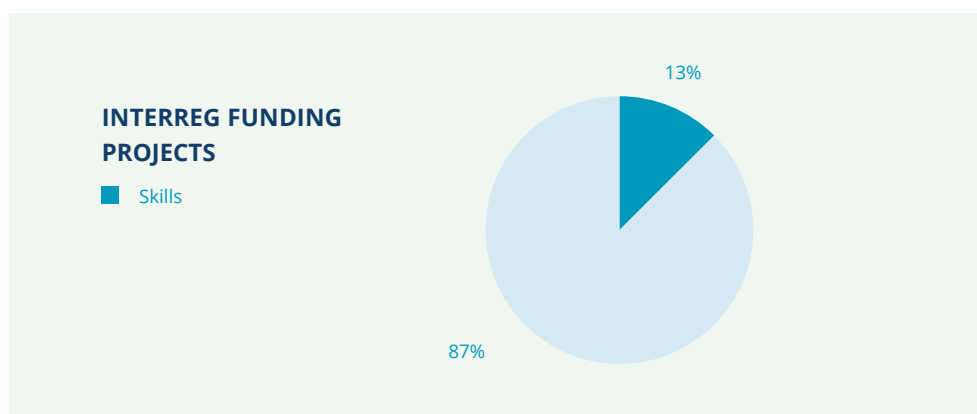
This first chapter gives an overview of Interreg projects aimed at improving people's skills in the working environment, either to improve their employability or to adapt to new and evolving characteristics of the working environment.

MACRODATA OVERVIEW

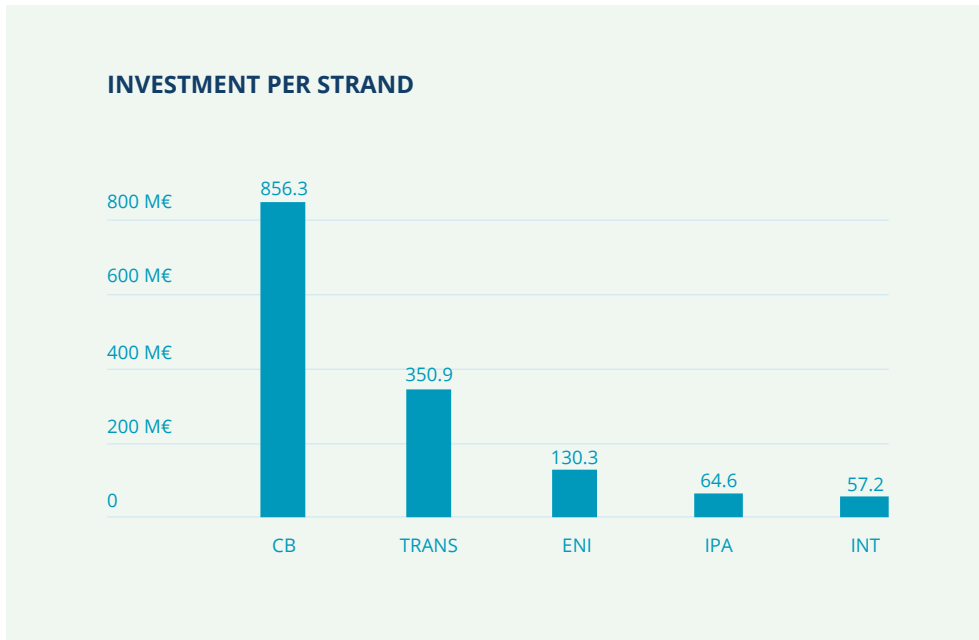
During the period 2014-2020, 1,600 projects have been carried out where, in one way or another, actions aimed at improving people's skills in the labour market have been carried out. So far in the period 2021-2027, 27 projects have been carried out or are being developed in this field. The data analysed below only refer to the period 2014-2020 as they are sufficiently representative to draw conclusions. Projects for the period 2021-2027 have not been taken into account in the numerical analysis; their small number at the time of writing this report could distort the results.

The analysis was carried out on the basis of the Keep.eu database, through a general search for the term "skill".

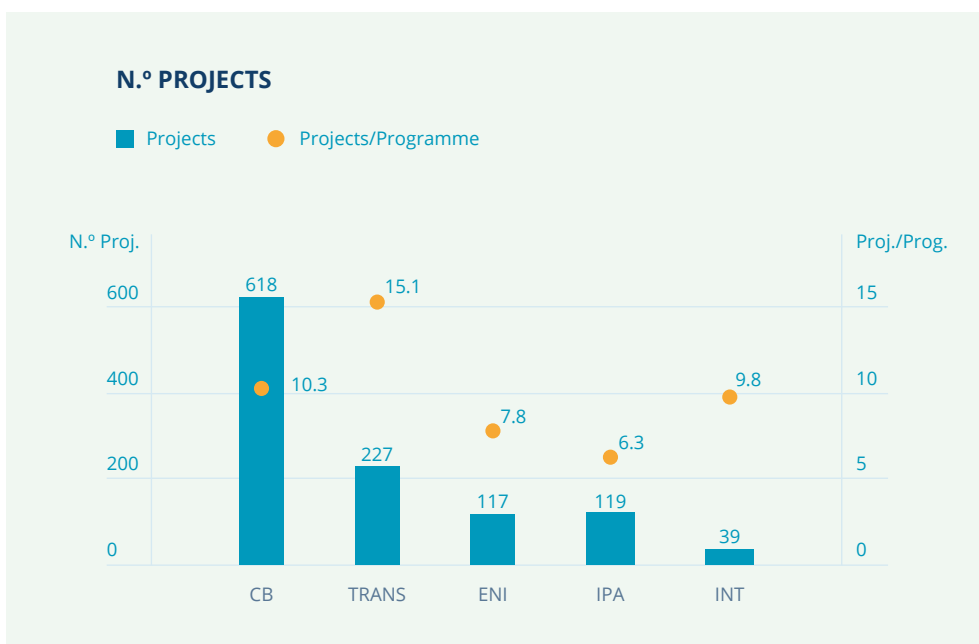
Analysing in more detail the description of these projects, we can conclude that in this period Interreg has developed 1,120 projects in the field of skills. In economic terms, this has meant an investment of 1,459.1 million euros. Taking into account that the total amount of funds invested by Interreg in this period was 10.2 billion euros, this means that 14.3% of the funds have been allocated to skills projects.



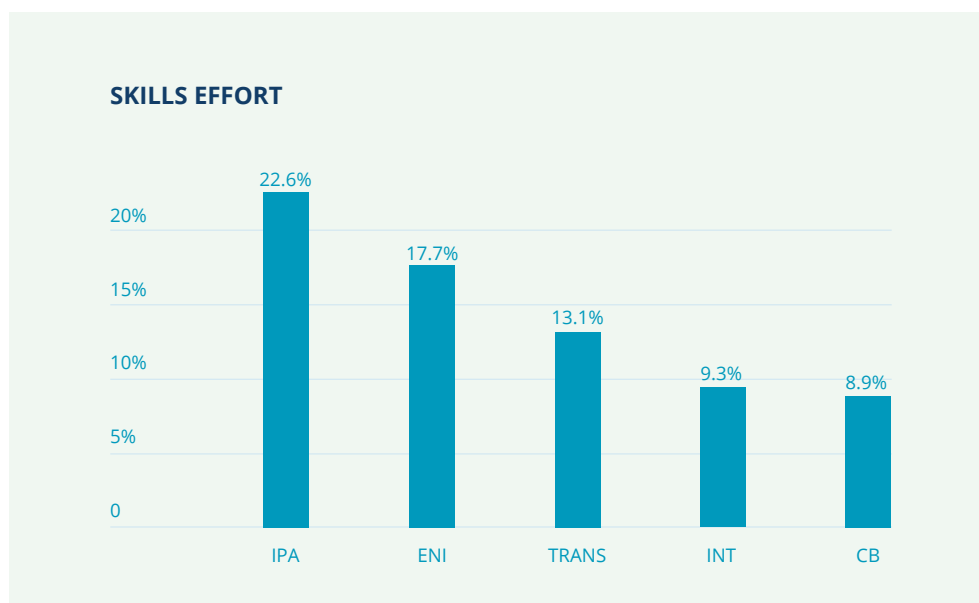
If we analyse how projects have been distributed by strand, we observe that, in terms of investment, Cross-Border Programmes (CBC) have allocated the most funds to this type of project, followed at a considerable distance by Transnational Programmes.



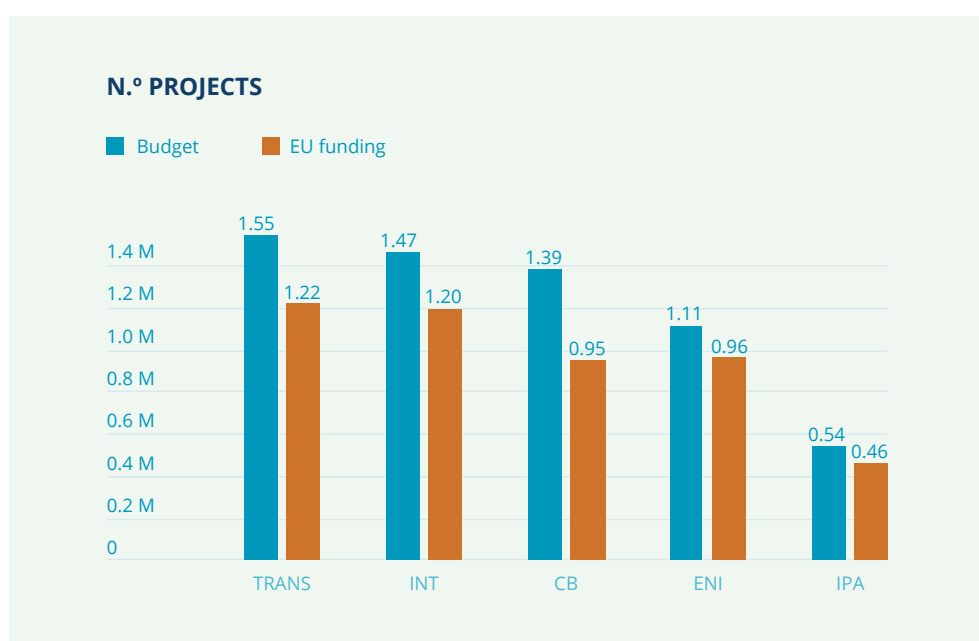
From the point of view of the number of projects, it is also the CBC programmes with the most projects, however, if we consider the number of programmes there are within each strand, we observe that it is the Transnational programmes that have carried out the most projects, with an average of 15.1 projects per programme.



