Flanders
State of the Art

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Introduction

The European Union is currently facing a diverse array of challenges, encompassing both internal dynamics and external factors. Successfully navigating these challenges requires the EU to stay flexible and adaptable, emphasising the importance of being prepared for the future through strategic foresight. The current European strategic foresight initiatives seek to embed foresight into European Union policymaking. They build on collective intelligence in a structured and systematic way to help better develop possible transition pathways and prepare the EU to withstand shocks.[1] A strategic foresight approach that truly spans multiple levels is necessary to create synergies and cooperation between different governmental actors to tackle global challenges.

Against this backdrop, the Minister-President of the Government of Flanders organised a gathering of government leaders of strong and innovative European regions to discuss global challenges and regional solutions during the Belgian EU presidency, from 1 January to 30 June 2024. The Leaders Meeting: "Fit for the Future: Global Challenges, Regional Solutions" took place on Thursday 18 April 2024 in Antwerp.

The Leaders Meeting aimed to send a strong signal to the European Union that the European regions hold important levers to tackle global challenges, while reaching out to one another for further cooperation and for a better EU policy. The Government of Flanders strives to lay the foundation for deeper collaboration between strong and innovative EU regions and aims to foster a lasting commitment from strong and innovative EU regions to address future challenges collectively.

In the lead-up to the Leaders Meeting, the participating regions joined forces and intelligence to carry out a strategic foresight analysis at administrative level. During this exploratory process, the participating regions exchanged their approaches to strategic foresight analysis, reflected together on possible future scenarios and identified common global challenges and potential regional solutions. This report presents the results of the exploratory process and has supported the exchange of views among the government leaders during the Leaders Meeting.

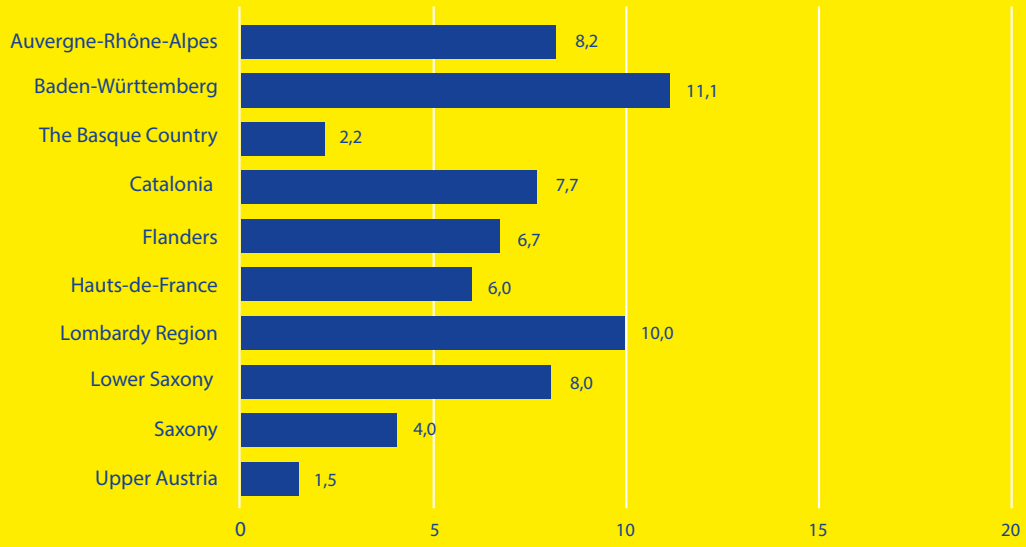
The first section of the report provides a brief overview of the statistics on the European regions concerned. The second part explores the methodology used in the strategic foresight exercise. The third section describes five key areas of action based on this exercise. It explores the key challenges and identifies possible solutions both on an interregional and European level to increase the EU's resilience.

The implementation of the recommendations in this report is dependent on the specific institutional context of each region.

