



KEY FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING AT EU LEVEL

Webinar | 05 July 2022

The European Commission organised its second webinar as part of a series of events for Pact members to discuss and exchange with experts and with the Pact for Skills community. The webinar was an information session on the key EU funding instruments that can be accessed by the Pact members to support resilience, cooperation and innovative approaches in the field of upskilling and reskilling. Moreover, two case studies from Pact members were presented.

Key messages

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 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.

The importance for upskilling and reskilling is enshrined in several key EU policy instruments (e.g., the European Skills Agenda¹ and the European Pillar of Social Rights, and its Action Plan²), as well as a number of EU level funding programmes. These include the [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#), the [Recovery and Resilience Facility \(RRF\)](#), the [Technical Support Instrument \(TSI\)](#), [Erasmus+ 2021-2027](#), and the [Digital Europe Programme](#). EU funding can play an essential role in supporting Pact members to foster skills development, resilience, cooperation and innovative approaches. Within the Pact membership, there is already a wealth of knowledge in relation to implementing concrete actions resulting in positive outcomes, that can inspire current and future members to make use of EU funding to boost upskilling and reskilling in their respective ecosystems.

Call for action

The European Commission is keen to hear from Pact members and showcase good practices from the Pact for Skills community to be potentially scaled up and replicated in other industrial ecosystems. Examples of EU-funded measures and/or initiatives implemented by Pact members can be sent to EC-PACT-FOR-SKILLS@ec.europa.eu

For more information about key funding opportunities for upskilling and reskilling at EU level, the recording of the webinar is available at this [link](#).

¹ European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, available [here](#)

² European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, available [here](#)

EU funding instruments for upskilling and reskilling

European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)

The [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#) is the European Union's main instrument for investing in people, as it aims to improve employment opportunities for workers and contribute to raising the standard of living in the EU, as well as to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Moreover, ESF+'s specific objectives include:

- Contributing to improving education and training systems at all levels, including through the modernisation of education and vocational education and training systems;
- Fostering equal access to quality education and training, while promoting equal access to good quality and inclusive education and training for all;
- Promoting upskilling, reskilling and skills anticipation by enhancing access to lifelong learning, career transitions and mobility.

Given the ESF+'s strong emphasis on education and training, as well as on social innovation and inclusion, it can play a key role in achieving the objectives of the Pact for Skills, and represents an effective tool to invest in skills development and support resilience and cooperation.

Under the current funding period 2021-2027, the ESF+ has a budget of almost €99.3 billion, €98.5 billion of which are under shared management. This means that the Commission does not provide direct financial support for projects under the ESF+ but that Member States and regions are responsible for the implementation of ESF+ funding. National and regional authorities are responsible for issuing calls for proposals under the ESF+, and therefore organisations and individuals interested in applying for ESF+ funding or wishing to submit a project proposal should consult their national and regional ESF/ESF+ websites.³ Alternatively, they may contact the ESF+ Managing Authority in their country or region.⁴ As ESF+ programmes are still being negotiated by the European Commission and Member States, ESF+ funding opportunities might not be available yet. The current list of Member States for which programmes have been adopted can be found [here](#).

Erasmus+ 2021-2027

[Erasmus+](#) is the main EU funding programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport.

Under the current funding period 2021-2027, the Erasmus+'s budget amounts to €26.2 billion, and the programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, the green and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life. The [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) is published on an annual basis and provides a comprehensive description of the opportunities supported by the programme, which is divided in three key actions:

- [Key Action 1](#) - Mobility⁵ of learners and staff (e.g. teaching and training staff mobility, learner mobility, blended activities and other supported activities): education and training providers (including in the VET and adult learning sector) that want to organise mobility activities on a regular basis can receive an Erasmus+ accreditation. The latter gives organisations simplified access to Key Action 1 funding every year to implement their planned mobility activities. In order

³ Please see [here](#). Please note that the database of ESF managing authorities is currently being updated.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Study or work placements abroad.

to receive the accreditation, organisations must develop an “Erasmus Plan”, outlining activities to be implemented and objectives to be achieved in the area of mobility.

- [Key Action 2](#) - transnational cooperation among organisations and institutions: under this action, there are different types of activities that can be supported. These include:
 - [Partnerships for Cooperation](#): these include Cooperation Projects and Small-Scale Projects; they are designed to develop and share innovative practices and promote cooperation, peer learning, and exchanges of experiences in the fields of education and training (including adult education and VET).
 - Partnerships for Excellence: projects with a long-term sustainable perspective, which includes promoting Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs); Erasmus+ Teacher Academies; Erasmus Mundus Actions.
 - Partnerships for Innovation: these include both [Alliances for Innovation](#) (which aim to boost innovation through stronger cooperation between higher education and VET institutions and businesses to support skills development and address skills mismatches) with a budget between €1-4 million, depending on the duration of the project and on the Lot; and [Forward Looking Projects](#) (transnational projects implementing sectoral or cross-sectoral activities to either foster innovation in terms of scope, ground-breaking methods and practices, and/or ensure a transfer of innovation across countries, policy sectors or target groups), with a budget between €800.000-1 million.
- [Key Action 3](#) - Support to policy development and cooperation: under this action, Erasmus+ supports projects that foster policy cooperation at EU level, contributing to modernisation and reforms in the fields of education, training youth and sport.

