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Resilience and Skills Matching in European Regions

Edited on 16 November 2020





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INTRODUCTION

As skills matching becomes a more relevant aspect of the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and its impact, Brittany Region and EARLALL hosted an online conference on 6 November to identify best practices in European regions regarding resilience and skills matching policies and practices, during which the Stride4Stride project was kicked-off.

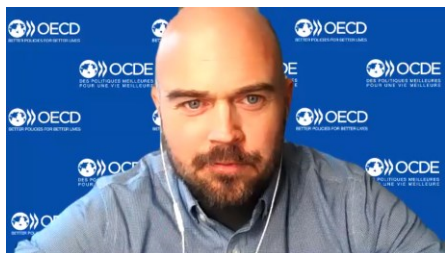


In a labour market heavily impacted by Industry 4.0 and SDG commitment (2 million employments will be created by the latter), and the rise of soft skills as a new area of interest in terms of qualifications, differences between skills offer and demand have widened, affected also by the COVID-19 outbreak and crisis.

As the European Commission has already stated, upskilling and reskilling programmes to protect workers from unemployment and loss of income will be an essential tool to mitigate the effects of the crisis, with 59 million jobs at stake and those without university degrees in a higher risk. Therefore, there is a crucial need for education and training systems to identify, anticipate and teach skills that are suitable for future needs, rather than to catch up with technological, demographic, and environmental changes after they have happened.

For all these reasons and with the objective of aligning the education and training provision with regional smart specialisation strategies (S3), the Stride for Stride project (funded by Erasmus+ and led by Brittany Region) will work on building up the concept of Regional Skills Ecosystems. The project was kicked-off at the "Resilience and skills matching in European regions" conference, during which best practices and challenges identified by six European regions were introduced: Basque Country, Brittany, Catalonia, Tuscany, Varaždin and Vestland.

FROM PANDEMIC TO RECOVERY: LOCAL EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Jonathan Barr,
Deputy Head of the Local Employment, Skills,
and Social Innovation Division.
Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions,
and Cities (CFE), OECD.

[Presentation available here](#)

Many of the policy responses have primarily come from national governments, such as job retention packages and income support to individuals. In this context, the OECD has been gathering insights on what regions and cities have specifically been doing within their policy capacity, with relative autonomy in terms of labour market and skills policies.

Subnational governments are at the frontline of managing the COVID-19 crisis, which will entail an economic shock in many places. A large share of subnational financing capacity (48%) is usually devoted to education and training. Helping people and firms to navigate the crisis has been one of the fundamental roles that the regional and local governments have played. The emergency response actions by localities in the field have covered:

- Communication and awareness;
- social distancing measures;
- continuity of public services;
- workplace access and transport;
- support to vulnerable groups;
- support to firms.

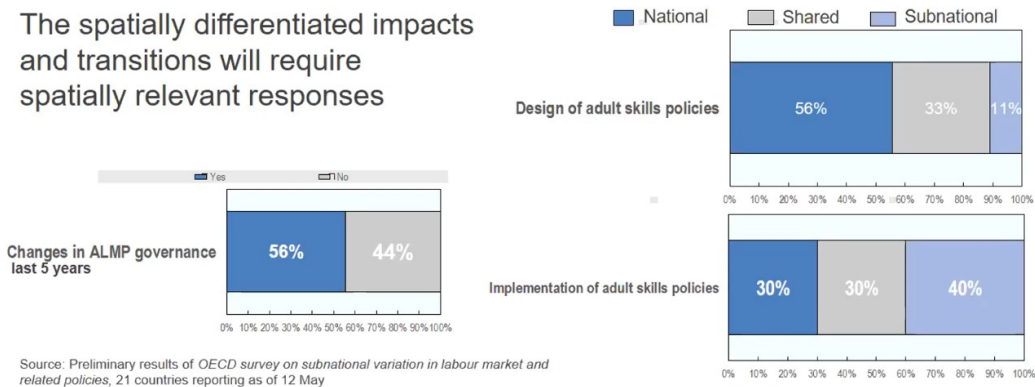
Tourist destinations and large cities have a higher share of jobs potentially at risk in the short term. Teleworking is the new normal and people are moving from big cities to medium-size municipalities. However, there is a city-rural gap of jobs that are amenable to teleworking, which typically refer to highly skilled occupations.