Exploring Regional Resilience: Facts and Figures

Population

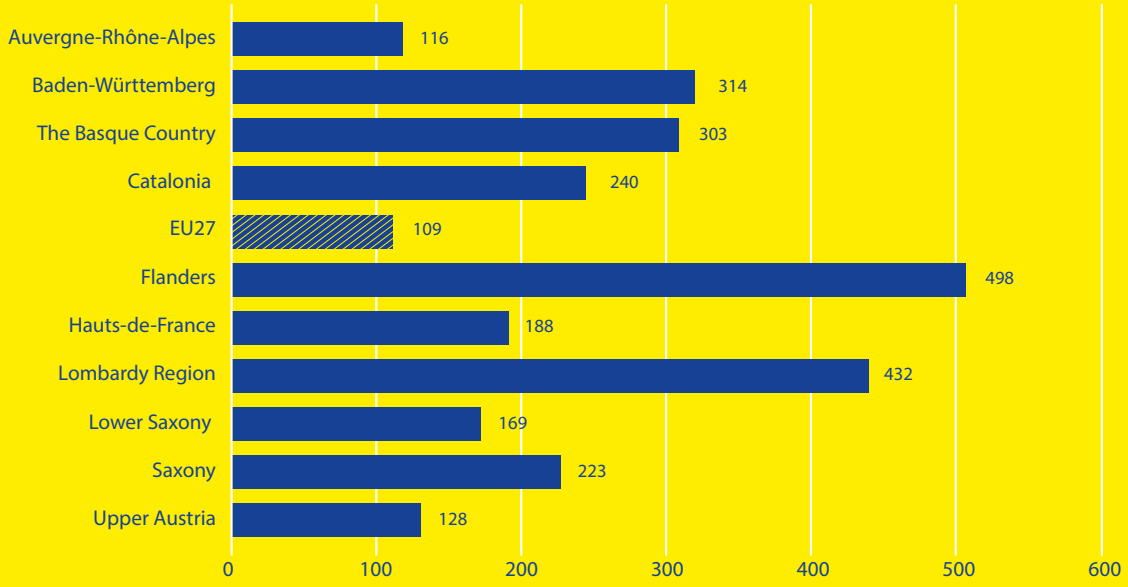
Million people (2022)



EU 27 population= 446,7 million

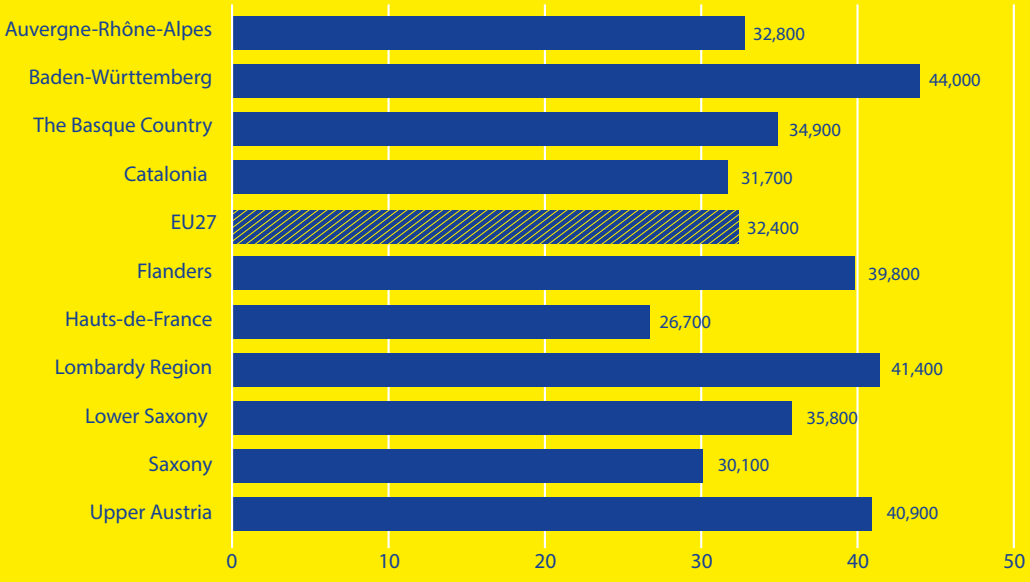
Population density

Persons per km² (2022)