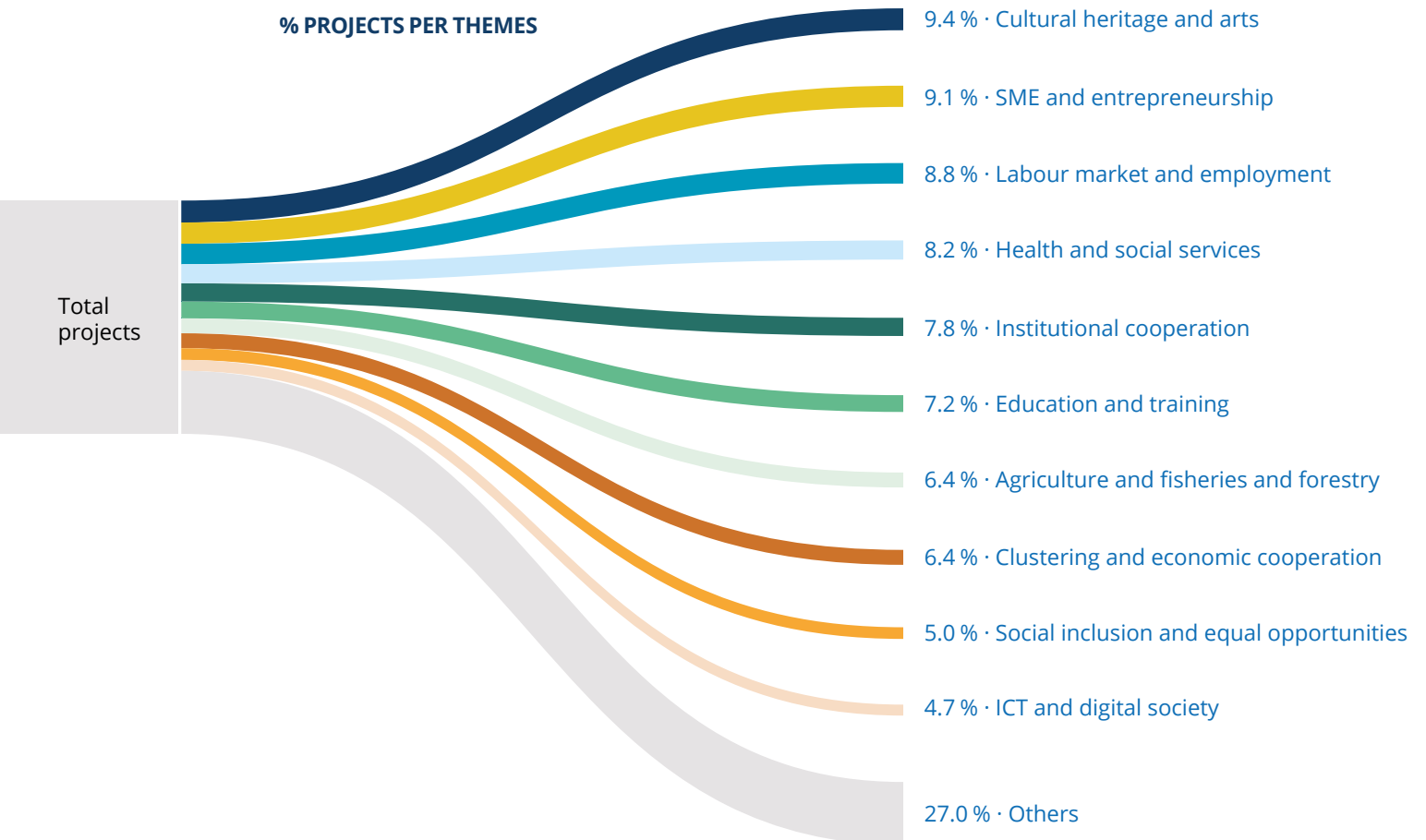
Another way to analyse the effort that each strand has put into the realisation of skills projects is through the amount of funding allocated to these projects in relation to the total budget managed by each strand. The following graph shows that the IPA and ENI strands have allocated proportionally more funds to these projects, with 22% and 17% respectively. In contrast, the CBC programmes have made the least effort in this area relative to their size.



If we analyse the size of the project in economic terms, we see that the average amount of each project is 1.3 million euros, except in the case of IPA projects, whose size is considerably smaller, 0.54 million euros. EU funding maintains a similar proportionality in all strands, accounting for 83% of the total budget, except in the case of CBC, where it is 68%.



Looking at the themes of the projects, the following graph shows the number of projects carried out by the TOP-10. These themes account for 73% of the total number of projects.

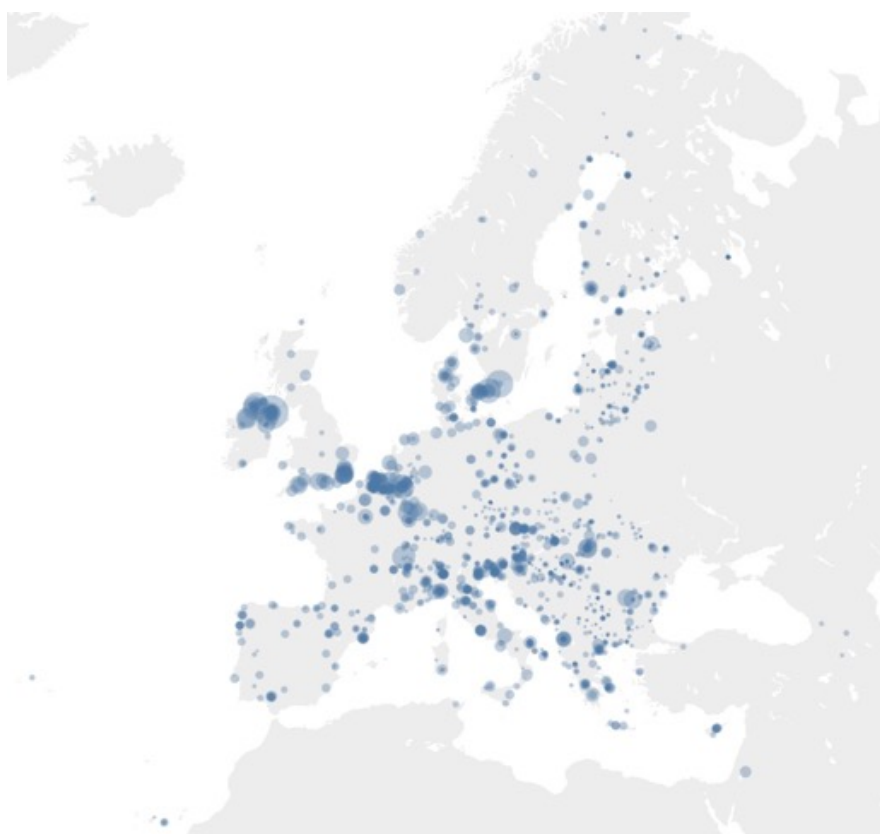


We see expected topics such as “Labour market and employment” or “Education and training”, or those related to economic aspects. However, it is worth highlighting the last position occupied by the theme “ICT and digital society”, as well as the fact that there are no themes related to climate change or energy efficiency in prominent positions among these 10 themes.

To conclude this section, we have analysed how the projects have been distributed geographically. In the following map we can see the distribution of the projects based on the location of the main partner of each project.



The distribution is fairly even throughout the territory of the Member States, although there is a higher density in the central, eastern and south-eastern regions.



If we look at the geographical distribution in terms of project budgets, we see that the highest density is in the west, especially in the Benelux area and the British Isles.

CLUSTERING

One of the objectives of this study is to answer the questions: What did the EU Co-operation programs offer in the field of “Skills for a quality job” during 2014-2020?

To do this, the characteristics of the selected projects have been analysed and classified into five groups that allow them to be categorized and to know what they do to deal with the situation highlighted in the introduction.

The clusters have been developed based on the objectives of the European Year of Skills to analyse Interreg’s position towards the current European needs of adapting skills to the labour market or new skills on demand of the society’s needs.

The 1.120 Interreg projects carried out in this area during the 2014-2020 period have been grouped into five clusters. In addition to these five clusters, there are transversal elements that are also present in many of the Interreg projects, such as social innovation, digitalisation, new jobs, gender, and marginalization.

Five clusters according to the objectives of the European Year of Skills

What the projects in each cluster do in general terms is outlined below. In the third part of this section, a sample set of projects is included as an example for accuracy and clarity.

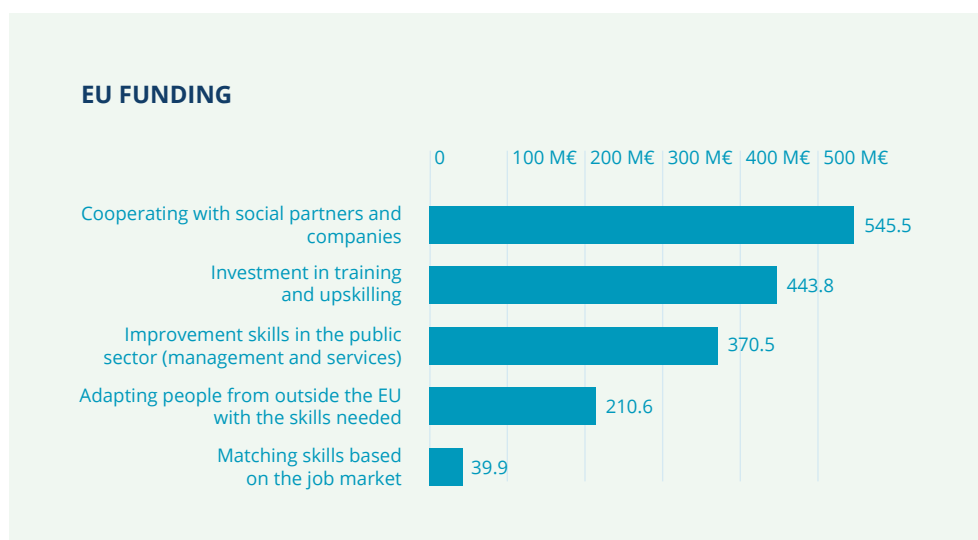
- **Promoting investment in training and upskilling, enabling people to stay in their jobs or find new ones.** These are projects aimed at improving the skills of those workers who need to improve their skills in order to adapt to changes in their current jobs, as well as in the event that the worker needs to change jobs either out of necessity (disappearance of their current job/company) or because of a vital need to develop a new profession. It, therefore, refers to both reskilling and upskilling.
- **Ensuring skills match the needs of employers, by closely cooperating with social partners and companies.** These are projects that primarily seek to equip people with the skills needed by employers, but in coordination with all stakeholders in the process.
- **Matching people’s aspirations and skill sets with opportunities in the job market, especially for the green and digital transitions and the economic recovery.** These projects are more focused on the new demands required by the transformation of the labour market due to aspects such as technological change, climate change, new social trends (e.g. ageing population), etc.
- **Adapting people from outside the EU with the needed skills.** From the point of view of Interreg, this group has included projects of two types: a) projects working with countries outside the European Union (IPA and ENI), and b) projects aiming at improving the skills of foreigners legally residing in the European Union, migrants, and refugees. Refer to the fact that Interreg does not have projects wanting to “attract people” from outside the EU but to include them while they are already in the EU.

