



**PACT FOR
SKILLS**

SYNERGIES FOR SKILLS PARTNERSHIPS UNDER THE PACT: FROM BLUEPRINTS FOR SECTORAL COOPERATION TO THE 2023 EUROPEAN YEAR OF SKILLS

Peer Learning Activity | 12 December 2022

The European Commission organised its second Peer Learning Activity (PLA) as part of a series of events for Pact for Skills members to discuss key topics, share their experiences, and showcase good practices with the Pact for Skills community. The PLA provided a space for Pact members to increase their knowledge of the Blueprint for sectoral cooperation initiative and discuss how to build or strengthen synergies with the Pact for Skills. Furthermore, the PLA was an opportunity to present and share ideas for the upcoming European Year of Skills 2023.

Key messages

Technological innovations, demographic shifts, climate change and globalisation, and more recently, the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic require individuals to acquire new skills, upskill and reskill to adapt to an ever-changing world of work. A sectoral approach to upskilling and reskilling can help to identify the specific challenges faced by individual ecosystems, and promote cooperation between key actors to develop tailored and innovative solutions.

Over the past decade, the EU has made efforts to promote a sectoral approach to skills development, including through flagship initiatives such as the Blueprints for sectoral cooperation. The latter have been established in a wide variety of industrial ecosystems, and have contributed to promoting upskilling and reskilling in key sectors by developing sectoral skills strategies, designing concrete solutions and tools (e.g. sectoral skills intelligence, occupational profiles, training courses), and identifying priorities and milestones to be achieved. The Pact for Skills and its large-scale partnerships have the potential to take this work forward, by further disseminating the deliverables of the Blueprints; strengthening cooperation between stakeholders and involving new actors, and ensuring the sustainability of actions and outputs in the long run, beyond the duration of individual Blueprint projects.

Furthermore, the upcoming European Year of Skills and the activities and events to be implemented throughout 2023, represent a key opportunity to promote and raise awareness of the importance of upskilling and reskilling. By ensuring that these issues are higher up on the political agenda both at EU and national level, the 2023 European Year of Skills has the potential to boost interest, motivation and commitment to upskilling and reskilling measures for the benefit of both businesses and individuals.

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

The **PfS Support Services** can offer tailored support to develop skills 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.

Skills partnerships at EU level: Blueprints and Pact for Skills

Sectoral approach to skills: the Blueprint for sectoral cooperation

The European Commission started implementing a sectoral approach in 2009, when it became clear that engaging with key stakeholders within specific sectors was key to identify skills challenges and to develop joint solutions, in order to ensure the successful implementation of horizontal policies. Key milestones include a 2010 Study on sector-based projects funded through the Leonardo Da Vinci programme¹, which showed that these projects have a greater chance of producing sustainable results. Sector Skills Alliances were then introduced as a regular action under Erasmus+ in the 2014-2020 programming period. In 2016, the European Commission launched the [Blueprint for sectoral cooperation initiative](#) as key EU level measure to support upskilling and reskilling at sectoral level, with the aim to foster sectoral skills intelligence, support efforts to map skills needs, revise and define occupational profiles, as well as to improve and develop training programmes. The Blueprint initiative is underpinned by funding under the Erasmus+ programme, with specific calls for proposals being launched every year to support the implementation of “Blueprint Alliances”². In the last months, Member States have engaged in discussions around vocational core profiles and vocational core curricula, too. Lastly, with the launch of the Pact for Skills, the European Commission has taken steps to further strengthen synergies between the two initiatives, including by ensuring that Blueprints can be embedded in Pact for Skills partnerships.

Blueprint Alliances – examples from the ground

At the PLA, the [EO4GEO Alliance](#) was presented. Launched in November 2022, the EO4GEO Alliance stems from the EO4GEO project, one of the first Blueprint projects funded under Erasmus+, aiming to bridge the skills gap between the supply and demand of education and training in the space/geospatial sector. The EO4GEO Alliance has the goal to maintain, enhance and further develop the results of the EO4GEO project, for example through the development of an extensive portfolio of products and services. These include a series of [tools](#), [training materials](#), and the [EO4GEO Body of Knowledge](#), which are available for free on the EO4GEO website. To ensure a coordinated approach to skills development, the EO4GEO Alliance has developed a [Sector Skills Strategy](#) setting out strategic objectives to be achieved in the space/geospatial ecosystem and a [Long-Term Action Plan](#), outlining how the outputs developed by the EO4GEO Alliance will be promoted and implemented. Some of the main lessons learned from the work of the Alliance can be identified in both the need for continuous updating of the training offer and occupational profiles to respond to the dynamic nature of the sector, as well as in the need to ensure that skills development remains a collaborative and collective endeavour, with the meaningful involvement of all relevant stakeholders. To this end, and in order to strengthen synergies, the EO4GEO Alliance requires new members sign up to the Pact for Skills.