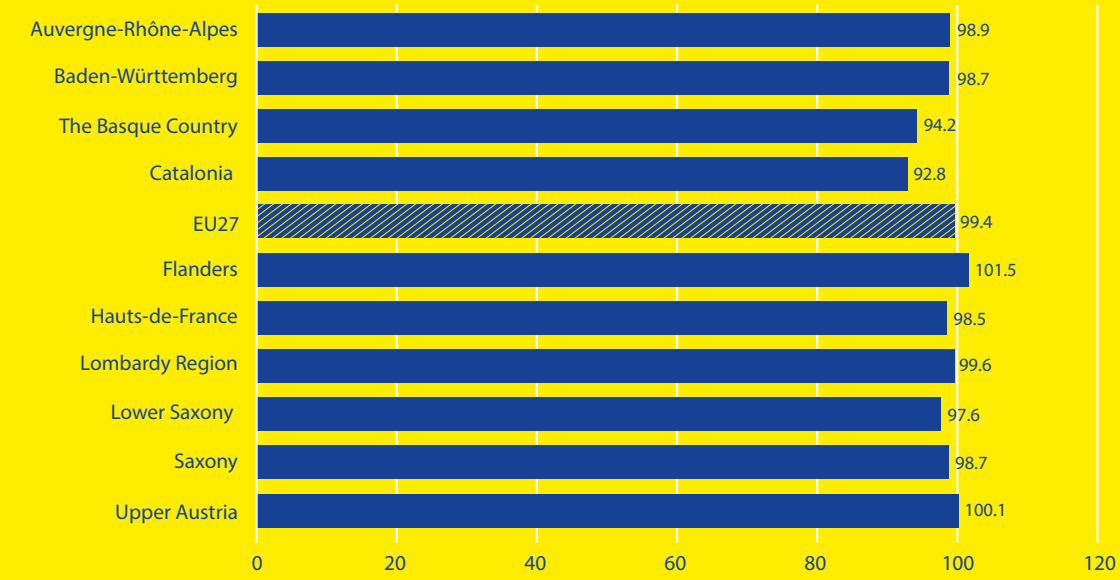
GDP per capita

euro PPS (2021)



Economic growth

Index, 2019=100 (2021)



Source: Statistics Flanders and EUROSTAT

Methodology: Strategic Foresight Analysis

1. What and why?

In September and October 2023, twelve European regions were invited by the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office for two strategic foresight sessions to explore common challenges and opportunities for cooperation. The regions were divided into two groups that carried out the same strategic foresight analyses. To bring focus to the discussions, the working sessions were structured according to the four resilience dimensions outlined by the European Commission (EC) in its 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. This report analyses resilience along four interrelated dimensions – social and economic, geopolitical, green and digital. The EC emphasises the importance of these dimensions for achieving long-term strategic objectives.

During two parallel sessions, the participants of the various regions explored four scenarios with horizon 2040. Within these scenarios, participants focused on specific aspects of the EC's resilience dimensions:

- **Green resilience: the sustainable transition of industry**
- **Digital resilience: empowering Europe's digital future**
- **Geopolitical resilience: trade, diversification and dependencies**
- **Socio-economic resilience: skills and the labour market**

The methodology for the two strategic foresight group sessions was carefully designed through an extensive bilateral process involving three regions: Catalonia, the Basque Country and North Rhine-Westphalia. This intensified approach included three bilateral sessions per region, which laid the groundwork for the subsequent group sessions involving all participating regions.

In strategic foresight, the scenario method is a tool that outlines possible future paths by considering current trends, uncertainties and key driving forces. It does not predict the future, but helps anticipate potential outcomes for making informed decisions amid uncertainty.

Participation in foresight is important to recognise and embrace uncertainty while collectively exploring global challenges. In these participative sessions, EU policy officers shared insights into existing policies, foresight specialists brought methodological rigour, and thematic experts provided domain-specific knowledge.

As some of the participating regions do not have resources dedicated to foresight (cf. regional strategy, team, action plan, etc.), they mainly contributed through their EU offices. Embracing the diverse perspectives of a variety of experts in different fields and from different EU regions broadened horizons and challenged assumptions. Moreover, this foresight exercise dismantled silos and fostered interdisciplinary thinking, which is vital to navigating the complexity of modern challenges.