The crisis has accelerated the changes that were taking place in the labour market, with digitalisation and automation at the forefront. Two potential outcomes of automation are:

- Jobs disappearing (risk of automation).
- Jobs still existing, but new skills are required to carry them out, as different tasks within these occupations arise (risk of significant change).

The overall OECD estimates point at a 14% of jobs at risk of automation and 32% at risk of significant change, with a regional variation between 4% and 40% and internal country differences reaching up to 10 percentage points.

The OECD Committee for Local Employment and Economic Development has identified the areas where regions and cities have taken on additional responsibility for either active labour market policies or the design of adult education and skills policies. Increasingly, an active management of these policies have been carried out by subnational authorities, as shown by the data collected:



For regions and cities to guarantee flexibility in the adult education and training system, it is fundamental that they have a stronger role to play, also looking at labour market variations and conditions. Examples of current policy responses by local labour market include:

- The role of **cities in Canada** in helping low-income individuals, the self-employed and recently laid-off workers to apply to the national Emergency Response Benefit.
- **Italian regions'** responsibility to disburse the national redundancy fund
- The **US National Association of State Workforce Agencies'** website featuring COVID-19 employment opportunities
- The **Basque Country's** credit line (25 million euros at 0% interest) to support SME liquidity.
- **Berlin's** support to micro-enterprises and freelance workers (100 million euros).
- **Occitanie's** plan to offer access to skills training and expand e-learning programmes (4 million euros).
- **Regional efforts in France** to engage the social economy and support its organisations.

Key long-term scenarios for local labour markets and their policy responses that have been identified are:

- Accelerating the digital transition.
- Re-visiting globalisation.
- Sense of collective destiny (public goods)
- Re-imagining public life

All in all, skills training overall will play a fundamental role in reshaping local economies and help people in adapting to transitions, which will be more frequent in the years to come.

BASQUE COUNTRY



Rikardo Lamadrid,
 Director General for Technology and Advanced Learning.
 Vice-Ministry of Vocational Education and Training, Basque Government.

[Presentation available here](#)

Vocational education and training (VET) strategy within the education system

Actions were established by the Basque Government VET Vice-Ministry and implemented by the VET centres. For example, crisis management teams were created at VET centres, instructions were designed, action and monitoring plans were designed. Furthermore, an urgent training plan in digital skills was designed for teachers, with training courses taking place in July and September 2020. Working plans were also developed along with students so they could adapt to remote learning.

Strategy supporting the health sector

- Surgical masks: three prototypes were produced at TKNIKA. Currently masks are being produced at a company, which have been certified by an official laboratory; furthermore, because of mask production, 55 students are working at this company.
- In spring 2020, 55 centres were producing masks with protective screens using 3D printing techniques, and the 3D printing makers community was mobilised to produce ventilators.
- Servicing hospital breathing equipment: repair of machines at training centres.
- Provision of healthcare material.

Strategy supporting Basque companies, particularly SMEs and microSMEs

- SMEs and MicroSMEs are going to be helped to respond to the training needs.
- SMEs and MicroSMEs are going to receive support and help.
- The work experience recognition mechanism has been set up for any layoff (ERE) process in Basque companies.

International cooperation

Cooperation with countries outside of Europe was also a key aspect. For example, the Basque Government received a request from the General Director for Technical Training, under the Chilean Ministry of Education, about the possibility of helping them to prepare their teaching staff for remote training, now necessary due to the COVID-19 crisis. Online training and access to materials and content were given to 50 teachers selected by that Ministry.

European dimension

The Basque Country's actions have followed the EU Agenda and decisions, also in cooperation with the European institutions (European Commission) and European partners (other regions, VET Centres, EARLALL network, etc.). Holding the Presidency of EARLALL, the Basque Government and the Basque Country Delegation to the EU closely followed up the situation of the VET sector in other Member Regions.

European projects needed also to adapt to the new situation. As an example of best practice, the [Excellent Advanced Manufacturing 4.0 \(EXAM 4.0\)](#) project, funded by the Centres of Vocational Excellence pilot initiative under Erasmus+ KA2, can be named.

Success factors

- Regional partners, teachers and students & different VET Centres and specialisations working together.
- Monitoring the whole process and adapting the decisions.
- Regional authorities guarantee the communication/bridge between VET centres and SMEs and society.
- Private and public agents and stakeholders working together sharing information, knowledge, materials (3D printers, etc.), resources, etc.
- The whole society pursuing together the same goal.