- **Improvement skills in the public sector (management and services).** Other projects not included in the previous groups. This group includes projects of different kinds, such as the improvement of skills in specific economic sectors, **skills related to management and public administration** (local and regional), or the improvement of public services (emergency services, connectivity, cultural aspects, environment, and energy, etc.).

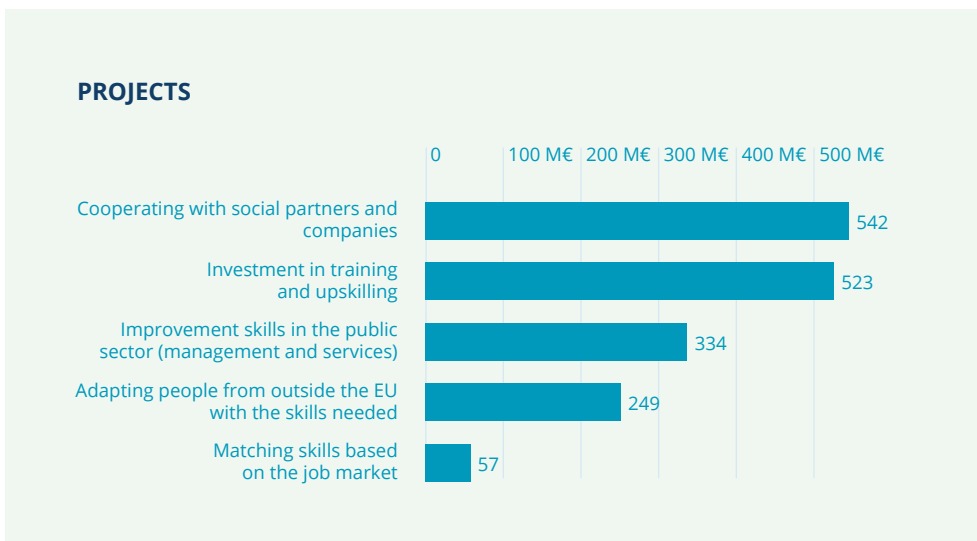
Data overview

In this section, we will look at some data on the distribution of projects among the different clusters. It should be borne in mind that the sum of the clusters can give more than 100% of the total due to the fact that there are intersections between clusters, i.e. a project can appear in two or more clusters.

Looking at the Interreg investment in the projects, we see that the cluster that has allocated the most funds to the development of the projects is “Cooperating with social partners and companies”, followed by “Investment in training and upskilling”.



The distribution in terms of the number of projects is similar, maintaining the same order. However, the number of “Investment in training and upskilling” projects is very close to the “Cooperating with social partners and companies”, which indicates that the funds allocated to each “Investment in training and upskilling” project is lower (€0.8M) compared to the “Cooperating with social partners and companies” (€1.0M).



The geographical distribution of each cluster is shown below. In general, it can be stated that the “Investment in training and upskilling”, “Cooperating with social partners and companies” and “Improvement skills in the public sector (management and services)” clusters are fairly evenly distributed throughout the territory of the European Union. While the “Matching skills based on the job market” and “Adapting people from outside the EU with the skills needed” clusters are more concentrated in the east and south-east.

INVESTMENT IN TRAINING AND UPSKILLING



COOPERATING WITH SOCIAL PARTNERS AND COMPANIES



**IMPROVEMENT SKILLS
IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**



**MATCHING SKILLS BASED
ON THE JOB MARKET**



**ADAPTING PEOPLE
FROM OUTSIDE...**



HORIZONTAL ELEMENTS

Beyond the classification of projects in the clusters we have seen, there are other cross-cutting concepts common to many projects. Of all of them, “technology” is the most present, as 34% of all projects are linked to it. The clusters where the element of technology is most present are Training and Upskilling, accounting for 74% of all projects associated with technology.

Although previously have been stated that “Climate change” is not one of the top 10 themes under skills in Interreg, environment and climate change still is an important cross-cutting concept. Thus, 20% of the projects are linked to concepts such as: green, energy, efficiency, climate.

A third important concept is that of vocational training. Eight percent of the projects are related to it, which is normal since vocational training is one of the most important ways of acquiring job skills.

It is striking that the concept of digitisation is present in only 1% of the projects. Although we have seen that technology is the most present cross-cutting concept, given the importance of digitisation in the labour market and the importance at the level of European objectives, we believe that its presence should be greater.

Other horizontal elements also present across many projects, are the following: social innovation, marginalization, new jobs or ageing, lifelong learning.

In short, we can affirm that the skills projects work transversally on other themes, which allows addressing different European dimensions and priorities not only directly, but also implicitly.

The following maps show the distribution of projects related to technology and environmental concepts.



TECHNOLOGY



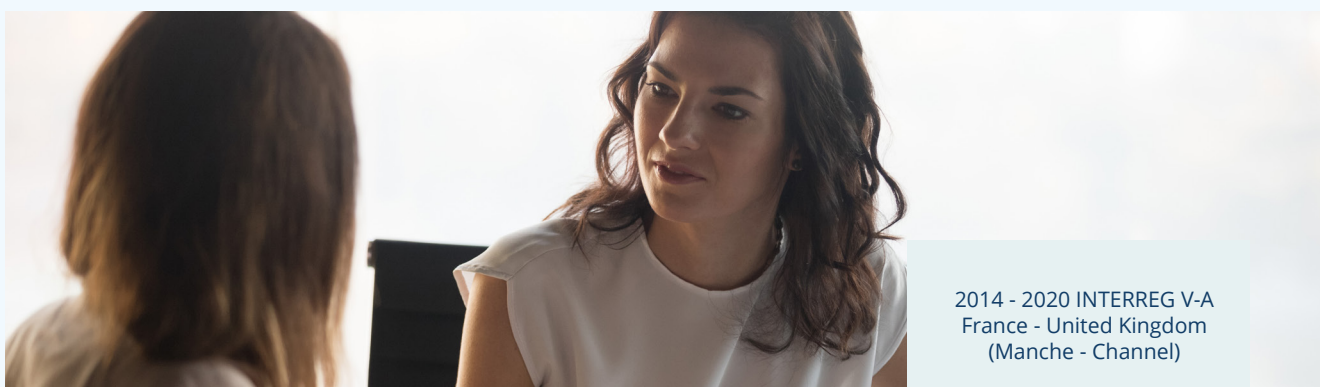
ENVIRONMENTAL



NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS

In this last section of the chapter, we provide a collection of examples of projects in each of the clusters. It should be noted that the classification of a project in a given cluster does not exclude it from being part of another cluster. As we said before, many projects can be part of several clusters since there are many intersections between them.

PROMOTING INVESTMENT IN TRAINING AND UPSKILLING, ENABLING PEOPLE TO STAY IN THEIR JOBS OR FIND NEW ONES



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
France - United Kingdom
(Manche - Channel)

AWE

Accelerating Women's Enterprise

Project AWE (Accelerating Women's Enterprise) will bring together organisations **working in business creation to address the gender imbalance in business start-ups**, where men are currently twice as likely to start a business compared to women.

The project will use expertise from both sides of the Channel to train and recruit over 160 specialist mentors. The mentors will then be paired with disadvantaged women where they will help coach and support them with business skills such as finance management, marketing, and access to markets.

In addition to the mentor training, the project will also create other training content including an e-learning platform and business boot camps which will help reach and train a larger number of disadvantaged women.

At the end of the 3-year project, AWE will have trained over 700 women and helped create 130 jobs.

This project has been selected for its focus on women, a group that still today needs to be supported to ensure equal opportunities in the labour market.

€ Project budget
€ 4.6 M

★ EU funding
€ 3.2 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



2014 - 2020 Interreg IPA CBC
Hungary – Serbia

€ Project budget
€ 0.33 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.28 M

🔍 [Web link](#)

C-AGRO-Dev

Cross-border Agrobusiness Development Program

The region has great potential in the agricultural production sector due to its favourable conditions, such as: the climate, soil characteristics and available water resources. However, this potential is currently underutilized. The region's agriculture is traditionally characterized by an unfavourable ownership structure, which typically includes family holdings, which in many cases are characterized by low labour productivity and inefficient use of resources.

The project partners are interested in launching an ultimate education and information management and sharing program ("Regional Agribusiness Development Program") which aims to **increase family farms' competencies in entrepreneurship, modern agriculture technologies, ICT and sustainability.**

The most important segment of the project is the "Modern Farmer Academy" which will provide classroom and practical training opportunities as well as mostly e-learning courses for the next generation of family farmers in the region to increase their entrepreneurial level and develop their competencies in the field of modern agriculture technologies.

The classroom and practical training material is built on four main pillars:

- Entrepreneurship skills
- Modern agriculture technologies
- ICT skills
- Sustainability

The program targets three main types of agriculture producers:

- Field crops
- Horticulture
- Food processing

This project stands out for the incorporation of new skills that allow the modernisation of a traditional sector.



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
Romania – Bulgaria

CBC LABORLAB

Developing an integrated and inclusive labour market at a cross-border level

The project's general objective is to support the **CBC integration of employment and labour mobility as a common "market" by creating CBC LABORLAB Model that will realize future skills forecasts, develop operational structures and joint vocational training programs capable to integrate CBC labour market in a flexible environment.** For achieving the project's objective, a CBC LABORLAB Model will be developed. In the first phase, a research study will be realized and a forecasting model (skills, labour market evolution, economic evolution) will be developed. In the second phase, 4 joint vocational training programs will be developed to cover basic skills, critical skills and language skills gap. These training programs will be delivered to 480 participants from the CBC area. In the third phase, CBC LABORLAB Cluster will be built with a legal entity, 3 departments: Information Centre, Advice Centre and Talent Mobility Centre, and equipped with 3 software applications that will be developed through the project: Job Matching App, FUTURE SKILLS APP and Portal APP. In the fourth phase, information campaigns will be organized and a strategy for employment and social inclusion of disadvantaged people will be elaborated. In the fifth phase, publicity and visibility actions will be developed and implemented. Project actions will be coordinated through project management activities.

This is a good example of an upskilling project, where a diverse and comprehensive programme for the improvement of job skills is offered.

€ Project budget
€ 0.66 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.56 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



CBC-PracticeFirms

Innovative methods of professional training and educational collaboration at a bilateral level RO-UA

Improving accessibility and employability in the labour market of 360 students and high school students from Romania and Ukraine, by developing the knowledge and skills necessary for a modern labour market, is flexible and dynamic through inter-institutional collaboration in education across borders.