¹ The Leonardo da Vinci programme, which provided funds in the field of vocational education and training was integrated in the Erasmus + programme in 2014

² A full list of the blueprint alliances can be found [here](#)

Another example is the [Skills Alliance for Industrial Symbiosis, a cross-sectoral Blueprint for a sustainable process industry \(SPIRE-SAIS\)](#). The [SPIRE-SAIS Alliance](#) aims to develop an industry-driven and proactive skills strategy that will assist the wider implementation and exploitation of [industrial symbiosis and energy efficiency](#) across energy-intensive industrial sectors until December 2023. This Blueprint project is based on technological and economic development foresight, adopting a cross-sectoral approach to identify [skills needs](#) and adjustments to the industrial workforce across energy-intensive industries. The project is rolled out across sectors and regions, with the involvement of European sectoral associations, industrial symbiosis regions and other relevant stakeholders. The Pact for Skills and work of the large-scale partnership for energy-intensive industries will be vital for the continued implementation and further development of the [main results](#) of the SPIRE-SAIS Alliance, beyond the project funding period.

Lastly, [MicroElectronics Training, Industry and Skills \(METIS\)](#) Blueprint is the third good practice example presented at the PLA. This Blueprint project aims to address the current talent and skills shortages in the microelectronic sector, by trying to develop training that is more industry driven and attracts marginalised groups (e.g. women). To this end, METIS focuses on three main core deliverables: a [Sector Skills Strategy](#), through which METIS was able to identify the most in-demand profiles in the sector, as well as the skill-sets associated with these; the implementation of (predominantly online) [innovative VET training](#); and a Long-term Action Plan, Observatory and Skills Council to be developed in the last year of the project, which will focus on building synergies with the Pact for Skills [Large Scale Partnerships \(LSP\) for Microelectronics](#) as both METIS and the LSP bring together many of the same stakeholders and organisations. More specifically, the objectives are threefold: ensuring that the METIS Sectoral Skills Strategy and its annual updates forms the basis for the establishment of a permanent observatory mechanism under the LSP (e.g. surveying organisations on a regular basis to gather skills intelligence); continuing to build on the METIS training programme to deliver courses bringing together partners from the Pact to build an industry-university training network; and establishing a centralised European microelectronics training platform. Lastly, METIS has recently published a vision paper on, and road map for, the establishment of a [European Chips Skills 2030 Academy](#), which is also the subject of a Blueprint proposal that has been submitted in 2022.

Support for Blueprints under Erasmus+

The **Erasmus+ call for Alliances for Sectoral Cooperation ('implementing the Blueprint) of 2023** aims to establish new skills partnerships under the Blueprint initiative to foster new strategic approaches and cooperation to identify concrete skills development solutions and tackle skills gaps in the labour market. The call explicitly targets organisations that are already members of a large-scale skills partnership under the Pact for Skills.

More information is available in the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2023](#) and the Pact for Skills [database of funding opportunities](#).

Synergies and opportunities for sectoral cooperation to strengthen skills partnerships

The PLA was an opportunity for the participants to discuss how to build and/or strengthen synergies between the Blueprint Alliances and skills partnerships in the context of the Pact for Skills to foster mutual learning and exchange of good practices, as well as ways to ensure that deliverables produced by either of the initiatives can mutually reinforce each other.

The discussions held at the PLA highlighted that the Blueprints represent an **important starting point to build partnerships** as they bring together different stakeholders through joint goals and a shared project, which can then be transformed into long-term commitments by the LSPs under the Pact for Skills. Stronger links and synergies between the Blueprints and Pact for Skills partnerships can ensure greater sustainability of project results, as well as **more coherent streamlining of outcomes and deliverables from the EU to the regional and local level**. To this end, it was suggested that efforts should be made to ensure that regional and local level policymakers and education providers can have access to the wealth of knowledge and tools that are produced through EU level initiatives such as the Blueprints (e.g. sectoral skills intelligence, skills strategies, occupational profiles, training programmes) so that these can inspire initiatives on the ground. In this context, **the Pact for Skills is seen as being crucial to “open minds and doors”**, as the Pact not only promotes a strong regional dimension by fostering regional partnerships, but also provides a space for other stakeholders beyond those already involved in the Blueprints to engage in discussions around upskilling and reskilling.