Given Erasmus+’s focus on education and training, as well as innovation and skills, funding, particularly under Key Actions 1 and 2 can be relevant for Pact members and their ongoing work to promote upskilling and reskilling. The implementation of Partnerships for Cooperation is decentralised in EU Member States, entrusted to [National Agencies](#). The latter are responsible for supporting organisations taking part in Erasmus+ decentralised projects (including supporting beneficiaries from the application stage to the end of a project), providing information on the programme, reviewing applications submitted in their country. Moreover, information on how to apply for funding under Erasmus+ can be found [here](#).

Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)

The adoption of [NextGenerationEU](#) took place in 2021 and responds to the need to support the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and boost resilience for the future of the EU, its Member States and its citizens. The [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) (RRF) is the centrepiece of NextGenerationEU with €723.8 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by EU countries. The RRF aims to mitigate the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to make the European economy and society more resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transition.

All Member States are required to submit national Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) indicating the reforms and investments up to 2026, which need to fulfil a number of conditions, including ensuring that reforms and investments lead to lasting impact. Moreover, 37% of actions should

contribute to the green transition, 20% to the digital transition, and none should harm the environment.

For what concerns Pact for Skills, funds under the RRF can also be used to strengthen education and skills development, with a link to active labour market policy measures. Up to July 2022, all approved RRP include measures on education & skills:

- Around 165 measures (approximately €17 billion) in the field of adult education, including continuing VET; recognition and validation of skills (see factsheet [here](#));
- Around 140 measures (approximately €26 billion) for human capital in digitalisation (see factsheet [here](#));
- Around 20 measures (approximately €6 billion) for youth support and around 20 (approximately €6 billion) non-youth employment support (see factsheet [here](#))

Furthermore, the [Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard](#) informs on the implementation of the RRF and the full set of RRPs can be found [here](#).

Technical Support Instrument (TSI)

While not a financial tool per se, the [Technical Support Instrument \(TSI\)](#) is a capacity building instrument that provides tailor-made technical expertise to Member States, to design and implement reforms. As such, support is focused on providing expertise rather than direct financial support. Moreover, the support provided is demand-driven: Member States have to submit their request for support via their National Coordinating Authority by 31 October. Once the request has been positively assessed by the European Commission, support can be provided in a wide range of ways, for example:

- Direct provision through the Commission's in-house expertise;
- Indirect provision through other providers of technical support, such as experts from EU Member States' national administrations (TAIEX), international organisations, private firms and consultancies or individual experts from the private sector.

The TSI has a budget of €864 million for the period 2021-2027, and projects are 1 to 2 years long. The areas of support covered by the TSI are relevant for Pact members as they include developing innovation and employment policies; modernising the administration of labour market policies and programmes; strengthening the effectiveness of active labour market policies; developing inclusion and integration policies; improving the delivery of social services; modernising the administration of social benefits and services; addressing low education outcomes and early school dropouts; adult education; reskilling and upskilling; digital skill; VET.

Aside from requests of support by Member States, the TSI currently has [12 Flagship projects](#): while these are still demand driven, they focus on specific EU priorities and initiatives and can be single or multi-country. Examples of flagship projects include:

- [Youth First](#) aims to help Member States to design policies that improve children and young people' wellbeing, education, training/skills, social services, as well as access to finance and financial literacy. It aims to support reforms that give young people, in particular youth with fewer opportunities, from disadvantaged backgrounds, from rural or remote areas, or belonging to vulnerable groups, the education and opportunities to become active citizens and actors of positive change.

Support to industrial ecosystems: The project aims to support Member States in the design and implementation of reforms to boost competitiveness, sustainability, resilience and employment, including through reskilling and upskilling.

Digital Europe Programme

The [Digital Europe Programme](#) is the main funding instrument to support digitalisation in Europe for the programming period 2021-2027. The Digital Europe Programme aims to bring digital technology to businesses, citizens and public administrations by investing a budget of €7.5 billion over seven years. The Programme supports support five priority areas:

- High performance computing;
- Artificial Intelligence;
- Cybersecurity;
- Development of Digital Capacities and Interoperability;
- Advanced Digital Skills.

