



**PACT FOR
SKILLS**

REGIONS TACKLING SKILLS CHALLENGES FOR THE GREEN AND DIGITAL TRANSITIONS UNDER THE PACT FOR SKILLS

Participatory Lab | 11 October 2022

The European Commission organised a participatory lab in the context of the European Week of Regions during which participants discussed in a virtual space how regional partnerships can help tackle skills challenges in the context of the green and digital transition.

This participatory lab aimed to strengthen participants' knowledge and awareness of the regional dimension of upskilling and reskilling and to encourage regional and local stakeholders to join Pact for Skills and establish regional skills partnerships using the knowledge and expertise gained. The presentation of best practice examples fed into fruitful exchanges during three group discussions on the importance of regional partnerships and their establishment.

Key messages

The key role regional skills partnerships can play in fostering upskilling and reskilling, and therefore contributing to economic and social development was once again recognised during this participatory lab. The main added value of such partnerships is the ability to unlock the capacity needed at the regional and local level to deliver quality training and mobilise collaborating arrangements in order to anticipate and respond to the fast-changing skills needs of the labour market.

A regional partnership can bring together a wide range of stakeholders, including employers and education providers, to gather intelligence, provide the digital and green skills for a successful transition as well develop tailored solutions to specific regional and local needs. Whilst the challenge of ensuring a continuous level of engagement was recognised, participants highlighted the need of advocating that investing in skills is absolutely fundamental. Pact for Skills can bring significant added value by providing a space for key actors to work together to become much more responsive to the changing skills needs by building strong skills partnerships and exchanging good practices.

Joining forces under the Pact

Investing in upskilling and reskilling measures is crucial to support a fair and resilient recovery from the socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and to ensure everyone can benefit from the green and digital transitions. Moreover, upskilling and reskilling at the regional level can play a key role in promoting lifelong learning, addressing skill mismatches and shortages, increasing the productivity of the European labour force, and tackling unemployment.

Sonia de Melo Xavier, Policy Officer and member of the Pact for Skills team at the European Commission, set the scene for the plenary discussion by providing an overview of the key progress achieved with **12 Large-scale partnerships** launched in key industrial ecosystems. Together, these major players committed to provide up- and reskilling opportunities to **close to 6 million people** in the coming years. Furthermore, over 700 stakeholders signed to the Pact for Skills Charter and close to a third developed concrete commitments. Sonia reiterated the Commission's efforts to mobilise and support key players to take concrete action and make up-and re-skilling a reality. Regional skills partnerships are the best instrument to take effecting skilling actions on the ground.

Interested in establishing a regional partnership? This is how the Pact for Skills can support you:

The **PfS Support Service** can offer tailored support to develop partnerships including agreements, networking, actions, and showcasing impacts at PactforSkillsPartnerships@ecorys.com

The [Guidance Handbook: introducing and setting up skills partnerships](#) offers support the process of developing impactful and sustainable skills partnerships.

Good practices under Pact for Skills

A plenary discussion invited established members of Pact for Skills to present their experience of developing skills partnerships in their region, the challenges encountered as well as the good practices and lessons learned in this process.

Monika Banka, Policy and Network Coordinator of the European Chemical Regions Network (ECRN) took the floor to introduce the network, which is a Pact member, and provide recommendations for new and prospective members of the Pact. The ECRN bears unique features within the European scene as a network of public authorities with a specific focus on the development of the chemical industry. The ECRN facilitates **interregional cooperation by leading the chemical industry's thematic partnership** under the Smart Specialisation S3 platform, supporting the establishment of common projects and regional joint investments, with the objective of modernization of the chemical industry and increase interregional cooperation. The main objectives of the partnership are to:

- highlight the role of skills and education in the green and digital transition of the chemical industry to make it resilient to market disruptions
- create a trustful platform for the cooperation between different stakeholders
- creation of the inter-regional learning communities