2. Scenario Building Process

In the context of the preparatory phase for the Leaders Meeting, four different scenarios were developed: the Global Challenges Regional Solutions for Resilience Scenarios (GR4Resilience Scenarios). At the core of this process lies the identification of transformative developments driving global change. These transformative forces, as identified by the European Commission's Megatrends, encompass a range of critical issues:

- Accelerating technological change and hyperconnectivity
- Climate change and environmental degradation
- Increasing the societal and political significance of migration
- Increasing demographic imbalances
- Changing security paradigm
- Aggravating resource scarcity
- Continuing urbanisation
- Shifting health challenges

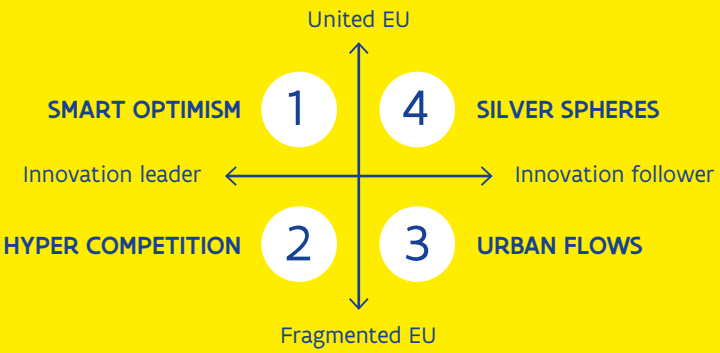
Find out more about the European Commission's Megatrends

In addition to these developments, special emphasis was placed on two key factors, given their heightened uncertainty and paramount importance for European regions:

1. The EU's evolving functioning and its consequential global economic role
2. Technological development and its implementation within the EU

The scenarios themselves are defined using pairs of these key developments as axes: EU as an innovation leader vs the EU as an innovation follower, a fragmented EU vs a united EU. Each quadrant of this matrix represents a unique scenario, offering nuanced insights into the potential future landscapes.

Each scenario was enhanced by using data and weak signals from diverse sources such as the EC JRC Megatrends (2022), World Economic Forum Global Risk Report (2023), Futures Platform, and Flanders' Outlook 2030. These sources added valuable layers of data and information, which were critical in understanding the nuances of the key developments identified.



3. GR4Resilience Scenarios

In the envisioned landscape of 2040, the following four distinct scenarios on the future of Europe shaped the discussions during the working sessions:

SMART OPTIMISM

In this scenario, Europe stands as a beacon of innovation and unity, despite the unprecedented pace at which technology is developing. The rapid technological advancements challenge businesses, policymakers and society as a whole. The key question here is not only how to ensure sustainable growth, but also inclusive and healthy growth. A highly advanced, tech-driven society emerges, with the EU at the forefront as an innovation leader. Regional disparities within Europe narrow, fostering harmonious coexistence driven by cutting-edge technology and shared progress. As a result of leveraging its technological progress, Europe strengthens its competitive position in the world.

HYPER COMPETITION

In this scenario, a world characterised by global interconnectivity, intense resource competition and geo-economic conflicts emerges. Within this landscape, a limited number of strong regional innovation leaders engage in fierce competition within a fragmented Europe. Despite this fragmentation, the EU as a whole maintains its status as an innovation leader. However, the rapid acceleration of technology presents a challenge. While technology is advancing at an unprecedented pace, it is frequently leveraged for economic gain rather than the common good. This scenario underscores the fierce competition among regional players and the complex balance between economic interests and societal well-being. On the global stage, a selected group of European innovators exert significant influence in steering the course of niche innovations and shaping the dynamics of competitiveness.

URBAN FLOWS

In this scenario, Europe faces a multitude of interconnected crises, weakening the EU's role, including its capacity for innovation. These poly-crises prompt short-term (social) crisis measures, diverting investments from innovation endeavours. Consequently, a low-investment and low-cooperation era hampers Europe's ability to effectively manage future shocks. Amid this turmoil, a shift towards localised solutions becomes prominent. Local co-housing and communities gain significance as people seek refuge in the sharing economy due to rising living costs. Smart city initiatives offer a digitally facilitated urban living experience, giving rise to numerous urban innovation hubs across Europe. Nevertheless, on the global stage, the EU is confronted with intensified competition. The increased rivalry challenges the EU's ability to exert significant influence in a world marked by dynamic geopolitical shifts and an evolving geo-economic landscape.