Main challenges in the near future

The Basque Country is working hard to change not only students', but also workers' mindset. It is clear that work must go towards a greener, more sustainable and more inclusive social model. Furthermore, digital thinking and a digital mindset will be key. The Basque "Sustainable Digitalization Plan" will help to materialize "the digital transformation." The knowledge developed by means of this plan is transferred to SMEs and microSMEs to support and put them on the wheel of innovation and digitalization.

Potential emerging sectors have been identified and the training of professionals for these sectors has been reinforced. Indeed, they have identified the skills and competencies that could help in overcoming the next societal challenges and they have started to implement them. Moreover, they have launched specific training programmes for teachers and trainers to anticipate/adapt to those new competencies, skills, needs and learning tools. Entrepreneurship programmes have also been reoriented towards these possible emerging sectors.

The key to success is people's attitude: their ability to adapt and, above all, their resilience. The potential of VET has been demonstrated, especially in a severe crisis situation, and we the Basque VET system will continue adding real value to society's needs

BASQUE COUNTRY

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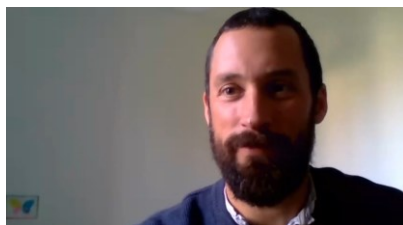
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in European Regions

Case study presentation by Stride4Stride partner regions:

BASQUE COUNTRY



BRITTANY



Tangi de Rochefort,
Project Manager for Innovation, Employment and Business.
Directorate for Employment and Lifelong Learning, Brittany Region.

[Presentation available here](#)

As most regions in Europe, Brittany Region needed to manage a sudden and very strict lockdown for all the training sessions (800 trainings) and the impact this had on learners. Furthermore, unemployment was rising at a fast pace.

Main challenges identified

During the emergency:

- Save lifelong learning centres from bankruptcy.
- Try to make training restart fast.
- Avoid learners' dropping out.

However, work also was needed to anticipate the exit from the crisis:

- Identify the needs of skills after the lock down.
- Attract people to the vocational training.
- Keep the companies involved in training process (through internships, for example).

Measures taken by the region

Emergency:

- Find a legal way to pay the centres in order to save them from bankruptcy
- Take care of people:
 - Maintain support for learners by vocational centres and guidance professional
 - Keep financial allowance available
- Provision of an LMS Platform : Help centres to organize the training by distance
- New strategy to communicate to VET centres and learners

Anticipation:

- Engage an ambitious strategy to support Centres in digital transition
- Comfort partnership with the economic stakeholders to keep companies involved: business will restart
- Equip learners with digital materials and skills

Lessons learnt

- People are involved in their training: very few of them gave up and the safety belt is working.
- The lack of digital skills in many VET centres.
- We must stay very closed from businesses organization.
- We started to build a better communication with centres, learners, and VET partners.
- The high capacity of the organization and the team to react very well, at a very fast pace but quietly.
- The priority is to be able to adapt our learning program to the new challenges of the economy, of the territories, of the people.