Improving the quality of education in the project area by developing cross-border partnership between educational units in Romania and Ukraine, exchanging best practices, development and innovation activities to increase the competitiveness of graduates, diversifying educational offerings and developing employment alternatives for young people in the project area will be achieved by harmonizing the theoretical knowledge of young people with practical skills to meet the economic and innovative needs in the cross-border area, increasing the access of young entrepreneurs in the cross-border area to new opportunities for promotion and creating new job opportunities and independent perspectives.

The general objective of learning through the practice firm is to develop the entrepreneurial spirit by: familiarizing students with the specific activities of a real company, simulating real business operations and processes specific to the real business environment, improving the business language, developing the skills and attitudes needed for a dynamic entrepreneur.

2014 - 2020 ENI CBC
Romania - Ukraine

€ Project budget
€ 0.33 M

☆ EU funding
€ 0.30 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



IMAGINE

Inclusive Market AGriculture Incubator in North-West Europe

IMAGINE aims at tackling youth unemployment by providing sustainable job prospects in the horticulture sector, more specifically for young people (15-34 years old) who are NEET – not in education, employment, or training – in the (peri-)urban areas of North-West Europe.

In these regions, horticulture, urban agriculture, and short food supply chain sectors are growing rapidly and require a lot of low-skilled labour. However, the job entry rate after training is currently 20%. Indeed, these sectors face significant barriers to fully developing their potential, including, a lack of access to land and weak youth empowerment.

Local organisations can help to overcome these deficiencies by facilitating free access to their hectares of vacant land and by involving young people through an innovative co-production methodology.

IMAGINE will therefore support the development, testing and implementation of different social incubation models (access to land + support) for young people in the peri-urban horticulture sector on the outskirts of London and Paris, in central Belgium, in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and in Eindhoven.

The objective is also to create a transnational network in charge of social innovation issues in (peri-)urban horticulture to ensure long-term effects and help organisations to replicate the model.

Interreg
North-West Europe

€ Project budget
€ 3.56 M

★ EU funding
€ 2.18 M

🔍 [Web link](#)

ENSURING SKILLS MATCH THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS, BY CLOSELY COOPERATING WITH SOCIAL PARTNERS AND COMPANIES



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
Romania – Bulgaria

€ Project budget
€ 0.65 M

☆ EU funding
€ 0.55 M

🔍 [Web link](#)

A chance for development

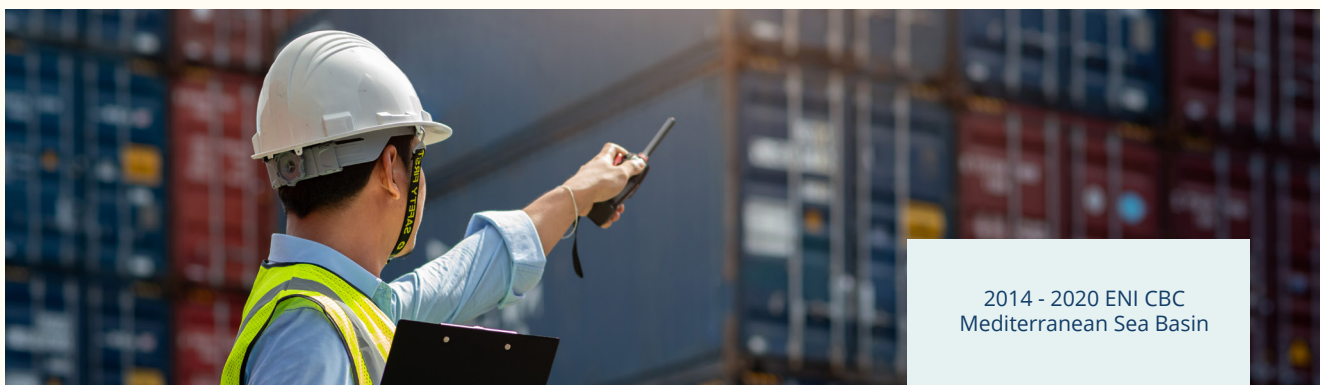
A chance for development

The project aims to **increase employability by developing professional skills and by ensuring better communication between employers and the persons that are in search of a job** in the counties of Dolj, Vidin and Veliko Tarnovo. Its priority is the inclusion in the labour market of students and university graduates of the region of implementation of the project.

Activities included: information and promotion, selection of the target group, professional training for the target group, the setting-up of a Romanian-Bulgarian centre for career and recruitment, Design of an interactive site and organisation of themed meetings between the employers and persons in search of a job, Working visits of students and professors to potential employers in Bulgaria and Romania.

Expected results: 14 initiatives (12 initiation and training courses, 1 internet domain, 1 job fair), 400 participants in local joint and employment initiatives, and 300 participants in joint education and training programmes.

This project stands out for the matching between the needs of the labour market and those of the people seeking to enter it.



2014 - 2020 ENI CBC
Mediterranean Sea Basin

€ Project budget
€ 0.65 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.55 M

🔍 Web link

YEP MED

Youth Employment In Ports Of The Mediterranean

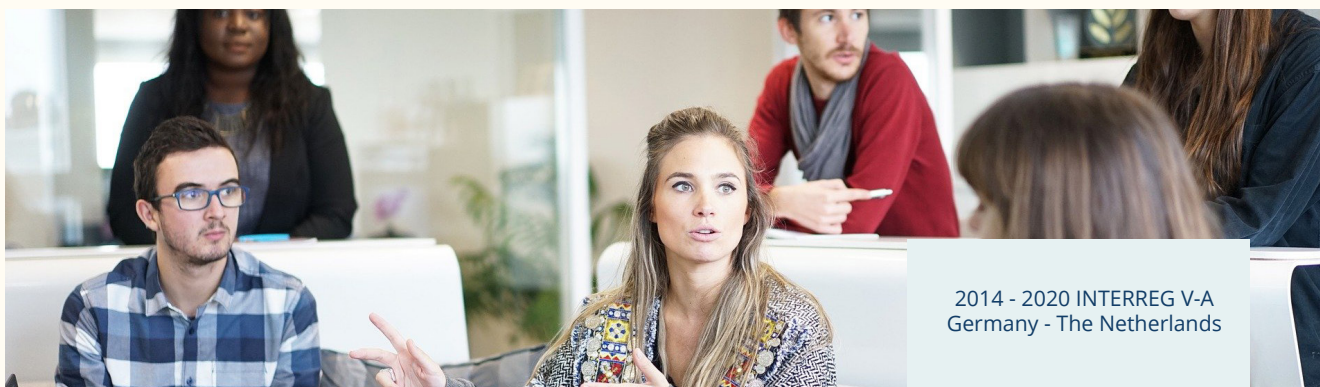
The YEP-MED project aims to **develop port-logistics training and vocational (TVET) resources adapted to sector needs to strengthen youth employability**; increase and upgrade local employment opportunities through the creation of real dual-learning programmes with job placements, strengthening the role of SME's operating in the port ecosystems for future employment creation; and setting up collaborative national and transnational partnerships between port-logistics associations, operators, SMEs, training centres and VET providers, whilst introducing a PPP (public private partenariat) co-management process.

Ten partners from seven countries (Spain, Italy, France, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan) bordering the Mediterranean have joined the project, with the amount of 3,000,000 euros of funds for its development, will work towards a better preparation of skills required by the port-logistics labour market.

YEP MED aims at better matching the labour market skills needs generated by port logistics, a sector with high growth potential, with the TVET offer in order to new jobs for young people by:

- Developing Port-logistics training and vocational (TVET) resources adapted to sector needs to strengthen youth, especially needs, and women, employability.
- Increase and upgrade local employment opportunities through the creation of real dual learning programs with job placement, strengthening the role of SME's operating in the Ports ecosystem for future employment creation.
- Setting up collaborative national and transnational Partnerships between Port logistics associations, operators, SME's training centres and VET providers, introducing a PPP co-management process.

The YEP MED approach is flexible and focuses on updating and adapting existing dual TVET programmes in several Mediterranean countries targeting three areas with skills shortage: Foreign Trade (commercial English, incoterms, intermodal transport), Environment (Marpol, energetic transition) and Port Logistic operations areas (port terminal; logistic areas and port operators). This project is a good example of improving the skills required in a specific economic sector.



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
Germany - The Netherlands

GIP Extra ERW

GIP Extra ERW

An integrated cross-border labour market is of particular importance for stimulating economic growth in border areas. Hereby, providing information to employers and employees plays a key role. The main obstacles to labour mobility are insufficient language skills and differences in social security and taxation systems, as well as the lack of information. In order to improve the provision of information a **network of border info points – the GrenzInfoPunkte (GIPs)** - has been established along the German-Dutch-Belgian border area in the years 2015 – 2017. With their broad expertise, the GIPs support employers and employees with individual questions concerning employment, job search and application procedures in a cross-border context.

The project GIP Extra ERW aims to further develop and improve the services of the GIPs in the Euregio Rhine-Waal (ERW). In doing so, the so-called „click-call-connect“-principle shall be followed, meaning that clients should receive advice digitally, by phone or within a group presentation before a face-to-face consultation takes place. Considering the current economic trends, the services should pay more attention to providing information and supporting employers. Following the implementation phase, the network of GIPs should be further developed from 2020 on, specifically with regard to quality assurance and the intensification of cooperation, e.g. in the field of communication. On a regional level, the GIP ERW will organise expert sessions for the most relevant labour market stakeholders. These sessions aim to share existing knowledge across the border, to generate new knowledge and to coordinate the exchange of information. Specific focus will be put on the exchange of information on the contents of education and the recognition of diplomas and qualifications. Also, the cooperation with other stakeholders and INTERREG projects will be coordinated within the expert groups.

€ Project budget
€ 0.42 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.21 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



CCI Mayotte — Economic Valorisation Of The Cosmetopoeia, Pharmacopoeia And Spices Sectors Of The South-West Indian Ocean — The Papam Counter

The project of economic valorisation of the cosmetope, pharmacopoeia and spices sectors aims to stimulate a dynamic of development on all the value chains of these sectors. It is part of a regional approach across 6 countries in the southwestern Indian Ocean (Mayotte, Madagascar, Comoros, Reunion, Mauritius, Seychelles) and is complementary to the project led by Qualitropic (La Réunion) with the support of AFD, Cap Business and Cosmetic Valley. The operation is a continuation of a project developed by Cap Business which aimed to develop cluster initiatives in essential oils and natural cosmetic products and to network them on a regional scale. The project carried out by the CCIM aims to make an inventory of the sectors in each territory from the production of raw material to the marketing of processed products, to establish a list of plants of interest for each field and the potential for recovery, to pool the skills and means available by creating a cluster of professionals, to identify the needs for the development of adapted training engineering and to support the actors in setting up processing chains for local consumption, but also in their innovation efforts and export strategy.