Moreover, whilst acknowledging the **importance of a strong regional and sectoral dimension**, discussions held at the PLA stressed the relevance of a cross-sectoral and cross-ecosystem approach to collaboration. While each sector has its specificities, skills development often faces the same obstacles across sectors, and therefore more knowledge sharing and mutual learning between different ecosystems has the potential to help finding long-term and sustainable solutions to cross-cutting issues.

However, the PLA also identified a number of **challenges** when it comes to streamlining the outcomes and deliverables of the Blueprint. Funding was highlighted as an important element to take into account: while support through Erasmus+ is crucial, ensuring that upskilling and reskilling are identified as investment priorities at the national and regional level (e.g. within the Operational Programmes under the European Social Fund Plus) was mentioned as key to achieve **long-term sustainability**. To this end, it was highlighted that the **Pact for Skills** has an important role in fostering sustainable funding as it can help public authorities at national and regional level to better understand the importance of upskilling and reskilling and encourage them to further invest in these areas. Furthermore, another challenge was identified in the need to update training materials and tools produced by the Blueprints in order to respond to the **rapidly changing skills landscape** and ensure their continued relevance.

Linked to this, the need for more flexibility when developing Blueprint tools for skills intelligence and training programmes was stressed: not only is there an opportunity for Blueprint Alliances and LSPs to collaborate and share knowledge (e.g. on how to set up training platforms, develop courses, and exchange innovative approaches to skills assessment to support efficient use of resources), but also to shift the focus from setting up new tools to making use and updating existing resources where appropriate, to avoid duplication. Lastly, the PLA underlined that **translating resources into local**

languages remains a challenge, which needs to be overcome to ensure that the deliverables of the Blueprint projects can be shared with local actors, such as policy makers and education and training providers in a timely, accessible and structured way and be implemented on the ground.

The 2023 European Year of Skills: an opportunity for awareness raising and long term commitments

The trends affecting the labour market, such as the green and digital transitions, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, and demographic change, lead to changing skills requirements and a need for action. Against this backdrop, in her State of the Union address in September 2022, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed to make 2023 the European Year of Skills, to put skills policies in the spotlight. More specifically, the European Year of Skills aims to promote reskilling and upskilling, boost competitiveness of companies (in particular SMEs), and foster a socially fair, inclusive and just digital and green transition.

Activities under the European Year of Skills will include promoting relevant EU initiatives, including EU funding opportunities, events and awareness raising. The European Year of Skills will function as a booster for initiatives that are already in the pipeline, such as the Cybersecurity Skills Academy, to be promoted through the planned communications campaign. The European Year of Skills will also further promote the Pact for Skills and put an emphasis on strengthening the collaboration between actors allowing national, local and regional stakeholders to organise events, use the communication campaign and be actively involved in the process of co-creating and co-organising the 2023 European Year of Skills. To this end, a dedicated national coordinator for each Member State will be appointed, to serve as the bridge between the European and local levels, provide information, and support the organisation and participation in specific activities.

The 2023 European Year of Skills: priorities

The four specific objectives of the European Year of Skills are:

- Increased, more effective and inclusive investment in training and upskilling to harness the full potential of the European workforce
- Strengthening skills relevance by close cooperation with social partners and companies
- Matching people's aspirations and skills-set with labour market opportunities
- Attracting people from third countries with the skills needed in the EU

At the PLA, participants were asked to share their ideas for activities and events that could be implemented during the 2023 European Year of Skills. Some of the ideas shared included the need to focus on qualification and validation of skills, organising events, providing training, and promoting soft skills.

Furthermore, during the plenary discussion, participants highlighted that the European Year of Skills is a very timely opportunity to ensure that key issues, which usually receive less attention at the European and Member state level, are in the spotlight. These include, for example, the importance of ensuring the **validation and certification of skills which then can lead to a qualification**, or the added value of **strong cooperation between stakeholders in industrial ecosystems and education and training providers**. Another key aspect that emerged during the discussion was the value of **communication and awareness raising** to motivate employees to undertake up- and reskilling and to boost the attractiveness of training opportunities by making them accessible, engaging and rewarding. Both the Pact for Skills and the European Year of Skills are vital in providing stakeholders with the necessary communication tools to promote a mindset of reskilling and upskilling that reach the target groups and help both employees and companies reach their full potential. Lastly, the PLA highlighted the importance of ensuring that the European Year of Skills promotes **stronger commitments towards upskilling and reskilling in the long run**, beyond the specific activities and initiatives to be implemented in 2023.