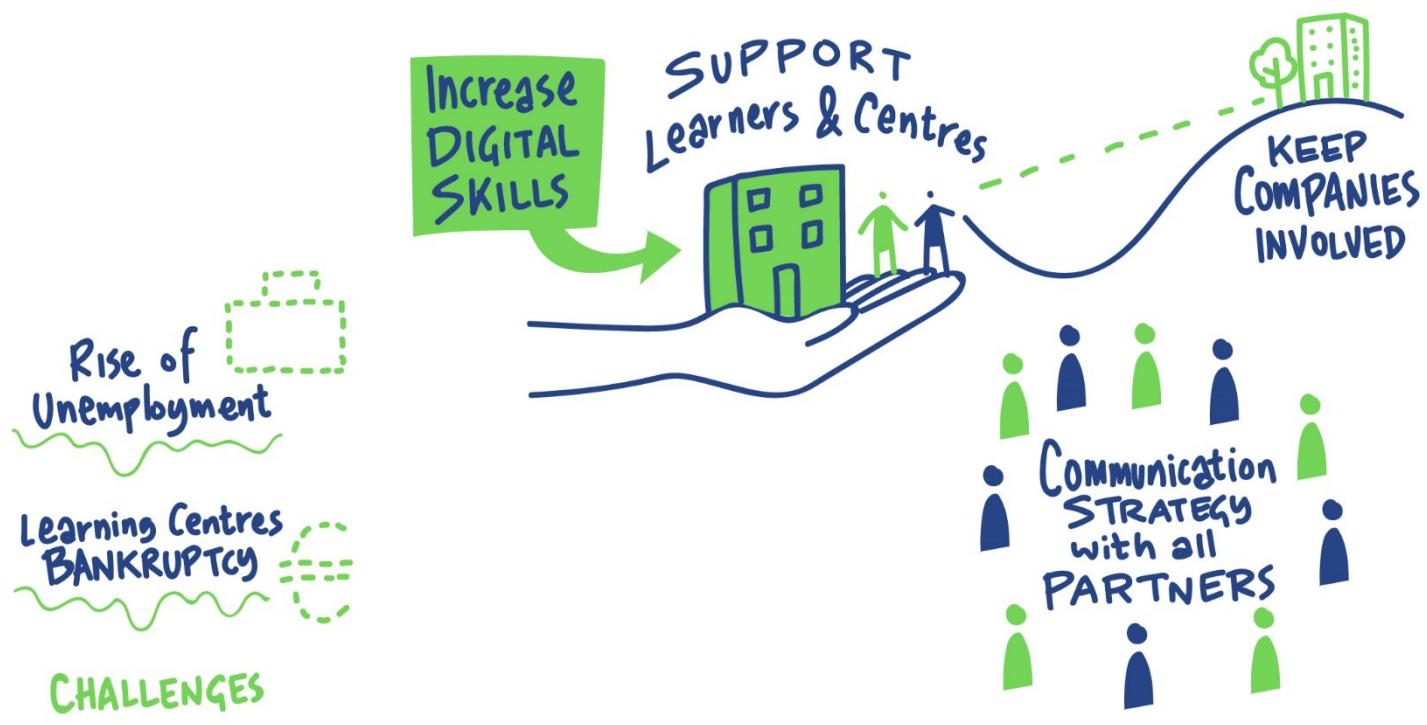
Priorities/areas of intervention to explore best practices in other regions

From Brittany Region, the key questions to other regions and partners involved in the Stride4Stride project are:

- How did you manage the risk of dropout?
- Do you help centres in their digital transition in order to adapt training to the economics challenges? How do you do it?
- How do you work with economics partnership to identify the skills needs despite the economic crisis?
- Do you think that involving companies and economic partners in the training process is important? How do you plan to achieve this goal in this period when emergency is everywhere?

BRITTANY

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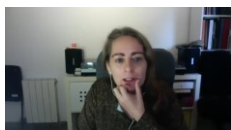
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Case study presentation by Stride4Stride partner regions:
BRITTANY

CATALONIA



Maria Pascual, Head of Unit of International and Cooperation Projects for VET, Department of Education, Government of Catalonia.



Irma Núñez, Project Manager of International and Cooperation Projects for VET, Department of Education, Government of Catalonia.

[Presentation available here](#)

A quick reaction from the Catalan Government has also been required, and the key measures implemented were related to the following areas:

- Certainty and flexibility.
- Actions for the different scenarios.
- Quality and equity.

Teaching and learning

In terms of teaching and learning, the measures taken have referred to the following aspects:

- Adaptation of the curriculum and teaching programmes. For example, by allowing students to balance teaching and project hours.
- (Online) tutorials: digital tools for teaching and learning.
- Teaching methods: possibility to have 50% face-to-face and 50% online.
- Guarantee of information and resources for the students.
- Individual measures for student assessment.
- The dual system (work-based learning, WBL) was adapted due to the difficult situation faced by many companies:
 - Exceptional reduction of WBL hours (compensated by project hours).
 - Remote WBL as an option for a maximum of 2/3 hours.
 - Replacement of WBL for a final project supervised by both the teacher and the company tutor.

The General Direction of VET at Catalonia's Ministry of Education: networks

The General Direction's networks were very important during the pandemic as they allow a direct contact with VET centres. Each network focuses on a different subject and different measures were implemented at each of them (please note that not all networks are referred below):

- [ImpulsFP](#) (overarching network): promoting new tools, digitalisation and methodologies.
 - [OrientaFP](#) (guidance): tools for online counselling and guidance.
 - [ActivaFP](#) (project-based learning): fostering digital project-based learning.

