



**PACT FOR
SKILLS**

DEVELOPING REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – GOOD PRACTICES FROM COVES, CLUSTER PLATFORMS AND S3 REGIONS

Peer Learning Activity | 04 October 2022

The European Commission organised its first Peer Learning Activity (PLA) as part of a series of events for Pact for Skills members to discuss key topics, share their experience, and showcase good practices with the Pact for Skills community. The PLA provided a space for Pact members to strengthen their knowledge of existing EU initiatives fostering regional cooperation on upskilling and reskilling and discuss challenges and opportunities linked to developing regional partnerships within the Pact of Skills.

Key messages

Changes and challenges to the way we live and work brought about digitalisation, climate change, demographic trends, and new forms of work, require innovative approaches, including to upskilling and reskilling to anticipate and respond to fast-changing skills need in the labour market. To this end, building cooperation and synergies to drive economic and social development is becoming increasingly necessary, and regional partnerships can play a crucial role in this process. Through increased cooperation between public and private actors at the regional level, increased coherence across policies and programmes can be ensured, and more tailored measures can be implemented on the ground.

While ensuring stability through continuous engagement and adequate resources remains a challenge, the PLA showed that these can also represent opportunities to unite different stakeholders to reach a common goal. Indeed, clear success factors to build effective regional partnerships include establishing coordination structures to develop shared strategies and implement projects bringing added value to all partners, seeking and creating networking opportunities to increase cooperation with new partners and with regional authorities.

While a number of initiatives fostering cooperation already exist at the EU level, the Pact for Skills provides an important space for key actors within and across regions to join forces and mobilise collective action to deliver skills and training opportunities, and support organisations to overcome challenges by providing guidance, training and knowledge-sharing opportunities and increasing the visibility of regional partnerships.

Is your organisation interested in establishing a regional partnership? The Pact for Skills can support you:

The PfS Support Services can offer tailored support to develop regional partnerships including agreements, networking, actions, and showcasing impact. Expressions of interest can be sent to PactforSkillsPartnerships@ecorys.com

The [Guidance Handbook: introducing and setting up skills partnerships](#) offers support to develop impactful and sustainable skills partnerships.

Existing EU initiatives with a regional dimension

Existing EU initiatives promoting cooperation on skills development, innovation and growth at the regional level provide successful examples of collaborative approaches to upskilling and reskilling and can be of inspiration to Pact members to build skills partnerships within and across regions.

The [Centres of Vocational Excellence \(CoVEs\)](#) bring together a wide range of partners (in particular Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, along with other, e.g. universities and research centres, public employment services, etc.) and work closely with businesses to develop local "skills ecosystems", by providing both high quality vocational education and training to young people, upskilling and reskilling opportunities for adults and by contributing to building better and stronger links between VET and regional strategies. At the PLA, the 3 LOE project by [Hanse Parlament](#), a non-profit network representing over 650.000 SMEs, was presented. The project established a regional network for VET, by setting up seven Centres of Vocational Excellence in seven regions collaborating with over twenty partners. With the aim to improve the level of qualifications and skills in the green economy and strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs, the 3 LOE project designs and delivers dual vocational training programmes for different levels of qualification, as well as programmes to train VET teachers.

The second EU initiative presented at the PLA was the [European Cluster Collaboration Platform \(ECCP\)](#). Clusters are groups of firms, related economic actors, and institutions located near each other and cooperating closely with each other on business development, uptake of technologies, skills, infrastructure, research cutting across different firm sizes and industries. The PLA, focused on highlighting how European Clusters are well placed to support skills development and respond to regional skills challenges thanks to their unique composition and ability to bring together diverse partners, which tend to work together already. In this context, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) strengthens cooperation by helping cluster organisations to network, communicate, and collaborate with the aim of tackling the challenges of the twin transitions. The ECCP is a one-stop providing a cluster mapping tool for partner search, knowledge repository and resources, targeted events and support programmes for clusters. Furthermore, the '[Supporting skills for industry through clusters](#)' initiative is another helpful resource addressing how skill gaps can be tackled and providing best practice examples and concrete policy options to strengthen the work of clusters in this area.

The [Smart Specialisation Platform \(S3 Platform\)](#) promotes cooperation to foster skills development, innovation and growth at the regional level and plays an important role in cohesion policy. The S3 Platform acts as a facilitator for regions in the uptake of smart specialisation and supports stakeholders seeking to develop their innovation-driven economic transformation agendas at different levels: transregional, national, regional, and local. The PLA highlighted how EU funding programmes can support skills-related measures under smart specialisation strategies at the regional level. For example, the [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#) requires regions to have a smart specialisation strategy in place to attract investments related to skills, research and innovation. Regions can access funding for developing skills for S3, if investments are in line with the relevant S3, including the selected smart specialisation areas, and they address SMEs' skills needs in S3 areas. Furthermore, the [Interreg Europe](#) programme includes priority areas that support skills in the context of smart specialisation (e.g. the [Interreg North Sea transnational programme](#)).