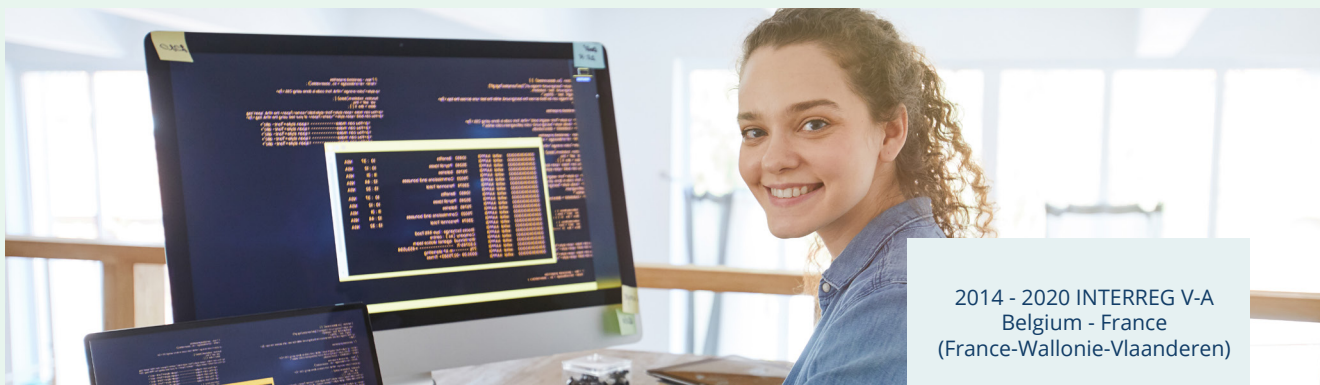
2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
France (Mayotte-
Comores-Madagascar)

€ Project budget
€ 0.31 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.21 M

🔍 [Web link](#)

MATCHING PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS AND SKILL SETS WITH OPPORTUNITIES IN THE JOB MARKET, ESPECIALLY FOR THE GREEN AND DIGITAL TRANSITION AND THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
Belgium - France
(France-Wallonie-Vlaanderen)

ACT'EMPLOI

Cross-border employment support

The human services sector is today facing a major challenge: improving service quality. This involves, among other things, boosting the level of professionalism and a better knowledge of the existing training programmes in the sector in France and Belgium.

The ACT' EMPLOI project aims to associate the human services sector with the new technologies sector. Information and communication technologies (ICT) help to professionalise the human services sector, contribute to the social inclusion of vulnerable people, and improve the quality of service provided by employees. Training job-seekers in new technologies does not only professionalise personal services but also reduces the digital divide within the population (carers and people). Among the actions carried out, the project also provides for the development of innovative training through the implementation of dual certification (FR and B), French/Dutch language learning, thus promoting cross-border mobility and the acquisition of skills for a public alienated from the workplace in order to meet the needs of companies in the sector; the construction of common training tools enabling dual certification valid for both French and Belgian employers; the improvement of recruitment by networking cross-border employers and pooling job offers throughout the territory concerned.

This project is notable for seeking an overall improvement of the human services sector.

€ Project budget
€ 2.9 M

☆ EU funding
€ 1.4 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



2014 - 2020 ENI CBC
Mediterranean Sea Basin

SIRCLES

Supporting Circular Economy Opportunities for Employment and Social Inclusion

The high rate of youth unemployment, in particular NEETs and women, in the Mediterranean basin has economic and social consequences that are not specific to one country, but rather impact all Mediterranean countries. These groups share common challenges like lack of education, unequal access to education and employment, mismatch of their skills with the needs of the labour market, and they suffer a difficult transition from school to work.

SIRCLES partners want to explore new employment opportunities by applying the circular economy model applied to the biowaste sector. **The project will mainly focus on developing new capacities oriented to business development and separation, collection, composting and agriculture processes.** The training will be tested through 7 pilot projects that address the hotel, food retail and household sectors, adjusted to the diverse local contexts of each territory involved in the project. Consequently, SIRCLES will contribute to the creation of green jobs by involving the most vulnerable sectors of the population and supporting environmental sustainability.

This project stands out for the generation of opportunities around the promotion of the circular economy.

€ Project budget
€ 3.9 M

★ EU funding
€ 3.4 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
Spain-France-Andorra
(POCTEFA)

Mèstres

Improvement of forest and agricultural machinery formations

In the Pyrenean territories, the local resources such as forests and agriculture are not exploited optimally. This is partly due to forest and agricultural formations that are not adapted to local realities or the professional world.

Mèstres' primary objective is the **improvement of forest and agricultural machinery formations through the creation of an educational reference system of forest and agricultural machinery trainers**. The development of pedagogical, technical, and practical skills of the trainers has been identified as a key element to achieving our goal. This reference system will allow, at the end of the project, to create a recognized and equivalent certificate on both sides of the border, which does not exist at the present.

The expected medium and long-term impact is to facilitate access for young people and jobseekers to highly qualified forestry and agricultural jobs, as well as the sustainable use of local resources and the creation of new local businesses. These three elements will promote the sustainable and endogenous development of the Pyrenees and increase its territorial attractiveness.

This project focuses on developing skills for rural environments and continuing to provide employment opportunities for local people in a sustainable way.

€ Project budget
€ 0.39 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.25 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
Italy - France (Maritime)

MA.R.E.

Cross-Border Labor Market and Network of Employment Services

Employment is one of the tangible aspects of a country's economy that most affects the lives of individuals. Although the GDP may be perceived as something abstract, employment loss or uncertainty is felt immediately. The inclusive growth of the area appears to be threatened by a persisting economic crisis and job loss, especially in the Italian and island regions, but also, increasingly, the NUTS 3 of the PACA Region.

With this scenario and based on the cooperation experiences of the MA.RE Maritime programme, **this project intends to contribute to the cross-border labour market by creating joint services to support the matching of employment supply and demand and a network of those responsible for employment services and the actors involved in matching supply and demand** (Chamber of Commerce, union representatives and workers).

The cross-border network of employment services, the development of joint services to facilitate the matching of supply and demand and cross-border mobility, the definition of joint professional profiles and validation processes of shared skills are the main outcomes of this project. Students, workers and the unemployed of the maritime area will benefit from expanded job search opportunities. A strategic action is planned to influence Regional Operational and Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes and facilitate the sustainability of the results and their capitalisation. The plan is to involve the EURES network for cross-border mobility.

€ Project budget
€ 6.7 M

★ EU funding
€ 5.7 M

🔍 [Web link](#)



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A
Spain - Portugal
Madeira-Açores-Canarias
(MAC)

€ Project budget
€ 0.41 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.35 M

🔍 [Web link](#)

InsertaTIC

System for the transfer of knowledge and for cooperation between companies and knowledge centres through human capital and the promotion and use of ICTs

InsertaTIC is a project whose objective is to **transfer knowledge between research groups/centres and companies in the regions in order to develop innovation projects** that result in products or services that companies need; incorporating for this purpose a new expert in innovation, who will be young students/new graduates who will be measured on their competences and skills (transversal and technical) and will be trained through an online training itinerary so that they become the agents that develop these projects.

To achieve this, IT tools will be developed that: identify the best connections between the different actors involved in the development of the projects, measure the skills of the HR of companies and young people and train/improve those of the latter. The main sectors will be: ICT, Tourism, Transport and Logistics and Agri-food Industry among others.

ADAPTING PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE THE EU WITH THE SKILLS NEEDED



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-B
Central Europe

TASKFORCOME

Transnational Action to advance Skills and competences FOR COmmunity engagement and social Migrants Entrepreneurship initiatives in the Central Europe

Taskforcome project aimed to **assist migrants interested in opening and/or developing (already created enterprises), including both for-profit firms and social enterprises**. During the project, we created the Education, Training and Supporting Tools both for migrant entrepreneurs and business service providers (online and offline materials). We have also created the E-Learning platform for Migrant Entrepreneurs (<https://learning.taskforcome.eu/>).

We have delivered Training Sessions for up to 100 active migrant entrepreneurs and start-upper and for up to 100 business service providers. We have piloted the sessions of one-stop-shops — in each Taskforcome region, providing support to 1000 beneficiaries. We have delivered Training Sessions for up to 100 active migrant entrepreneurs and start-upper and for up to 100 business service providers.

We have piloted the sessions of one-stopshops — in each Taskforcome region, providing support to 1000 beneficiaries. As for policy design, 5 Local Action Plans have been designed and agreed with a total of 100 stakeholders in Taskforcome countries. We had also completed the investment in TASKFORCOME Community-based Social HUB (CSHUB) in Split, Croatia — the CSHUB in Split has been established and equipped. Additionally, all communication aims have been reached — the activities and the results of the project had been disseminated to a wide audience, according to the indicators described in the application. It is important to note that the Taskforcome consortium has been a sustainable partnership - a transnational network of community-based social hubs that will survive beyond the lifetime of the project and which has led to some permanent changes in the ecosystem serving migrant entrepreneurs. This project stands out for helping migrants but from the point of view of their own entrepreneurship.

€ Project budget
€ 2.7 M

★ EU funding
€ 2.3 M

🔍 Web link



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-B
Balkan-Mediterranean

€ Project budget
€ 0.50 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.43 M

🔍 Web link

Skills4MSEs

Building communities of knowledge for competitive MSEs

The Skills4MSEs project aims to **develop an integrated cross border learning structure for the provision of Business Development Services and other business support tools for existing and potential MSEs (micro and small enterprises)** in both electronic and physical form. The aim of the Skills4MSEs project is to reach a maximum territorial impact on competitiveness, through internal spill over and leverage effects on knowledge transfer.

The project outputs are tangible, visible and are also in accordance with the output indicators. According to the work packages and to project activities, the expected outputs include:

1. Progress reports from the project partners to the MA, verification of expenditure reports, 5 project meetings along with the reports and the published materials.
2. Promotional material such as brochures, electronic newsletters disseminated to target groups, press releases to the local and regional press, 1 website, 4 open events, 1 communication plan, 1 final conference, 1 press kit, banners.
3. Training needs analysis per country focused on the identification of the needs of the target group.
4. 1 joint e-learning database including all the educational material that will be uploaded to the platform and development of the on line courses, 1 joint e-learning platform that will be used by all partners, 1 training programme developed for migrants, 1 training programme developed for entrepreneurs that are either formally bankrupted or they face the danger of bankruptcy, series of training seminars-workshops for migrants and bankrupted entrepreneurs and social businesses, 1 assessment of the training, 1 assessment of the operation of the platform. The selection of the participants will follow open procedures respecting equal rights.

This project stands out for focusing on the needs of micro and small enterprises, and for aiming for a broad territorial impact through knowledge transfer.