- [FuturaFP](#) (skills anticipation): planification of strategies to adapt skills provision to new labour market needs from a VET centre perspective. Through workshops and seminars, VET centres will design upskilling and reskilling pathways for teachers.
- [EmpresaFP](#) (contact with companies): supporting and promoting dual professional training through a research team.
- [MobilitatFP](#) (international mobility): design of blended and virtual mobilities for students and teachers, in accordance with both Erasmus+ and VET Catalan frameworks due to COVID-19, and online sharing of international good practices.

Digital Education Plan Catalonia 2020-2023

The digital education plan includes three strategic frameworks:

- Digitally competent students that are protagonists of their own learning to achieve educational success.
- Teachers who are empowered and digitally competent to face numerous methodological challenges and respond to their pupils' needs.
- Education centres in transformation that respond to the challenges of digital and educational transformation from its leadership and in connection with the environment.

Key challenges identified by measure implementation

- Ensuring the provision of online tools to teachers and students.
- Making sure all the students have access to internet and can follow the lessons.
- Adapting the plan constantly and fast to the official instructions.
- Working with other departments to design measures and plans.

Prospective solutions to improve crisis reaction

- Keeping normality as much as possible.
- Carrying out actions & events online. □
- Providing safety measures and plans. □
- Giving clear and supportive guidelines to the training centres.
- Designing a plan to boost and adapt international mobility.

Best practice compilation

- [Networks Yearly Closing Event](#)
- [International Entrepreneurship & Innovation Seminar](#)
- [QCAMPUSFP](#)
- [Education Fair 2020](#)
- [New Mobility Platform & Website](#)

CATALONIA

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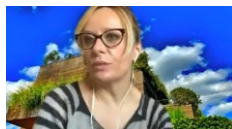
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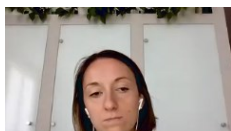
CATALONIA



TUSCANY



Miriana Bucalossi, Head of the VET Policies and European Project Management Unit at Tuscany Region.



Silvia Duranti, Researcher, Istituto Regionale per la Programmazione Economica della Toscana (IRPET).

[Presentation available here](#)

Tuscany is a region located in central Italy with an area of about 23,000 square kilometres and a population of about 3.8 million inhabitants (2013). The regional capital is Florence (Firenze). Tuscany is divided into nine provinces and one Metropolitan City. The unemployment rate stood at 6.7% in 2019 and was slightly lower than the national average (10%). The youth unemployment rate in 2019 was 23,6%, while at national level was 29,6%.

Tuscany Region is a Public Regional Authority responsible, on a regional level, for policies including among others Education and Employment. It is a regulatory Institution for VET and its policies are designed to promote employability, lifelong learning and competitiveness, stability, and quality of work. It manages the Public Employment Service system (PES) (a network of 52 local centres) within its territory according to National and regional law, delivering for career and vocational guidance activities to different group of users in order to improve their employability and promote the matching between demand and supply of labour.

Within the framework of Regional Law no. 32/2002, skills adaptation/anticipation is a high priority for Tuscany Region, with a specific focus on the potential repercussions that technological innovations under Industry 4.0 are producing and will produce in the future on the skills needed by the labour market.

Analysis are developed mainly through IRPET, the Regional Institute for Economic Planning of Tuscany, which studies its socio-economic structure and its transformations economic, providing support to plan regional economic policies.

Measures taken by the region during the pandemic crisis

In March 2020, the National Government decided that all education and training activities in presence should be stopped and provided at distance by ICT tools: Universities, Schools and VET Providers establishments were closed. In Tuscany, at the early stages of the lockdown, all the regional training activities, but also traineeships and apprenticeships were stopped.

Tuscany regional government then decided that, whenever possible given the situation, teaching and learning should continue in a distance format. 'Formazione sincrona' or synchronous training (live delivery of the teaching) allowed the teachers/trainers to be in contact with the learners as in a normal classroom.

As regards traineeships, it is obvious that not all activities could take place remotely, especially those regarding non cognitive occupations (e.g. blue collars). Also, an important number of learners enrolled in the commerce and retail sectors had it difficult to reconvert their training into a distance/virtual one.