The importance of regional partnerships

The PLA was an opportunity for participants to recognise the **importance of regional partnerships**, as a crucial avenue to engage a wide range of stakeholder groups and to mobilise them to work on shared objectives, to the benefit of the organisations involved as well as regional and local communities. By establishing a regional partnership, organisations can learn from each other and implement skills-related activities that are more effective and impactful at the regional and interregional level. Moreover, by joining forces through regional partnerships, organisations can have a stronger voice when engaging with policy makers at the regional, national and EU level.

The PLA, however, also identified a number of **challenges to regional cooperation**, including finding partners and ensuring their continuous engagement and lack of resources (both human and financial) to actively participate and contribute to the work of the partnership, as well as of a broader culture of cooperation across levels, sectors and stakeholder groups. Nonetheless, **regional partnerships have the potential to turn these challenges into opportunities**, as these are built around shared strategies. Partnerships can lead to greater chances of acquiring funding through more effective and impactful projects and they can be an opportunity to establish better coordination to discuss shared solutions to cross-cutting issues among partners.

The PLA underlined the **key elements of strong regional partnerships**. Firstly, a partnership needs a well-functioning coordination body equipped with the organisational and material means to coordinate activities and ensure a common approach when engaging with local and regional authorities and advocating for the partnership's needs. A strong regional partnership, according to the feedback gathered through the PLA, is one that can work both at the regional and interregional levels, brings different stakeholders together, including larger organisations and/or clusters, fosters public-private cooperation. Furthermore, strong regional partnerships should have proactive members, focus on future skill needs and innovative ideas that can attract funding to ensure the continuity of activities and projects. Lastly, ensuring a bottom-up approach, working towards long-term change, and providing sustainable networking opportunities also stand out as crucial elements to the success of regional partnerships.

Good practise case study - Regional Skills Partnerships for the chemical industry (ECRN)

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 S3platform**, supporting the establishment of [common projects](#) and regional joint investments, with the objective modernising the chemical industry and increase interregional cooperation.

The main objectives of the partnership are to:

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

Establishing regional partnerships

At the PLA, a number of **concrete steps needed to build solid foundations for a strong regional partnership** were identified, in particular with regards to identifying key actors to involve in the process.

The main step to **establish a regional partnership** is agreeing on a **common strategy** that is coherent and effective. In particular, starting with small and concrete actions, to be scaled up over time as the partnership grows and gains new members is considered a practical and efficient approach. Furthermore, **identifying and appointing a partnership leader** is another crucial step to ensure that the partnership is led by an organisation with the appropriate resources and knowledge. Whilst acknowledging the importance of joining forces to apply for funding and increase financial resources, the PLA underlined the need to shift away from funding as the main *raison d'être* of regional cooperation and move towards the need to promote innovation at the regional and interregional level as an incentive to collaborate.

Moreover, the PLA identified regional authorities, businesses, chambers of commerce, industry and crafts, education and training providers and civil society within and outside the region as the **key actors to be involved**. To ensure a successful cooperation, existing challenges around building public-private partnerships should be acknowledged with a view to develop tools to address them. Equally, finding new members is seen as an ongoing effort, which requires both regular outreach to local public administrations, who have a thorough overview of different regional actors and can assist with establishing the first contact; and innovative solutions (e.g., match-making platforms allowing for continuous and sustainable networking).

Furthermore, the PLA underlined the **role to be played by the Pact for Skills**, which includes providing practical support to members by offering specific training and knowledge-sharing activities to organisations leading regional partnerships; as well as creating opportunities for mutual learning, identifying best practices and encouraging regional institutions to increase their support to local actors and facilitate their cooperation. Lastly, Pact for Skills can support awareness raising efforts to promote the importance of partnerships for regional skills development and provide visibility to the actions of the Pact members.

Case study example: Lombardy Region

Investing in **innovation** and **vocational education and training (VET)** has been a long standing priority for Italy's Lombardy Region. 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. To foster upskilling and reskilling, the Lombardy Region focuses on the following priorities:

- Focus on **stakeholder engagement strategy**
- **Human-centred approach** – both workers and citizens need to be involved and the programmes need to be adjusted accordingly.
- **Create synergies** between sectoral and regional partnerships
- Make use of **skills intelligence** and use data as a basis for identifying actions
- Effective involvement of **VET institutions**
- Focus on **social aspects** and the well-being of companies and workers