

The EU Pact for Skills – Regional Skills Partnerships for Bari city & metropolitan area

The economic landscape of Bari City & Metropolitan (Provincial) Area

The Bari Metropolitan Area, located in the Italian region of Puglia – capital of Puglia region, enjoys a diversified economy combining traditional sectors with emerging industries and as an aggregate ecosystem, with more than 110,000 enterprises of which more than 95% are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Its metropolitan area includes 3 universities, the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute, 11 National Research Centers, 1 Academy of Fine Arts, 1 Conservatory of Music, 10 production districts and is the second largest industrial area in the Adriatic region. The labor market in the Bari Metropolitan Area (with over 416,000 employees) reflects economic diversification, with a variety of sectors offering employment opportunities. However, it is important to note that the labor market in the province can be influenced by seasonal, cyclical and broader economic factors. The quality of job opportunities, remuneration levels, and contract conditions may vary depending on the sector and the skills required. In addition, training and further education (upskilling and reskilling) can play an important role in ensuring competitiveness in the local labor market. In fact, the Area's labor market can also be influenced by the skills and vocational training of the local workforce. The availability of skilled workers can influence the distribution of job opportunities and wage levels. The following is an overview of the main elements of Bari economic landscape:

- **Agriculture:** the Bari Metropolitan Area is renowned for the production of olive oil, table grapes, almonds, vegetables and wheat. Agriculture remains an important economic pillar, with an increasing focus on sustainability and organic production. Agriculture is a significant part of the local economy and contributes to the creation of both direct and indirect jobs (about 24,000 employees).
- **Food industry:** the food industry is a key sector in the region's economy. Bari is home to numerous companies that produce olive oil, pasta, canned tomatoes, dairy products and wine. These industries not only provide local employment but also export their products all over the world.
- **Tourism:** the Bari Metropolitan Area is a major tourist destination, with attractions including the historic towns of Bari, Polignano a Mare, Monopoli and Alberobello, famous for its trulli (UNESCO heritage). Beaches, archaeological sites and culinary traditions help make the province a popular tourist destination, generating revenue through hospitality, tourist services and cultural activities. Tourism contributes significantly to the local economy through hospitality, tourist services and cultural activities.
- **Trade, construction and services:** the Area is home to a variety of commercial activities, including retail stores, large retailers, restaurants, bars and hotels. In addition, construction, ICT, financial, legal and administrative services play a crucial role in supporting the Area's economic activity with more than 333,000 employees.
- **Manufacturing Industry:** although not as developed as in other Italian

regions, the manufacturing industry has a significant presence in the Bari Metropolitan Area. Sectors such as machinery manufacturing, chemical industry and metal processing contribute to economic diversification and job creation (about 59,000 employees).

- **Technology and innovation:** there is a growing interest in the development of technology and innovation sectors in the region, with the aim of stimulating economic growth through innovation. Technology clusters are being developed and start-ups and high value-added enterprises are being encouraged in ICT, renewable energy and biotechnology.

In general, the Bari Metropolitan Area shows a combination of tradition and modernity in its economic landscape, with a strong emphasis on agriculture, the food industry, tourism, and a growing focus on high-tech and innovation sectors.

The challenge

The economic system of the Bari Metropolitan Area is facing major challenges such as globalization, climate change, urbanization, changing consumer demand, generational renewal and strong competition from non-EU countries. The profound change in the global economic scenario has necessitated the use of a range of tools that can address the current challenges. Society and the labor market in the metropolitan context continue to be marked by major gaps. The first is undoubtedly that between generations: in the Bari Metropolitan Area, the youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) is around 34.5 percent, significantly higher than the European average of 16.1 percent (Eurostat data 2021). In addition, the percentage of NEETs (young people not employed and not in education or training) in the 15-29 age group reaches 23.8 percent, compared to an EU average of 13.1 percent (ISTAT data 2021). A further gap, which should not be overlooked, is the gender gap, which is deeply connected to LGBTQIA+ issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity. The female employment rate in the Bari Metropolitan Area stands at around 46.2 percent, well below the European average of 67.3 percent (Eurostat data 2021). This gap is also reflected in wages: women earn on average 16.5 percent less than men for the same work (regional data, ISTAT 2020). Regarding LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the world of work, although there is a lack of specific data for the Bari Metropolitan Area, nationally 40% of LGBTQIA+ people say they have experienced discrimination in the workplace (Arcigay, 2022). In addition, 23 percent of transgender people in Italy report losing their jobs because of their gender identity (Transgender Europe, 2021). Women and girls, still far from achieving adequate conditions of empowerment, are unfortunately often limitedly included in the dynamics of the world of work and in decision-making, inclusion and participation processes. For example, only 28.3 percent of managerial positions in companies in the Bari Metropolitan Area are held by women (Bari Chamber of Commerce, 2022), and women's