Key findings

- Interaction between the teachers/trainers and the students was key and was facilitated thank to the virtual environment provided. The teaching and training also counted with the supervision of a tutor as it is the case in the regular face to face programmes.
- In the commerce and retail sector, the companies hosting the trainees decided to transform most of the traineeships in proper employment contracts. This was the case for big supermarkets chain
- For traineeships that could take the shape of a distance experience, the Region elaborated some guidelines to legally adapt them to the situation and to make them 'safer', and not only from the point of view of a safe working environment at home. The guidelines were addressed to the three stakeholders involved in any traineeship: 1) company, 2) trainee and 3) the 'promoter' of these traineeships (the public employment service in most cases in Italy and in Tuscany).

Challenges identified due to COVID-19

- One of the main obstacles to overcome: learners' assessment and final exams were carried out online. However, this is an area where further reflection is needed. Assessing learning outcomes remotely is possible but should be done in the best possible way and under the best possible conditions.
- Another challenge was to guarantee that the teaching and learning process happened according to certain quality standards. Quality VET provision should be at the core of any activity regardless of the tools and methods used.
- Another important challenge was to run and organize the in-company training when the economic activity for the non-essential sectors was stopped.

Skills needs anticipation: a key challenge from the labour demand side

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to bring about marked structural changes in the short to medium term, with an asymmetric impact on different economic activities and occupations. E.g., the tourism sector is a key employer of the Tuscan economy but it is highly vulnerable to COVID-19 challenges: skills demand has immediately decreased due to social distancing measures and travel restrictions and it is hard to say if and when there will be a recovery. Indeed, in the after COVID-19 era, the sector could possibly be smaller due to business closures.

The risk of skill loss: a key challenge from the labour supply side

Firms and workers in sectors that are directly or indirectly hit by the effects of the pandemic are supported through short time working schemes, which however risk to freeze job mobility and to retain workers in declining sectors, without incentive to upskill or reskill.

Furthermore, school closures and distance learning could have a negative impact on human capital formation: increased dropout rates, lower levels of competences acquired may cause a lack of the necessary skills in the medium to long term.

Lessons learnt

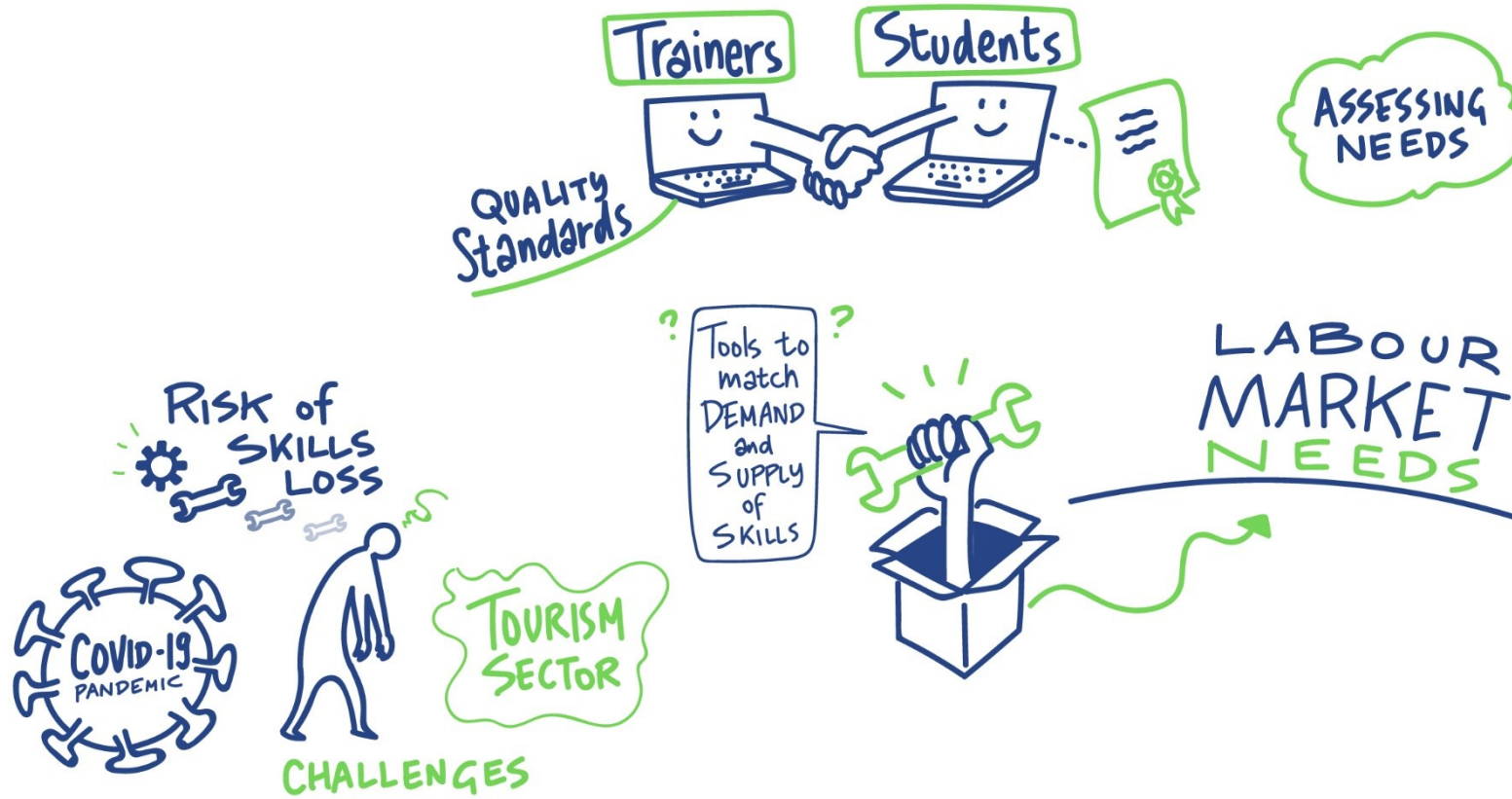
- Knowing local labour market needs (local ecosystem).
- Assess matching regularly.
- Analysing skills needs at the level of qualifications.