SILVER SPHERES

In this scenario, a shift in monetary policies ends easy access to capital, which leads to a global security breach that erodes trust in digital technologies. European countries face pressure on public health spending due to ageing societies, prompting collaboration for health and well-being initiatives with strict budgetary policies. Ongoing cybersecurity threats, financial uncertainty and elevated cybersecurity costs introduce fragmentation and obstacles to innovation. The EU, however, becomes a market for foreign innovation, focusing on supporting the ageing population and prioritising solidarity and social cohesion. Despite being an innovation follower, the EU actively applies transformative technologies, such as digital DNA services for healthcare to address critical societal challenges.

Strategic areas of intervention

The findings of the two working sessions were synthesised and structured into five strategic areas of intervention aimed at strengthening the resilience of the region and the European Union: SMEs fit for the future, European regions fit for the digital world, European regions fit for a sustainable transition, European regions fit for global competition and European regions skilled for the future. For each key area of intervention, the challenge is first outlined, followed by solutions through interregional cooperation and solutions where the regions want more support from the European Union.

1. SMEs fit for the future

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the power cells of our region's economies and that of the EU as a whole, representing 99% of all businesses in the EU. SMEs bring innovative solutions to challenges like climate change, resource efficiency and social cohesion and help spread this innovation throughout Europe's regions. They are central to the EU's twin transition to a more sustainable and digital economy.

The single market serves as the primary market for European SMEs, offering substantial benefits, both in terms of internationalisation and competitiveness. However, certain technical, legal and bureaucratic barriers still prevent SMEs from fully enjoying the advantages the single market has to offer.

Hence, the objective should be to make the EU the most conducive environment for SMEs.

Still, SMEs face challenges to compete and grow internationally as their small size, as well as their lack of financial and human resources, prevent them from entering new markets. Moreover, SMEs often struggle with complex administration, resources to upskill their workers making full use of local talent, lengthy processes for support instruments and adapting swiftly to evolving market demands and sustainability requirements. Since SMEs account for the majority of people employed and added value in most EU regions, and can also hire local talent, obstacles that limit their capacity to grow and compete can negatively affect regional economies' capacity to be innovative

and compete. Due to their size, they often lack the capacity and time to focus on their long-term competitiveness and resilience.

It is vital to encourage and support SMEs in expanding their businesses overseas. The globalisation of SMEs has positive effects on profit, employment, investment, wages and productivity. Through overseas expansion, the following effects could be observed: trade in products and services promoted, innovation, productivity and competitiveness improved, and international relations strengthened.

Hence, greater interregional cooperation is crucial to building a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient trade system.

To fully unlock the potential of SMEs and create an environment that enables businesses to start up and scale up, as well as expand overseas, regional governments and the EU should reinforce support instruments for SMEs and invest in a business climate conducive to their development and internationalisation.

Building and connecting resilient ecosystems and establishing a smart regulatory framework

Both European and regional authorities have implemented several strategies and programmes to boost the productivity and competitiveness of SMEs. The presence of a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem immediately benefits European regions by reinforcing their social and economic fabric. Regional governments and the EU should actively support the integration of SMEs in innovative ecosystems. These ecosystems are characterised by the presence of multiple stakeholders that interact with each other in order to forge partnerships and produce knowledge and new and innovative developments through co-creation and collaboration. What enhances an innovation ecosystem is the ability of its participants to build synergies and align themselves to attain common goals, hence the relevance of being an active player. European regions could collaborate to provide SMEs access to bigger ecosystems and share expertise by establishing frameworks for regional cross-border cooperation.

Another important point is to further improve the underlying conditions for investment and business in general, including through a solid and smart regulatory framework, conducive to fostering competitiveness. The EU should introduce a 'smart competitive region' or 'heartland' check for new rules and regulations.

This entails taking into account the specific features of our regions with high populations and industrial density, innovative ecosystems, SMEs, agriculture, etc. The following variables could be taken into account to create a smarter regulatory framework:

- Establishing uniform rules and simplified administrative procedures by setting common technical standards in order to increase interoperability and a level playing-field, but also leaving a sufficient margin for innovation;
- Ensuring a level playing-field when it comes to mitigating climate and environmental risks by reducing the administrative burden and enhancing the compatibility of regulations in interconnected areas (environment, industry, innovation, etc.);
- Targeted support and tax incentives or grants that preserve the integrity of the single market;
- Promoting collaboration amongst public administrations to foster the exchange of good practices and tackle overlapping challenges;
- Ensuring sufficient support for SMEs to address the skills gap by fully tapping into local talent.