representation in the area's municipal councils stops at 32.5 percent (Ministry of the Interior data, 2022). Reducing these gaps means ensuring opportunities for the development and capacitation not only of the young people and women themselves, but also of the entire community of reference, ensuring that the latter becomes increasingly able to enhance and systematize the skills and talents it has. Studies show that closing the gender gap in the labor market could increase the Bari Metropolitan Area's GDP by 7.5 percent by 2030 (estimate based on McKinsey Global Institute projections, 2022).

For this reason, the Metropolitan City of Bari has drafted a Metropolitan Strategic Plan (MSP), intended as a tool and permanent laboratory committed to the elaboration of new visions of the future synchronized with the great challenges of the future. The MSP aims, now, to build strategies based on systemic measures of long conceptual reach, capable of responding to the pandemic crisis that by drawing inspiration from the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the EU NEXTGENERATION, to trigger the restart and support the recovery until at least 2030. The MSP, consistent with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, identifies 3 Transversal Priorities, i.e., key challenges related to the development of the Strategic Plan and the achievement of metropolitan government goals and are identified as follows:

- Enhancement of training offerings, with a focus on digital and STEM skills, to align young people's skills with labour market needs.
- Implementation of active labour policies aimed at reducing the youth unemployment rate (34.5 percent) and NEET rate (23.8 percent), which are significantly higher than the European average.
- Creation of vocational training and apprenticeship programmes to facilitate young people's entry into the world of work.

These interventions, aligned with the missions of the NRP, aim to create a more sustainable, inclusive and competitive metropolitan ecosystem. The goal is to address the challenges related to youth unemployment, ecological transition and the enhancement of human and cultural capital, positioning the Bari Metropolitan Area as a center of innovation and sustainable development in Southern Italy.

The ambition

The partnership, through the following plan, sets ambitious and measurable goals to address challenges related to youth employment, training and skills development in the Bari Metropolitan Area. The RDP aims to create a cutting-edge educational ecosystem by actively involving educational institutions, businesses and local authorities. The goal is to achieve partnership coverage of 15 organizations involved in the partnership and its steering committee by 2027. This will be achieved gradually, with an intermediate target of 10 members by 2025,

Power-up skills: developing Europe's workforce 4

and then 15 by 2026. The gradual expansion of the partnership will ensure a diverse and comprehensive representation of area stakeholders. To promote and disseminate the partnership's initiatives, 12 communication events are planned by 2027. These will be evenly distributed over time, with 6 events planned by 2025 and another 6 by 2027. These events will be key to raising awareness of the partnership initiatives, sharing best practices, and fostering networking among participants. A key element of the plan is the skills needs analysis. The partnership is committed to producing 10 skills needs assessments at the Area and/or sector level by 2027, with the goal of completing all 10 analyses by 2026. These analyses will continuously align training provision with local labour market needs, ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of training interventions. To concretely address the identified needs, the plan calls for 25 upskilling and reskilling actions led by partnership stakeholders by 2027. These actions will be distributed over time, with 13 actions planned by 2025 and the remaining 12 between 2026 and 2027. The goal is to improve the skills of the local workforce, with a focus on digital and green skills, to meet the challenges of the green and digital transition. The plan has an ambitious goal of engaging 150 participants in training actions by 2027. This will be achieved in two phases, with 75 participants planned between 2025 and 2026, and another 75 between 2026 and 2027. The partnership is committed to ensuring balanced participation in terms of training levels, gender, age, and geographic origin, with inclusion and access to education as key elements. Finally, the plan calls for the development of 2 new digital and environmental skills training models and tools by 2027. Specifically, it aims to create and test 1 new model and tool for digital skills by 2025, followed by 1 new model and tool for environmental skills by 2026. These new approaches, including pilot initiatives, will be created and tested by partnership stakeholders to innovate educational offerings and respond to future labour market challenges. Through the achievement of these goals, the Bari Metropolitan Area Skills Pact aspires to become a laboratory for social and labour innovation, capable of attracting talent and investment. The ambition is to position the Bari Metropolitan Area as a centre of excellence for sustainable and inclusive development, not only in the context of Southern Italy, but also in the broader national and European landscape. The plan aims to transform current challenges into opportunities for growth and development for the entire metropolitan community, promoting social equity, supporting the green and digital transition, and significantly improving the employability and skills of the local population. The structure of the plan, which includes partnership coverage, dissemination events, needs analysis, training actions, participation, and development of new training models, offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges related to employment and skills development in the region.