Priorities/areas of intervention to explore best practices in other regions

- Which tools they use to match demand and supply of skills? Are they local, regional or national tools?
- Are these tools suitable to match skills in an uncertain labour market structurally changing due to the pandemic?

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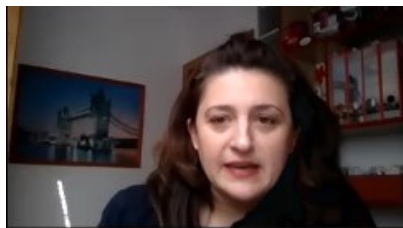
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Case study presentation by Stride4Stride partner regions:

TUSCANY



VARAŽDIN



Nikolina Vlahek, Srednja strukovna škola
Varaždin.
Varaždin County.

[Presentation available here](#)

Varaždin County is in northern Croatia near the borders with Slovenia and Hungary. It is one of 20 regional self-government units of the Republic of Croatia. It has a population of 175,951 (139.42 per square kilometre), 77 schools (14 secondary, 33 primary and 30 subsidy), 10,233 primary school pupils and 7,749 secondary school students.

The two VET schools that will be actively involved in the Stride4Stride project are:

- Vocational School in Varaždin. This school continues the rich tradition of education in the crafts of Varaždin County. There are almost 600 students at the school who are trained in 32 classrooms, school's training facilities and 15 different vocational programmes, some of them lasting for four and some for three years.
- Vocational School Arboretum Opeca. In 2018 the school was declared as 'Regional Centre of Competence in Agriculture'. The centre is characterised by innovative teaching methods and an innovative learning model, as well as hands-on-based learning for a more efficient inclusion of the students into the job market.

Measures taken by the region

The Government of the Republic of Croatia has issued instructions on the manner of teaching in primary and secondary schools as well as in higher education institutions and the performance of work in pre-school and educational institutions in the conditions of the COVID 19 epidemic. According to these instructions, school principals are obliged to organize work in schools in accordance with the recommendations of the Croatian Public Health Institution and the proposed 3 models of work:

- Model A (school teaching): all students are in school in compliance with epidemiological measures.
- Model B (mixed form of teaching): students follow the teaching partly at school, partly online.
- Model C (distance learning) all students follow distance learning and teachers teach online.

For students who belong to a highly sensitive group, classes are organized online exclusively.

Main challenges identified

- Implementation of vocational practice in the conditions of an epidemic: it is difficult to organize the implementation of practical classes and going to field classes, which is of crucial importance for VET students.
- Ensuring sufficient space in classrooms: some classrooms are of inadequate size and it is impossible to provide the required distance.
- Lack of quality monitoring of online classes: it was noticed that a number of students did not regularly apply for online classes and ignored the instructions for work and their tasks.
- We noticed that the pandemic crisis has highlighted some challenges and limitations of distance learning first of all in technical structural and social areas.
- For apprentices in short time work, training is often reduced to consolidating theoretical content of their profession, while the practical work in direct contact with the customer, with machines and equipment is stopped for weeks.