SMEs in the green transition

The transition towards more sustainable business models while maintaining competitiveness brings massive challenges for SMEs, especially in the face of legislation such as the Ecodesign Directive, the Due Diligence Directive or the Corporate Sustainable Reporting Directive. The last two initiatives only target big companies, yet can still affect SMEs. The EU and regional governments must play a pivotal role in informing SMEs about climate and environmental-orientated initiatives to enable them to anticipate and adapt to evolving regulatory landscapes. Flexibility and incentives are necessary to assist SMEs in aligning with the ambitious sustainability goals set by the EU. SMEs should be supported in this process and equipped with instruments to understand environmental risks.

One of those instruments is public procurement, which can be used to achieve multiple goals at once as a vast amount of public money is spent on these contracts. European and regional authorities should establish effective incentives that encourage innovation and sustainability within the EU. To enhance SMEs' credibility among conscious consumers, introducing a circular label tailored to SMEs could prove beneficial, complementing the already existing EU Ecolabel.[2]

To reinforce the success rate of SMEs in public procurement, both European and regional authorities should provide access to information, transparent procedures, training and additional simplification measures. Incentives for external consultancy could be provided by the regional governments (and supported by the European Union) to accelerate SMEs' twin transition. Furthermore, building on regional strengths can form the basis for impactful green initiatives led by SMEs. Fostering cross-regional exchange would not only encourage knowledge transfer and innovation, but also align with the principle of smart specialisation. Hence, it would help SMEs make better use of the opportunities offered by the green economy. Furthermore, the collaborative pooling of services, infrastructure and training could prove a powerful catalyst for SMEs towards a sustainable transition, for example for the recycling or circular economy. By sharing resources, SMEs can reduce costs and improve efficiency to foster the adoption of sustainable practices.

Interregional cooperation

1. Install frameworks for cross-border cooperation between SMEs
2. Interconnected innovative regional ecosystems
3. Incentivise innovative and sustainable investment through public procurement and free consultancy
4. Cross-regional exchanges between startups to facilitate knowledge transfer, innovation and smart specialisation
5. Pool services, infrastructure and training as a catalyst for SMEs in a sustainable transition
6. Improve access to IPCEI (Important Projects of Common European Interest), such as hydrogen production, to provide SMEs with the technological and financial resources needed for sustainable ventures

EU support for regions

1. Deepen and broaden the EU single market
2. Establish a solid and smart regulatory framework with a “smart competitive region” or “heartland” check
3. Support the creation of innovative regional ecosystems
4. Incentivise innovative and sustainable investments through public procurement
5. Provide tailored information to SMEs about green legislation to enable them to anticipate and adapt to changing regulatory environments
6. Provide incentives to allow SMEs to adapt to environmental goals and to participate actively in the sustainable transition without compromising their competitiveness

Moreover, improved access to IPCEI (Important Projects of Common European Interest), such as hydrogen production, could provide SMEs with the technological and financial resources they need to embark on sustainable ventures. These initiatives could empower SMEs and bolster regional economies, steering collective progress toward a more sustainable future.

Implementing taxation cuts for companies which provide an answer to both societal and environmental challenges could serve as a powerful incentive for SMEs. This, coupled with the aforementioned measures, would create a conducive environment for SMEs to transition towards more sustainable business models while maintaining competitiveness, especially in the face of upcoming green legislation.

2. European Regions fit for the digital world

In the dynamic landscape of technological development, European regions have to ensure future-proof, secure and trusted digital technologies. This need is underscored by the acknowledgment that data is a fundamental resource crucial for economic growth, competitiveness, innovation, job creation and broader societal progress. Data is the basis for many new products and services, driving productivity and resource efficiency gains across all sectors of the economy, allowing for more personalised products and services, enabling better policy making and upgrading government services. Access to data, particularly qualitative, real-time and meta data is essential to training artificial intelligence systems, with products and services rapidly moving from pattern recognition and insight generation to more sophisticated forecasting techniques and, thus, better decisions. In turn, artificial intelligence could provide an opportunity to cleanse the data on behalf of the user, when adequately trained.