The partnership is committed to strengthening links between the RSP and local stakeholders to develop tailored training programs. Joint strategies will be defined to increase competitiveness and job retention. Skills surveys will identify gaps

between labour supply and demand by analysing current skills and business needs. Training catalogues will be updated to respond to emerging skills to offer continuing education interventions, including soft skills development, in line with the MSP. The skills certification and learning validation system will be enhanced. In addition, mentoring and communication campaigns will support women and fragile individuals in green entrepreneurship and promote planned activities through networks and events in line with PORTA FUTURO's mission.

For financial support, the Pact will draw not only on the resources of the Erasmus+ Programme, but also on national, public and private resources (e.g., New Skills Fund, Interprofessional Funds, Digital Republic Fund, Funds of other national and regional private Foundations that finance training or employment support activities) and regional resources (e.g., Regional Youth Guarantee Program, Regional Workers' Employability Guarantee Program/National Recovery and Resilience Plan, ESF+ 2021-2027); will also benefit from the support services provided by the European Commission and regional/metropolitan/local funds related to the EU 2021-2027 programming period, in collaboration with Local Authorities such as the Apulia Region and the Municipality of Bari/Metropolitan Area of Bari. The goal is to use the social dialogue framework to develop and implement the strategy at all levels, together with reaching out to all stakeholders in the area's economic ecosystem and in close relation and synergy with the mission and activities already managed by the partnership within the public employment center PORTA FUTURO. The RSP includes actions, accompanied by KPIs to assess and tracking their impact.

Tracking your impact

<i>KPI</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Timeframe for achievement</i>	<i>Key Milestones</i>
<i>Partnership coverage: number of organizations involved in the partnership and its steering committee.</i>	15	By 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 members by 2025 - 15 members by 2026
<i>Communication/dissemination events: number of promotion and dissemination events.</i>	12	By 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 events by 2025 - 6 events by 2027
<i>Skills needs analysis: number of skills needs assessments produced at the Area and/or sector level by RSP stakeholders.</i>	10	By 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 analyses by 2026

<i>Upskilling and reskilling actions conducted by partnership stakeholders.</i>	25	By 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 actions by 2025 - 12 actions by 2026 - 2027
<i>No. participants in education and training actions (considering levels of training, gender, age, geographic balance, with inclusion and access to education as key elements).</i>	150	By 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 75 participants by 2025 - 2026 - 75 participants by 2026 - 2027
<i>New training models and tools, including pilot initiatives created and tested by partnership stakeholders: number of new partnership training models and tools for digital and environmental skills.</i>	2	By 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 new training model and tool for digital skills by 2025 - 1 new training model and tool for environment skills by 2026

Partnership arrangements

The RSP partnership consists of the following public and private organizations:

Municipality of Bari: Capital and main cities of Puglia Region, local Public Authority, runs “Porta Futuro”: it is a new-generation Job Centre mainly aimed at people residents of the Metropolitan City / Area of Bari and activated on an experimental basis by the Municipality of Bari at the premises formerly allocated to the Consortium of the former Tobacco Factory (old, renovated factory architecture practice). The Centre is aimed at the reception, information, training, orientation, support, assistance, listening and accompaniment to work of users in a state of unemployment/underemployment and/or seeking (first) employment or creating own company. Porta Futuro Bari, in the wake of similar experiences successfully tested in other Italian and European realities, proposes itself as a platform (physical and virtual) for dialogue, in-depth analysis and comparison on the issues of work, training and job placement of people, especially those seeking their first job, experimenting with virtuous formulas of horizontal collaboration between the institutional fabric, employment centres, training agencies and economic-social representatives and stakeholders present and active in the area. A job community that operates according to organizational standards, communication modes and collaborative forms, including on web-based platforms, in line with the current configuration of social demand.