Lessons learnt

The impact of the COVID 19 pandemic in the world of work seriously threatens opportunities for access to vocational and technical training and education.

With increasing experience in the use of digital tools in distance teaching, the teaching of new content is becoming more important.

It is vital for educational institutions to keep their learning platforms or technologies up to date so they can effectively respond to the needs of their students in the event of a crisis like that of the coronavirus.

Priorities/areas of intervention to explore best practices in other regions

- How did other regions organize classes in vocational high schools during the epidemic?
- How do you continue cooperation with companies where their students do their internships?
- What model is applied in VET schools when it comes to carry out practical training at school facilities, laboratories and workshops?

VARAŽDIN

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VESTLAND



Kjell Helge Kleppestø, Senior Manager, Career Guidance Centres, Vestland County Council.

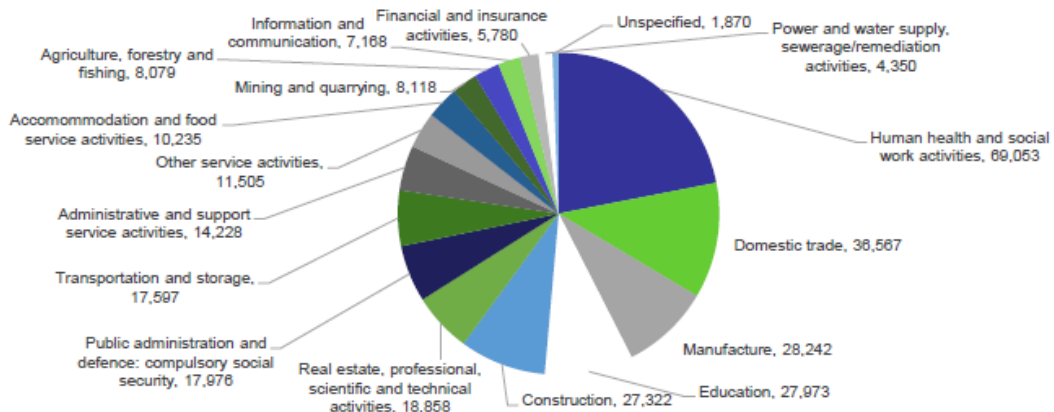
Jostein Eitrheim, GM Hardanger Council.



[Presentation available here](#)

Vestland County has a population of 635,000 people and covers a surface of 34,050 square kilometres, with 19,339 km of coastline. The territory is divided into 43 municipalities, the largest one being Bergen (280,000 inhabitants). The economic structure of the region is distributed as follows, with a big importance of exports:

Employees per sector, Vestland 2018



Currently, a 3.7% of unemployment is registered, and skilled workforce is needed.

Career guidance: a solution for skills needs

Access to career guidance is very important for the regional competence strategy, with a need of cooperation between education stakeholders and a general need of workforce. Career guidance is part of an effectively functioning education and employment system, and acts as a safeguard against ineffective and imperfect practices: it is the “oil in the machinery.” Free and professional guidance is offered to all groups, both employed and unemployed, as has been included in the recent 2020 law. This applies also specifically in the field of integration of third-country nationals, who are obliged to reach out to guidance services.

Hardanger Council

Hardanger council covers five municipalities within Vestland, with a total population of 37,000 inhabitants. Main economic activities in the area are tourism, industry, agriculture (fruit/cider), aquaculture, small businesses, education and public administration.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not have a big impact in Hardanger, being a rural district, and a small number of infections was registered. However, the important tourism sector has been affected, even if national tourism has been preserved, and small businesses are suffering from the new situation, which is expected to stay as it is in the coming months.

Main challenges

- Demographics: high average age.
- Young people do not return to the region after moving to urban areas to study.
- Difficulties for businesses in connection with recruitment.

These challenges have been bridged through the following actions:

- Close cooperation between education system and businesses.
- New regional arena for cooperation.

Priorities/areas of intervention to explore best practices in other regions

- Local/regional education.
- Competence that businesses need.
- Combination work/education.

VESTLAND

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