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-B
Central Europe

€ Project budget
€ 2.2 M

★ EU funding
€ 1.8 M

🔍 [Web link](#)

SiforREF

Integrating Refugees in Society and Labour Market through Social Innovation

The challenge that SiforREF addresses is combating the risk of marginalization of refugees after the reception phases (which are different in the various central European Countries). **SiforREF's main objective is to enhance significantly and/or to launch (where not existing at all) refugee integration policies at regional and local level (in the 4 involved regions), particularly addressing refugees' transition from reception phases to autonomy.**

The change that SiforREF intends to produce is the following: we expect that refugee integration is included in the decisional agenda both at local and transnational level. Moreover, we expect that through this project policy-makers and stakeholders engage in virtuous governance in order that innovative and inclusive measures become mainstream. The main outputs of the projects are: tools for evaluating and designing social innovative practices and improving the social innovation capacity of policies; pilots of these tools (7) and a regional and transnational strategy. As for the approach, SiforREF is based on the idea that best practices related to a refugee's integration can be found both in countries more experienced in tackling refugees -or where policymakers explicitly put in their agenda refugees' mid- term integration- and in countries less experienced or where national governments are more hostile. The complexity of this issue requires mutual learning among central European regions, especially neighbourhood regions like those involved in the project.

SiforREF conveys innovation because it tackles an issue (refugee integration) which is poorly addressed by official policies, despite attached problems are evident, and because it aims not only at exchanging good practices, but intends to jointly design and implement methodologies for integrating refugees that draw from the social innovation approach.

IMPROVEMENT SKILLS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR (MANAGEMENT AND SERVICES)



2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-B
Northern Periphery
and Arctic

€ Project budget
€ 0.09 M

★ EU funding
€ 0.06 M

🔍 Web link

INNOCAP

Building public sector innovation capacity towards digital-driven NPA communities

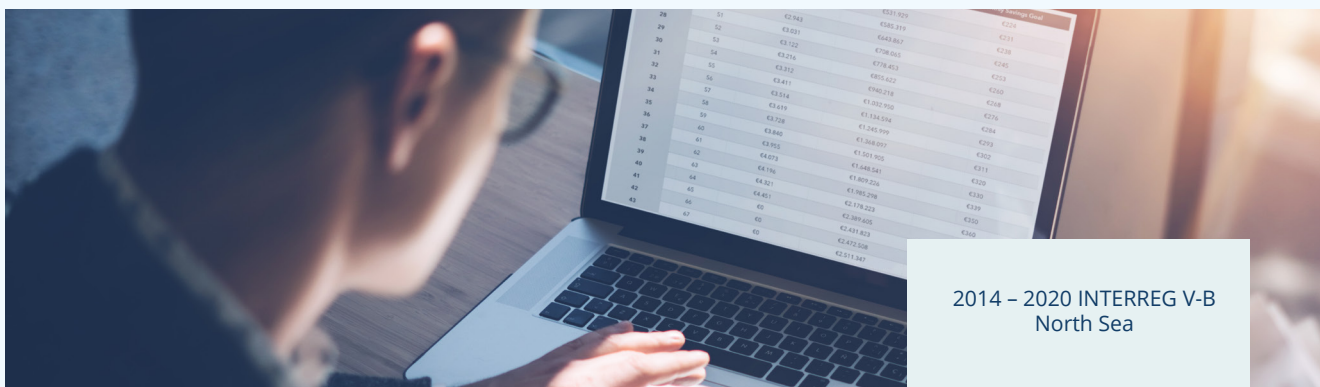
Public sector organisations in the NPA area acknowledge the importance of introducing new innovations to meet the increasing demand for quality and sustainable services addressing shared characteristics like long distances, limited resources and skills and low critical mass of consumers for successful market-led operations.

Work carried out in projects like DISTINCT shows that, when addressing these challenges, the main factor is not the availability of innovative services, products, or processes in the area, where SMEs, higher education institutions (HEIs) and research centres present a significant pool of expertise and enough potential to assist public sector in this task, but the lack of awareness by public sector organisations on these innovative solutions.

INNOCAP tackles the challenges and leverages the opportunities of the public sector from a new approach: it covers both the demand and the supply sides of public service provision and assesses not only its role as a provider but also as promoter and early-adopter of digital innovations available. Public service providers are turned into facilitators that co-create value and take advantage of the current supply capacity in the NPA area. In doing so, focus will be put on how to build the capacity of the public sector and prepare it to play this important role.

The main outcome of the project will be the Capacity Building Programme for Innovative Digital Public Services in the NPA regions, including the main aspects identified with key stakeholders from the public sector, SMEs and HEIs and using previous experience from partners.

The work will be utilised as a main project idea to run and test the effectiveness of the Capacity Building Programme in the coming NPA Programme 2021-2027. This project stands out for its focus on improving public services from a modern and innovative perspective.



2014 – 2020 INTERREG V-B
North Sea

- € Project budget
€ 4.2 M
- ★ EU funding
€ 2.1 M
- 🔍 [Web link](#)

Like!

Like! Building a Local Digital Innovation Culture

Like! Will significantly **enhance the capacity of the public sector to facilitate and deliver innovation and result in the development of a wide range of services with innovative solutions for improved public service delivery**. Local governments, citizens, universities, and SMEs will come together to co-create smarter, more efficient and more innovative services through 9 transnational pilots that cover 3 core themes.

1. Like! will create a Local Digital Innovation Culture across the NSR, giving authorities practitioners new skills and knowledge to deliver innovative services, to develop new ways to engage with communities, and to build more inclusive services.
2. These skills will be used by local and transnational innovation teams to deliver new and innovative Smart Services in the NSR that use information more efficiently, that communicate using appropriate channels and content, and which help governments move from delivering generic to truly local services that meet real community needs.
3. These Smart Services will underpin activities to create a Digital DNA for the City/Neighbourhood, where transnational digital dashboards will be developed by authorities to turn data into information that will be used by citizens, policy-makers, SMEs and researchers to understand how cities and neighbourhoods are working. This will be complemented by work on integrating information from IoT sensors and complement work to enable the use of local data and information for local services.

This project stands out for its focus on improving local public services from a modern and innovative perspective.



2014 – 2020 INTERREG V-A
Belgium – France
(France–Wallonie–Vlaanderen)

€ Project budget
€ 4.2 M

★ EU funding
€ 2.1 M

🔍 [Web link](#)

Agreen-job

The project aims to enable vulnerable and low-skilled jobseekers to enter the agricultural sector on both sides of the Franco-Belgian border.

To achieve this, the project partners will identify the needs of the farmers, the skills required for jobs in this sector and the methodologies for professional integration, specific to each side of the border.

An operational phase will then realise the objective of the project. Job seekers and farmers will be made aware, recruited, guided, and trained, from the monitoring of their career path to the signing of a sustainable contract.

To meet these challenges, the associated operators will pool their experience, but will also call on experts for some actions. These exchanges will result in more qualitative and efficient methodologies, with the aim of facilitating the return of low-skilled applicants to sustainable employment.

This project focuses on improving skills in a traditional sector such as agriculture in order to lead to improvements in efficiency and sustainability.

INTERREG CONTRIBUTION TO SKILLS

This section shows the extent to which Interreg projects have contributed to improving people's skills in the workplace. This overview is structured in key achievements, strengths, weaknesses, and challenges on skills for quality jobs.

Achievements	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large number of projects • Thematic variety • Broad target audience • Broad view of the skills concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low presence of digitalisation skills projects • Few life-long learning projects • Imbalance between economic actors and social actors
Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide territorial coverage • Projects close to the needs of the territory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing projects focused on reskilling

ACHIEVEMENTS

Large number of projects

With more than 1,100 projects developed in the period 2021-2020, Interreg can boast of having done a great deal of work in the field of improving job skills. Moreover, this effort has been carried out from different perspectives: thematic, geographic, conceptual, etc., which has made it possible to benefit broad and diverse groups.

Thematic variety

One of the most outstanding achievements is the fact that skills have been approached from different thematic perspectives. As seen in the previous chapter, most of the projects have concentrated on 10 main themes, which already have very different characteristics. However, projects have also been developed through some thirty other themes, as diverse as: tourism, multimodal transport, water management, etc. This diversity has allowed the upskilling process to be carried

out on many occasions in an indirect or unconscious way, without the need to do it through courses, but through other methodologies.

Broad target audience

Beyond students and young people taking their first steps in the labour market, Interreg projects have also focused on other groups: migrants, refugees, and people who, for various reasons, find it more difficult to access the labour market. This has helped to avoid the marginalisation of some groups and to work on the idea of leaving no one behind.

Broad vision of the skills concept

Many of the projects that have worked on skills have done so from a broad perspective, which goes beyond knowing how to use a specific technique or instrument, but has done so by empowering the person to perform better in the workplace, on many occasions with skills for entrepreneurship, on others with specific knowledge of a specific economic sector, on others with improvement in the field of management and administration of public services, etc.

STRENGTHS

Wide territorial coverage

As seen in the previous geographical analysis, one of the great strengths of Interreg has been the wide deployment of projects throughout the European area. In addition, it should be borne in mind that, as these are regional cooperation projects, they contribute to strengthening territorial integration, as opposed to other types of projects that are approached from a more local perspective.

Projects close to the needs of the territory

One consequence of the aforementioned territorial scope is that the projects are most often based on the needs that exist in each territory and, therefore, respond better to the reality of each territory, and also do so in a cooperative manner between border regions, solving problems that are sometimes common to both sides and that would be more difficult to solve from a single region.

WEAKNESSES

Low presence of digitalisation projects

Being a fundamental concept in European strategies, it is striking that the presence of digitalisation projects is very low. It is true that the projects where the concept of technology is present is very high, as we have seen in the previous chapter, however, more emphasis should be put on projects where the central element is to acquire skills in the field of digitalisation of many tasks in the labour market. This will be key to maintaining people's employability in the coming years.

Few life-long learning projects

The concept of lifelong learning should also be more present in the projects. The current characteristics of the labour market (new technologies, new jobs, etc.) force people to be continuously trained. Obviously, this will mean that the target group of the projects will be widened to include older people and not only focus on young people. But it will be necessary if we want to maintain the employability of citizens and the competitiveness of our economy.

Imbalance between the presence of economic actors (employers) and social actors (trade unions, associations)

In general, there is a greater presence of the business vision from the point of view of the skills needs demanded than from the social point of view. It would be desirable to balance this point of view in order to reinforce also the social aspects of the working environment.

CHALLENGES

Enhancing projects focused on reskilling

The labour market will undergo important changes in the coming years due to technological changes, environmental sustainability, energy efficiency, innovation, etc. These changes will lead to changes in current jobs (by adding and modifying existing tasks which may be substituted or complemented by technology) and generate new jobs. In this context the concept of reskilling will be crucial to keep the workforce employable and up to date regarding the new and constant technological challenges they are facing. In many cases, it will not be sufficient to upgrade and acquire skills within the current job environment, but it will be necessary to acquire entirely new skills for entirely new tasks and jobs (transversal and social skills will be more valuable to complement digital skills and tasks which will be more automated by algorithms and AI). Facilitating the transition to these new jobs and tasks is one of the biggest challenges facing our society in the coming years.