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www.comune.bari.it/
www.portafuturobari.it/

UNISCO Network for Local Development – private NGO, approved member of the Pact for Skills community (registration number 1068), coordinator of this Regional Pact for Skills proposal: is a Bari-based training agency (VET centre) accredited by the Puglia Region; is also an accredited body for Employment Services, and certified by UNI EN ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System for the following products/services: design and delivery of vocational and non-vocational training courses, employment guidance and job placement. From 2003 to today, as the name suggests, mission is to unite different resources and collaborate with professionals, entities, organisations and institutions to create a virtuous and integrated network and to promote and disseminate good practices in the social, economic and cultural spheres in the territory, strengthening competitiveness and active citizenship processes. It accomplishes this by structuring a series of targeted and integrated training courses, guidance, counselling and planning activities, paying special attention to innovation, the labour market and the new generations. Play role also in EU Programs and Projects, e.g. is one of the IO (Intermediary Organization), the only acting in Puglia Regione, of the EU Direct Program "Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs".

www.unisco.it/

IFOA - Bari: training organization accredited by the Puglia Region, born from the will of the Chambers of Commerce network, and Employment Agency, a combination that allows it to offer paths of growth, training, professionalisation and programs of insertion in the world of work. It works on a national and international scale driven by the desire to transfer useful knowledge to people, companies and territories. As a nonprofit organization, it develops its activities following the rules of a code of ethics that aims at the professional growth of the person.

www.ifoait.it/

INFORMA Scarl - Bari: Informa is a cooperative that has been active for more than 25 years dealing with people, organisations and communities by facilitating change processes, providing them with tools to recognize and value their talents, re-find their energy, realize their purpose and make sense of their place in the world. It addresses social, organizational and personal innovation by putting the well-being of the individual at the centre. The Informa-certified method activates a growth process based on awareness and enhancement of one's resources, the ability to choose and identify opportunities, and the 'activation of networks and relationships (empowerment). Its team has 28 members and 45 workers. Women represent 90% of the membership and the entirety of the Board of Directors and Management.

<https://informa.coop/>

Consorzio Mestieri Puglia s.c.s.: Employment Agency accredited and active in Puglia, has as its mission the social inclusion of people at risk of marginality, and work is only the tool to be used. It has, as its mission, to be the "companions" of the people who are most vulnerable from a social point of view and potentially most in difficulty from a professional point of view as well: migrants, the disabled, women victims of violence, people who have transited from the addiction circuit, people in conflict with the law, and young people discouraged by the scarce employment opportunities.

www.mestieripuglia.it/

Private partners of this partnership (UNISCO, IFOA, INFORMA, MESTIERI) are already involved, since several decades, in common projects related to the labor market and managed within local / regional / national / EU programs and projects; moreover, they are common partner of the Municipality of Bari for the technical and management assistance, following public procurement procedures, of the Job Centre "Porta Futuro" since its very beginning in 2017; this determines and ensures synergies and consolidated teamwork experience, strategic for the positive deployment of the activities and goals foreseen in this RSP proposal.

The promoters of this RSP have agreed on this common proposal, and this document will represent the framework of commitments within which the goal and activities set forth in this PfS, which incorporates its contents in full. A Memorandum of Understanding will also be signed by the organizations / stakeholders that will follow the implementation of the RSP (in case of approval and future financing) and subsequently will be involved in the partnership.

RSP management is through a steering or coordinating committee that helps guide and coordinate the project from start to finish. The steering or coordinating committee is composed of representatives from key organizations that are partners in this proposal / project and have particular expertise in project activities and in the management of Porta Futuro; the role of the steering committee is to ensure the achievement and delivery of project outcomes.

This will include activities such as:

- Expanding the number of RSP partners
- Ensuring that the planned strategy matches the project's purpose
- Reviewing project progress against milestones and KPI
- Considering ideas and issues raised, adjusting / updating the proposal in its entity
- Provide guidance to the project team
- Help balance conflicting priorities and resources

- Promote positive communication outside the committee regarding the projects
- Actively promote project outputs
- Contribute to project evaluation.

A chairperson of the steering committee will also be appointed. This will be the same member of the committee who will moderate and ensure that the meetings proceed smoothly.

The frequency of the committee meetings will be determined by the chairperson with a frequency of 1 time every two months to monitor the progress and evaluate the results of the project and contribute to its evaluation and to coincide with project milestones.

Supported by:



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