The example of Skillnet Ireland and its experience of driving the green and digital transformation in Ireland and Europe was presented by **Valerie Somerville**, EU Funding Manager. Valerie provided an overview of Skillnet Ireland's mandate to **advance the competitiveness, productivity and innovation of Irish businesses** with the support of the national government. With its broad reach and coverage in the business community, Skillnet Ireland represents a great example of the benefits greater collaboration between businesses and training providers can have on the development of dedicated skills strategies and training curricula. The main strategic focus of Skillnet Ireland is to:

- Accelerate digital transformation
- Support climate action and the development of sustainable businesses
- Increase SME productivity
- Support FDI
- Facilitate innovation within the workforce

Good practise case study - Lombardy Region

The Lombardy region has 10 million inhabitants, accounts for around 20% of Italian GDP and is in a good situation in terms of training offer and employment. Investing in innovation and vocational education and training (VET) was a priority even before the pandemic, but is now more important than ever in light of the twin transitions. The alignment of regional programmes with the priorities of the European Commission, as well as continuous dialogue with EU actors plays an important role in regional skills development.

Key messages:

- Focus on stakeholder engagement strategy
- Two main priorities: attracting young people and supporting SMEs in their up-and-re-skilling initiatives
- Create synergies between sectoral and regional partnerships
- Make use of skills intelligence and use data as a basis for identifying actions
- Develop tailored digital strategy for local authorities
- Develop a toolkit to evaluate the impact of the partnerships on jobs and growth.

Group discussions

After the plenary debate, participants were grouped into three breakout sessions and invited to share their views on regional partnerships, what their role is and why they are important in their region to tackle the skills challenges of the green and digital transitions. The participants agreed on the **importance of regional partnerships**, especially regarding their ability to bring together a wider range of stakeholders including businesses and education providers and ensuring the support is available for people from different backgrounds. The main role of regional partnerships was to **unlock the capacity needed to deliver training** at the local level and **mobilise collaborative arrangements** to develop curricula and address the skills gaps.

During the discussions, participants highlighted the **need to undergo a mapping of the skills needs at the regional and local level** and the importance of involving academic institutions in identifying the skills requirements for the future. At regional level, the need to adopt a cross-sectoral approach was mentioned repeatedly. A regional partnership could help clusters come together to develop solutions and provide the basic green and digital skills across all sectors and facilitate mutual learning, whilst gathering intelligence and delivering more advanced skills training specific to each sector. The importance of encouraging people to engage in lifelong learning is also crucial.

The main **challenges** that emerged from the discussions were the complexity of the skills ecosystems and the numerous actors involved, as well as the difficulties in identifying an organisation leading the partnership and ensuring long-term commitment given the limited resources. As Monika Banka reiterated, the key challenge for an efficient partnership is ensuring a consistent level of engagement and responsibility among members.

In the presentation of the **good practice of the Lombardy region** to engage the wider community of businesses including SMEs and large employers, Leonardo Larusso, underlined that the key criteria for

participating in a recent call for proposals¹ as part of the 2021-2027 ERDF and ESF+ programmes was for big enterprises to involve the entire supply chain with the aim to guarantee the standard of quality of the training. The network approach of Skillnet Ireland brings together different companies and enables them to access funding from the Irish government as well as raise match funding. Valerie Somerville emphasized the **need of demonstrating and advocating that investing in skills is absolutely fundamental** in order for companies to grow.

In this context, the **Pact for Skills** could provide practical support by offering specific training and knowledge-sharing activities for the leaders of regional partnerships. Furthermore, the Pact for Skills can support building regional partnerships by creating mutual learning opportunities, identifying best practices and helping to encourage regional institutions to do more to support local actors and facilitate cooperation between different regional actors. A collaborative platform, which allows connecting partners, would be a powerful tool accompanied by other project activities, funding tools, and training opportunities.

¹ <https://www.regione.lombardia.it/wps/portal/istituzionale/HP/DettaglioAvviso/servizi-e-informazioni/imprese/filiere/avv-bando-filiere-ecosistemi-svec/avv-bando-filiere-ecosistemi-svec>