SYNERGIES WITH OTHER FUNDS

Synergies opportunities with other skills related to EU instruments and funds: benchmark between Interreg and other EU instruments financing skills for a quality job

The importance of upskilling and reskilling is emphasized in several major EU policy instruments, including the European Skills Agenda and European Pillar of Social Rights, and its Action Plan), along with various EU-funded programmes.

Promoting skill acquisition for high-quality employment and assisting companies in addressing skill shortages are objectives advocated at the EU level through a range of funding initiatives. This section presents a comparative analysis between Interreg and other EU-funded programmes such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe, and Erasmus+. It examines the distinctive characteristics and goals of projects funded by these programmes, the allocated budget, and the beneficiaries involved to comprehend how EU-level initiatives target skills in relation to jobs.

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS (ESF+) AND POTENTIAL FOR SYNERGIES

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the European Union (EU)'s main instrument for investing in people and supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. With a budget of almost EUR 99.3 billion for the period 2021-2027, the ESF+ will continue to provide an important contribution to the EU's employment, social, education and skills policies, including structural reforms in these areas.

The ESF+ will be one of the key EU instruments helping Member States to address these challenges. As part of a cohesion policy, the ESF+ will also continue its mission to support economic, territorial, and social cohesion in the EU – reducing disparities between Member States and regions.

The ESF+ brings together four funding instruments that were separate in the programming period 2014-20: the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI).

Support under the ESF+ is mainly managed by Member States, with the Commission playing a supervisory role. Funding, therefore, takes place through:

- The shared management strand - implemented by Member States in partnership with the Commission. These resources have a budget of roughly 98.5 billion EUR for the programming period of 2021-27
- The Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) Strand - implemented by the Commission with a budget of close to 762 million EUR for 2021-2027.

The EaSI strand builds on the former EaSI Programme 2014-2020, maintaining the focus on evidence-based policy-making and social experimentation, support to job mobility and non-financial instrument activities related to the former Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis. As part of ESF+ it follows the same policy objectives as ESF+ and is centered on the following main policy priorities: 1) employment and skills; 2) labour markets and labour mobility; 3) social protection and active inclusion and 4) working conditions.

Potential for synergies

ESF+ presents a high potential for synergies because of complementarities in the areas of the promotion of upskilling, reskilling, and lifelong learning. These topics are shared between ESF+ and specific areas that are covered by Interreg programmes. For the financing period of 2021-2027, ESF+ offers funding for transnational cooperation focused, among others, on education. Among ESF+'s specific objectives related to education we find the following:

- Contributing to improving education and training systems at all levels, including through the modernisation of education and vocational education and training systems;
- Fostering equal access to quality education and training, while promoting equal access to good quality and inclusive education and training for all;
- Anticipating new skills requirements based on labour market needs;
- Promoting upskilling, reskilling, and skills anticipation by enhancing access to lifelong learning, career transitions and mobility.

With its notable focus on education, training, social innovation, and inclusion, the ESF+ holds significant potential in contributing to the goals outlined in the Pact for Skills. It serves as a valuable instrument for investing in skills development and promoting resilience and cooperation. Within Interreg, one of the social sub-topics is education and lifelong learning, which aims to enhance access to inclusive and high-quality education, training, and lifelong learning services. This objective is pursued through the development of accessible infrastructure, including measures to foster resilience in distance and online education and training.

The ESF+ places its emphasis on fostering employability and inclusion by means of training and education initiatives, whereas Interreg strives to enhance cross-border cooperation and advance regional development. Through collaborative efforts, these programs have the potential to facilitate the exchange of best practices and knowledge, enhance skills alignment in the labour market, and offer cross-border training opportunities, among various other initiatives. By leveraging the strengths of both programs, synergies can be harnessed to maximize their impact and promote mutual benefits in terms of skill development, regional growth, and cooperation.

There is therefore a high degree of synergy between ESF+ and Interreg, especially with Easi programme as its objectives are more focused on employment and skills. As has been seen, Interreg also develops many projects to leave no one behind from different perspectives. Therefore, greater synergy between the two programmes would be desirable for greater effectiveness in the pursuit of shared objectives.

THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE FACILITY (RRF) AND POTENTIAL FOR SYNERGIES

The adoption of NextGenerationEU took place in 2021 and responds to the need to support the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and boost resilience for the future of the EU, its Member States, and its citizens. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is a temporary instrument that is the centrepiece of NextGenerationEU with €723.8 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by EU countries. The RRF aims to mitigate the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to make the European economy and society more resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transition.

One of its six policy pillars is precisely adult learning and skills. Skills are one of the foundations of the European economy and society by preparing people to seize opportunities and drive transformations, notably in relation to the green and digital transitions. Despite its central role in addressing prevalent skills shortages and mismatches, adult learning participation is still not widespread across EU Member States. At the same time, demographic change is reducing the available labour force and requires Europe to fully take advantage of all its talents and diversity. The NextGenerationEU supports a wide range of investments and reforms in the area of adult learning and skills development. These include, for instance, national skills strategies, reforms to improve skills intelligence and governance, including recognition and validation of skills, as well as targeted investments in up-skilling and re-skilling for employees, the unemployed and the broader population.

The NextGenerationEU can support Member States' reforms and investments, including in the area of skills and jobs.

Potential for synergies

Regarding the Pact for Skills, funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) can be allocated to strengthen education and skills development, in conjunction with active labour market policy measures. The approved Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) include provisions for measures related to adult education, including continuing vocational education and training (VET), as well as the recognition and validation of skills. Additionally, the RRFs emphasize the importance of human capital in digitalization, youth employment support, and support for both youth and non-youth employment.

The NextGenerationEU represents a significant opportunity for Member States to make substantial investments and implement reforms in education, with the potential to yield medium to long-term impacts. Member States have chosen to

utilize the RRF primarily to enhance the resilience of their education systems, with a particular emphasis on digital education. Some Member States will also utilize the Facility to implement targeted measures aimed at mitigating the learning loss resulting from the pandemic. These investments and reforms encompass all levels of education and training, with variations tailored to each country's specific priorities and challenges.

Furthermore, skills development as enabler for the digital transformation is acknowledged throughout RRFs. Plans include a wide range of actions whose objectives align with the EU agenda on digital skills. These include comprehensive digital skills strategies; actions to close the shortage of ICT specialists and to endow a broader population and workforce with digital skills; support to cyber skills; digitalization of educational institutions and content; and targeted support to vulnerable groups. Many plans include measures to increase the digital skill levels in the general population and in the workforce, mainly by providing digital up- and re-skilling opportunities for the employed, unemployed, or specifically targeting SMEs. Support takes different forms, including through the development of new trainings, through voucher systems to beneficiaries, by expanding online course offer, or through digital skills training for conscripts.

Reforms of active labour market policy, such as retaining the right to unemployment benefits during the participation in trainings, are also planned and will further foster upskilling. A number of plans also include other support systems, such as mapping of skills demanded by the labour market or individual learning accounts.

Employment and active labour market policies are a key aspect of the recovery and resilience plans for most Member States. These investments often accompany reforms to increase the functioning and inclusiveness of the national labour markets. The implementation of specific employment measures is complemented by investments and reforms (such as in the areas of education, training, innovation and competitiveness) to support a fully functioning and inclusive labour market.

Active participation of regional and local authorities is essential for the successful implementation of EU instruments and the realization of tangible projects that can leverage the available funds. The precise mechanisms to uphold this fundamental subsidiarity principle may differ among EU member countries. Central governments hold a vested interest in actively collaborating with project promoters, as well as regional and local authorities, and in acquiring comprehensive information regarding potential financing opportunities in a timely manner. Given the constrained timeframe of the RRF, with funds needing to be committed by the end of 2023 and expenditures completed by the end of 2026, swift action is of paramount importance.

In this context, Interreg Europe projects can serve as a valuable source of inspiration for defining regional priorities to access the RRF. These projects also play a catalytic role in bringing together local stakeholders, enabling them to collaboratively design project proposals for the recovery process. By leveraging the experience and networks established through Interreg Europe, regional and local authorities can enhance their capacity to identify and develop initiatives that align with the goals and funding requirements of the RRF.

THE DIGITAL EUROPE PROGRAMME (DIGITAL) AND POTENTIAL FOR SYNERGIES

The Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL) is a new EU funding programme focused on bringing digital technology to businesses, citizens, and public administrations. It is the main instrument to support digitalization in Europe for the programming period of 2021-2027 by investing a budget of €7.5 billion over seven years. The Programme supports five priority areas such as: high performance computing; artificial intelligence; cybersecurity; development of digital capacities and interoperability; advanced digital skills. With a planned overall budget of €7.5 billion, it aims to accelerate the economic recovery and shape the digital transformation of Europe's society and economy, bringing benefits to everyone, but in particular to small and medium-sized enterprises.

The EU's goals in the area of digital transformation are defined in the communication: "2030 Digital Compass: The European way for the Digital Decade"³ and "Path to the Digital Decade"⁴ policy programme that sets up a governance framework and lists digital targets for 2030 based on four cardinal points: digital skills, digital infrastructures, digitalisation of businesses and of public services. The EU is engaged on the pathway towards digital economies and societies with the twin (green and digital) transition accelerating the shift towards digitalisation and the use of digital tools for work and life purposes.

The Digital Europe Programme will not address these challenges in isolation, but rather complement the funding available through other EU programmes, such as the Horizon Europe programme for research and innovation and the Connecting Europe Facility for digital infrastructure, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Structural funds, to name a few.

The actions supported by the Programme are complementary to those supported by the ESF+, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Erasmus+. Those actions will target the Union workforce in the private sector as well as the public sector, in particular ICT professionals and other related professionals, as well as students, trainees, and trainers.

Potential for synergies

The Digital Europe Programme will reinforce EU's critical digital capacities by focusing on the key areas of artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, advanced computing, data infrastructure, governance and processing, the deployment of these technologies and their best use for critical sectors like energy, climate change and environment, manufacturing, agriculture, and health. The Digital Europe Programme also targets upskilling and reskilling to provide a workforce for these advanced digital technologies. It supports industry, SMEs, and public administration in their digital transformation with a reinforced network of European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH).

With regards to the upskilling and reskilling goals and with skills in general, in the Digital Europe Programme they are centred in acquiring advanced digital skills, which may be targeted to very specific individuals which already have other advanced or intermediate skills demanded in the labour market. They may not be

the main goal of Interreg's skills upskilling and reskilling objectives, but there is room for synergies between them in the area of advanced digital skills, especially to tackle the problem of digital gaps between regions and countries.

The development of the digital economy and society is uneven across EU Member States. Rural and peripheral regions are vulnerable in the shift towards the digital economy and innovation in the EU remains highly concentrated in a limited number of regions. It is, therefore, necessary to develop policies that support technological and non-technological innovation in less developed regions and regions with low diversification and that connect businesses, research centres and specialised services to businesses in different regions.