The latter is particularly relevant for Pact for Skills members and includes a budget of around €580 million. Every two years the European Commission publishes [work programmes](#) indicating the actions that will be supported in that period with this budget. A work programme was published in 2020, covering the years 2021 and 2022: under this work programmes, two calls for funding have been launched, and a third call will be open for three months, starting in September 2022. This third call will focus on Specialised Education Programmes in key capacity areas.⁶ Key information the upcoming call include the following:

- Objectives: Actions should support excellence in digital skills – funded projects should focus on advanced digital skills.
- Type of actions: funded measures may include bachelor/master courses, but also interdisciplinary programmes to connect more traditional fields with digital technologies e.g., between agriculture and artificial intelligence; funding to improve technical facilities; etc.
- Type of beneficiaries: consortiums should be large and ideally include a variety of partners from different Member States.
- Budget: The estimated overall budget will be €58 million, with a €10 million budget per project, with a 50% co-financing rule.

More information about funding opportunities related to digital skills can be found [here](#).

⁶ Find further information on the upcoming call regarding Specialised Education Programmes in key capacity areas in the [Digital Europe Programme's multiannual work programme for 2021 – 2022](#).

What can Pact for Skills members do?

Pact for Skills members are encouraged to make use of the funding opportunities presented during the webinar to contribute to the upskilling and reskilling of the European workforce. In case of questions and need for guidance Members are invited to reach out to:

- EMPL-G1-UNIT@ec.europa.eu for the ESF+
- REFORM-B4@ec.europa.eu for the Technical Support Instrument
- cnect-f4@ec.europa.eu for the Digital Europe Programme
- Contacts for Erasmus+ available [here](#).

Example of EU-funded initiatives by Pact members

Automotive Skills Alliance: Development and Research on Innovative Vocational Educational Skill (DRIVES) project

The [Development and Research on Innovative Vocational Educational Skill \(DRIVES\) project](#) by the Automotive Skills Alliance⁷ was implemented with the support of Erasmus+ funding under Key Action 2. The European automotive industry is going through massive transformation, due to the green and digital transformations; it represents almost 15 million workers and 11.5% of all manufacturing jobs.

The Drives project was launched in 2018 to support the skills agenda in the automotive sector with actions being implemented over the course of four years, with the participation of 24 project partners from 11 countries. The main objectives of the projects were:

- **Sectoral intelligence:** this included analysing key trends, defining skills and job roles needed in the future, analysing the current training offer and identify skills gaps. Some of the main project results include: [Sectoral Skills Needs, Hiring an Apprentice Guide, Sectoral Skills Strategy and Roadmap](#) and [Apprenticeship Key Issues and Recommendations](#)
- **Recognition:** This included ensuring mutual recognition of the skills and job roles across the EU, creating an EU-wide framework based on commonly used definitions, delivering policy recommendations reflecting the needs of the automotive sector to the European Commission. Results include the [DRIVES Framework](#) and the [Good Practice Resource Tool](#)
- **Training offer:** Creating trainings for selected skills and [job roles](#) in the automotive sector, providing 1100 trainings across the EU and across the education and training institutions, providing clear guidance for the education and training providers on skills needs of the automotive industry. See the [DRIVES learning platform](#), which offers the courses developed by the DRIVES project. More courses will be added to the platform through the Pact for Skills – Automotive Skills Alliance.

The full list of project results can be found [here](#).

⁷ The Automotive Skills Alliance was among the first blueprint alliances that started their work in January 2018 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1415&langId=en>

Union for Private Economic Enterprise: Joint actions of social partners for the development of digital skills

The "Joint actions of social partners for the development of digital skills" project by the [Union for Private Economic Enterprises \(UPEE\)](#) – an employers' organisation based in Bulgaria – was launched in 2021, with 85% of the budget coming from the European Social Fund (ESF). The two-year project brings together 14 industrial sectors and all 7 social partners involved in them.

The main objective of the project is to identify the digital skills needs of employees to perform their tasks and to support the acquisition of new skills in line with evolving digital technologies, in order to be ready for the digital transformation and the so-called industry 4.0. All main project activities are implemented in cooperation with the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour as well as trade unions, and include: research and analysis of the employees' needs for digital skills; testing the current skills of the workforce; the development of learning content and non-formal learning programmes targeted at digital skills, the development and adaptation of sectoral qualification frameworks to digital skills, raising awareness about the importance of digital skills and the development of social partnership and collective bargaining in enterprises.

The project, which is set to end in 2023, expects to see the involvement of 100 companies and more than 500 employees of different age groups, in order to increase their digital literacy and providing them with effective models and tools to be tested in a real working environment.

What can Pact for Skills members do?

Pact for Skills members are encouraged to share examples of EU-funded initiatives undertaken by their own organisations by reaching out to EC-PACT-FOR-SKILLS@ec.europa.eu

What's next? Save the date!

The Pact for Skills Support Services will be organising a Peer Learning Activity: "Developing partnerships at regional level - Examples of good practices from COVEs, Cluster platform and 3S regions" in October 2022. Further information will be shared via the next Pact for Skills newsletter. The European Commission looks forward to welcoming you to the event!