Regional governments are increasingly using data sources to better deal with today's challenges and to make decisions at a strategic, tactical but also operational level. Consider the specific example of regional governments using data sources for urban planning. They can use real-time data on population demographics, traffic patterns and environmental factors to make informed decisions. This could involve designing sustainable infrastructure projects, optimising traffic flows, and implementing measures to enhance overall urban liveability. By pooling these resources and expertise, European regions can efficiently utilise the wealth of available data, driving innovation and informed decision-making. Nonetheless, regional governments face a number of challenges when expanding the use of data.

To unlock the potential of existing data, several challenges have to be tackled both by the EU and by European regions. Two key obstacles revolve around the legal environment and (digital) infrastructure. Solving these challenges demands collaborative efforts, involving the harmonisation of legal frameworks, promotion of interoperability, investment in digital infrastructure and enhancement of cybersecurity measures.

Furthermore, European regions face multiple societal challenges with regard to digitalisation, such as bridging the digital divide, the imperative of fostering inclusive participation and digital literacy, cultivating awareness, trust and expertise, and investment at individual, professional and institutional level. In general, the undesirable consequences of data management and technological change in digital societies must be avoided by anticipating ethical dilemmas, protecting democracy, human rights, etc. European regions can act in different areas to navigate the complexities of the digital age and make their citizens, businesses and their own services more fit for the digital world.

Interregional cooperation

1. Set up a cross-regional sandbox
2. Jointly invest in shared digital infrastructure
3. Enhance cooperation to bridge the digital divide
4. Discuss how to reform education systems, emphasising critical thinking and improving digital literacy
5. Discuss the digital transformation of public administration
6. Exchange best practices on how to attract digital security experts
7. Exchange on the work of and partner with regional local champions

Harmonising data governance: balancing innovation and privacy protection

The absence of a harmonised legal environment poses a significant challenge to data usage and protection. As the world becomes increasingly data-driven, the protection of personal data and ensuring privacy rights for individuals become crucial considerations. The EU already has the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which provides a comprehensive framework for data protection. However, efficiently implementing and enforcing the GDPR is an ongoing challenge.

Data flows are often subject to restrictions and data localisation requirements both within (and beyond) EU borders. Restrictions on the free movement of data are constraining the development of a unified and interconnected EU data economy. Therefore, the EU digital single market should be reinforced. Streamlining regulations and standards across Member States will facilitate the seamless flow of data, fostering innovation and collaboration across borders, and enabling startups and SMEs to scale up and expand their activities throughout the Union and beyond. Finding a balance between protecting data and enabling data sharing and reuse is therefore crucial. Through concerted efforts to align regional, national and European data policies, regions can help to attain this balance.

EU support for regions

1. Establish a harmonised digital legal framework
2. Reinforce the EU digital single market
3. Explore the establishment of a digital ecosystem facilitator

Furthermore, the regulation and standardisation of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), and blockchain pose multiple legal challenges. A long list of EU Regulations and Directives in the digital field have been adopted recently, raising compliance challenges for businesses. Developing policies and regulations that promote innovation while preserving ethical considerations and ensuring accountability for data use is a complex task. To ensure that regulations achieve their goals, it is essential to collaborate with various stakeholders, including industry leaders, research institutions, end-users and regulatory bodies. Given their expertise and proximity to the stakeholders, the regions shall play a crucial role in implementing the digital legal framework. By working together, sharing best practices and adopting common methods, the regions can ensure that the digital single market is further harmonised. In order to protect the rights of EU citizens and at the same time give our companies an opportunity to be highly innovative, the implementation of digital regulations and policies should involve streamlined bureaucratic procedures.

Regions are particularly well placed to set up testing, validation and compliance infrastructure for technologies such as AI, quantum, big 5G networks, edge computing and data centres. This infrastructure ensures efficient data processing and storage, enabling companies to innovate and get their products and services to market quicker. Regardless of whether they launch this infrastructure through EU programmes such as the Digital Europe Programmes, or via national and regional policies, collaboration between regions is essential. By sharing best practices, coordinating standards, and making their infrastructure available to other regions on the basis of their specialisations, regions can set up a truly pan-European, interregional framework of excellence.