While knowledge economies drive economic development, they can also contribute to widening the development gap between regions. Regions vary in terms of their knowledge and innovation activities, resulting in different capacities for innovation and varying levels of sophistication in innovation processes. Territorial innovation patterns can be reinforced by acquiring knowledge from external sources.

The increasing adoption of 4.0 technologies, based on cyber-physical systems and the Internet of Things (IoT), has the potential to create "islands of innovation" even in less advanced regions. However, there is a need to prioritize the acquisition of digital skills to avoid excluding certain groups, such as the elderly, who may not be well-prepared for this rapid transformation. In this context, Interregional cooperation plays a crucial role in building a smarter Europe. It enables European regions to enhance their innovation and research and development (R&D) policies and programs, particularly their smart specialization strategies.

Through the exchange of experiences and policy learning, regions can expedite and enhance the implementation of their regional development policies in key areas. These include skills development for smart specialization and entrepreneurship, digitalization of the economy and society, digital connectivity, adoption of advanced technologies, innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and non-technological innovations (such as organizational and social innovations). Interregional cooperation contributes to creating a more innovative and digitally-driven Europe by facilitating the improvement and acceleration of regional development policies in these critical domains.

HORIZON EUROPE (HE) AND POTENTIAL FOR SYNERGIES

Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation with a budget of €95.5 billion. It aims to raise EU science spending levels by 50% over the years 2021-2027. It has a more technical and empirical approach compared to other EU funds financing training and skills. Horizon Europe tackles climate change; helps to achieve the UNS's Sustainable Development Goals; boosts the EU's competitiveness and growth; facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies while tackling global challenges; supports the creation and better diffusion of excellent knowledge and technologies; and creates jobs, fully engages the EU's

talent pool, boosts economic growth, promotes industrial competitiveness and optimizes investment impact within a strengthened European Research Area .

Horizon Europe underpins skills for researchers, entrepreneurs, and innovators notably through its Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, the European Innovation Council and the European Institute for Technology.

As part of its Pillar I “Excellent Science”, Horizon Europe aims at reinforcing and extending the excellence of the Union’s science base through the European Research Council reinforcing frontier research by the best researchers and teams with a competitive funding to support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields on the basis of scientific excellence (€16 billion), the Skłodowska-Curie Actions equipping researchers with new knowledge and skills through mobility and training (€6.6 billion), and Research Infrastructures through integrated and interconnected world-class research infrastructures (€2.4 billion).

Potential for synergies

Horizon Europe has a medium-high potential for synergies with Interreg. On research and innovation, complementarities with some Horizon Europe actions can be established. Interreg Europe operations can support in the policy learning process leading to improved skills for: smart specialisation and entrepreneurship, the digitalisation of the economy and society and the uptake of advanced technologies. Knowledge on mature R&I results from H2020 and Horizon Europe can be shared within Interreg Europe to contribute to policy making and to be further capitalised within the regions, in line with the Horizon Europe Dissemination & Exploitation Strategy and the exploitation of R&I knowledge. In addition, policy changes emerging from Interreg Europe could be linked with the Feedback to Policy Framework of Horizon Europe. In that sense, the technical and research-oriented outputs by HE can be implemented by Interreg projects to address specific regional needs related to reskilling, upskilling, and training.

The European Commission has published a practical guidance on new opportunities to maximise the synergies between Horizon Europe and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programmes. The aim is to reinforce the impact of both policies by creating complementarities, especially in less developed and peripheral regions.

ERASMUS+ AND POTENTIAL FOR SYNERGIES

Erasmus+ is the EU’s programme to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. It has an estimated budget of €26.2 billion. This is nearly double the funding compared to its predecessor programme (2014-2020). The 2021-2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people’s participation in democratic life.

It supports priorities and activities set out in the European Education Area, Digital Education Action Plan, and the European Skills Agenda. The programme also

- supports the European Pillar of Social Rights
- implements the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027
- develops the European dimension in sport

Potential for synergies

Given Erasmus+'s focus on education and training, as well as innovation and skills, funding, particularly under Key Actions 1 and 2 can be relevant for Pact members and their ongoing work to promote upskilling and reskilling.

Erasmus+ has a high potential for synergies with Interreg, particularly for initiatives dealing with education and skills development. In this sense, it is similar to ESF+ and it has a potential for synergies with Interreg due to their complementary nature. Erasmus+ aims to strengthen the regions by providing young people with education and training opportunities, while Interreg aims to promote territorial cohesion through cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. By working together, these programmes can create more opportunities for cross-border education, research, and innovation. For example, the Interreg programme can provide funding for cross-border research project, while Erasmus+ can provide funding for student and staff exchanges between universities in different European regions. This can improve the quality and impact of investment in research and innovation. However, there is a need to improve communication between departments in higher education institutes to enhance the effectiveness of the EU programmes.

POTENTIAL FOR SYNERGIES SUMMARY

Drawing from the examination of the primary EU tools focused on skills, training, upskilling, and reskilling, the subsequent chart outlines a summary of the key attributes of these tools. Its purpose is to detect possible synergies among EU instruments and refine the specific role of Interreg.

Synergies between Interreg and other funds

Programme	EU Fund	Budget	Territorial Framework	Beneficiaries	Main themes	Potential for synergies with Interreg
Interreg	European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€10.2 billion	Across regions	Public authorities (municipalities, provinces and regions), universities, research institutions, NGOs, business associations, and other specific relevant actors in the territory	Territorial cooperation across the EU	—
European Social Fund (ESF+)	European Social Fund Plus	€99.3 billion	Within one country and/or region	Public Institutions Regional and Local Authorities Training and Education Institutions Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Social Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Education • Skills 	High
The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)	Recovery and Resilience Facility (temporary instrument as centrepiece of NextGenerationEU)	€723.8 billion	Within one country and/or region. Multilevel governance arrangements for the participation of cities and subnational governments.	Governments, to support investments and reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green transition • Digital transformation • Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth • Social and territorial cohesion • Heal, and economic, social and institutional resilience • Policies for the next generation 	High
Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)	Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)	€7.5 billion	EU, national, regional and local	Member States Public Sector Organizations Research and Academic Institutions Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) Industry and Private Sector Non-profit Organizations and Civil Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supercomputing • Artificial intelligence • Cybersecurity • Advanced digital skills • Ensuring the wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society 	Medium
Horizon Europe Programme	Horizon Europe	€95.5 billion	EU, national, regional and local	Research organizations and universities Businesses and industries Public bodies Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Civil society organizations International organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change • UN's Sustainable Development Goals • EU competitiveness and growth • Strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies • Creation and better diffusion of excellent knowledge and technologies • Strengthens the European Research Area 	Medium / High
Erasmus+	Erasmus+	€26.2 billion	Across countries	Students Staff and Faculty Vocational Education and Training (VET) Learners Youth Workers and Youth Organizations School Education Staff Adult Learners Higher Education Institutions Organizations in the Field of Sport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Youth • Sport 	High

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERREG PROGRAMMES

This last chapter lists a set of recommendations to Interreg programmes to better support quality jobs through improving people for 2021-2027.



Exploiting synergies with other European funds

We have seen that there are important synergies with other funds; it would be interesting to take advantage of these coincidences through greater collaboration to improve results and increase the impact on the territory.

Smaller projects

The development of smaller projects can be a good measure that allows a quicker reaction to unforeseen situations, as has occurred during the previous period. It also facilitates the participation of actors with less structure, but who are sometimes closer to the social reality of the territories.

More digitalisation projects

We have seen that among the weaknesses detected is the low presence of projects in this field, with the aggravating factor that it is a top European priority. Emphasize the development of digital skills, including coding, data analysis, cybersecurity, and digital marketing. Support initiatives that promote digital inclusion and bridge the digital divide, particularly in disadvantaged regions.

Projects aimed at environmental sustainability

Another recommendation is to maintain or increase efforts in projects focusing on climate change and environmental sustainability. Issues such as circular economy, energy efficiency, reduction of fossil fuels, the water quality of rivers and oceans, etc. are factors that should be present in all projects either directly or implicitly.

Boosting reskilling-oriented projects

In the coming years, it will be necessary to put more emphasis on reskilling in order to adapt to the new working environment (new jobs and the disappearance of others, new technologies, etc.). It is therefore recommended to:

- Facilitate transitions from declining industries to growing sectors by providing career guidance, tailored reskilling programs, and support for entrepreneurship and self-employment.
- Encourage collaboration among training providers, employers, and industry stakeholders to develop demand-driven reskilling programs that align with job market needs, improving employability and job prospects.
- Invest in accessible and high-quality Vocational Education and Training (VET) for effective reskilling. Align curricula with industry needs, promote transferable skills, and provide work-based learning for practical skill acquisition.

Promote life-long learning projects

We have seen that one of the challenges of the labour market is its rapid evolution, which is why it is more necessary than ever for citizens to continue training and acquiring skills on an ongoing basis. A culture of continuous learning by supporting initiatives such as vocational training, apprenticeships, and upskilling programs. Provide opportunities for reskilling and career transitions, particularly for those affected by economic shifts or technological advancements.

Anticipate future skills needs

Identify emerging trends and technologies that will shape the labour market and anticipate the skills required to meet those needs. This can include investing in sectors with growth potential, such as renewable energy, digital technologies, and advanced manufacturing.

Projects aimed not only at young people

Implicit in the above recommendations (reskilling, life-long learning, future skills) is the need to target an adult audience, and not only to focus on improving the skills of young people. Changes in the labour market will force all people, regardless of age, to acquire new skills throughout their lives, therefore it is necessary for Interreg projects to extend their target audience also to people of all ages.

Address regional disparities

Focus on reducing regional inequalities by targeting areas with high unemployment rates or limited access to quality jobs. Tailor skills development programs to the specific needs and potential of each region, taking into account local industries, market demands, and available resources.

Support social inclusion and diversity

Ensure that skills development initiatives are inclusive and accessible to all individuals, regardless of their background, gender, age, or socioeconomic status. Promote diversity in the workplace and address barriers to employment faced by underrepresented groups.

Other transversal policy recommendations

- Monitor and evaluate the impact, efficiency, coherence, and value added of the policies, initiatives, and programmes, and use this information to inform future policy development.
- Identify priority target groups for programs and initiatives, including the long-term unemployed, older workers, people with disabilities, and individuals with migrant backgrounds. Address challenges in reaching these groups, such as lack of awareness, financial barriers, stigma, and low motivation.
- Promote active labor market policies for employability and quality job placement, including career guidance, job-search assistance, and support for disadvantaged groups.
- Support local and regional initiatives addressing skill needs and labor market challenges through partnerships, tailored training programs, job matching, and regional economic development.
- Strengthen international cooperation and exchange best practices to enhance skills development and improve labour market outcomes.
- Enhance labour market data collection and analysis to provide accurate information for evidence-based decision-making, anticipating future skills needs, and designing targeted policies and interventions.

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