Moreover, the emerging use of AI in healthcare holds the potential to enhance clinicians' efficiency, refining medical diagnosis and treatment protocols, and optimising the allocation of both human and technical resources. This transformative change necessitates the adoption of a systematic approach to risk assessment and management, one that specifically addresses the technical, clinical, legal and ethical challenges inherent in the integration of AI, in particular within the realms of healthcare and medicine. The EU must provide robust frameworks for privacy standards and compliance with existing regulations such as the GDPR to safeguard patient information. Establishing guidelines for accountability and transparency in AI applications, alongside adapting existing regulatory bodies, is crucial for navigating liability challenges. To foster responsible AI adoption in healthcare, the EU should lead efforts to develop standards, educate stakeholders, and regularly update regulations to keep pace with technological advancements.

As innovation and digital transformation continue to reshape industries and societies, the management of data is becoming a critical aspect to ensure not only efficiency but also privacy, security and fair competition. Therefore, the potential establishment of an ecosystem facilitator, such as a neutral government body, could be explored. A neutral government body acting as an ecosystem facilitator could play the role of a data intermediary, managing and overseeing data transfers within each respective region or country. The exploration of this approach is a strategic consideration in the pursuit of comprehensive solutions within the realms of innovation and digital transformation.

Finally, there is a need for a more robust and comprehensive European cybersecurity strategy. It should extend beyond the mere safeguarding of digital infrastructures, actively nurturing a dynamic cybersecurity ecosystem that promotes innovation and sustainable progress in the digital realm.

Bridging the digital divide

Efforts to narrow the digital divide have made progress in the past decade, but multiple challenges remain. Social exclusion is a significant risk, highlighting the urgent need for widespread access to the internet and digital services in critical areas such as healthcare, education and public services. It is therefore important to minimise the differences in broadband speeds and emerging technologies such as AI between urban and rural areas, as well as between EU Member States. Enhanced cooperation among European regions and Member States' public authorities is crucial to combatting the growing digital divide.

To guarantee inclusive participation in the digital economy, it is essential to provide open and affordable internet access for everyone. Empowering individuals through regional education reform that emphasises critical thinking and digital literacy is crucial. Promoting inclusivity can be achieved by enabling multilingual communication with machines and exploring innovative technologies such as VR and AI. Regional governments have a crucial role in extending public administration services digitally, fostering transparency, and enhancing accessibility.

They can reinforce the digital literacy of local entities by tailoring educational curricula to the needs of the digital age. Providing toolkits and guidance on implementation can empower local entities to leverage new techniques effectively. In addition, developing digital talent and building capacity are crucial for successful digitalisation.

However, brain drain poses a significant challenge, highlighting the need to retain promising digital talent within the EU for a smooth and efficient transition into a digitally driven future. The European Union has a lot of talent, but the question is how to retain it. One possible solution is to encourage the creation of startups and innovation hubs, which provide IT professionals with the opportunity to contribute to cutting-edge projects and research.

Trust in digital technologies

As data generation increases, it is crucial to prioritise individual interests that align with European values and rights. Trust in data-driven innovations depends on strict adherence to EU data protection regulations. The cross-border nature of digitalisation and regulatory fragmentation undermines trust and effectiveness, exacerbating concerns about data sovereignty and cyber threats. A fragmented regulatory landscape across jurisdictions erodes trust and requires sensitive information to be safeguarded in order to address growing safety and security challenges.

Moreover, regional governments should invest more in digital security experts, recognising the critical role of digital security.

These experts can enhance the robustness of digital systems, bolstering security and instilling citizen trust in the government's ability to protect sensitive information.

Partnering with local champions who are trusted by citizens is identified as a potential strategy to bridge the gap between digital transformation and public acceptance. This could be achieved by expanding the technologies of tested and trusted tech connectors (such as banking apps or platforms for government interaction) to new and even more innovative ones.

3. European regions fit for a sustainable transition

The sustainable transition in European regions presents multiple challenges that extend well beyond those outlined in this report. At its core, this transition requires a shift towards a circular economy, where resources are reused, waste is minimised, barriers within the internal market are eliminated and renewable technologies replace fossil fuels to mitigate climate change. Yet, there are numerous obstacles to overcome.

A significant challenge, for example, lies in implementing a 'just transition' that ensures a fair distribution of the burdens and benefits among workers and communities. It is imperative to consider the social and economic impacts of sustainable transitions. The social economy presents a promising avenue to address this challenge by engaging in circular value chains. It not only fosters positive environmental outcomes but also addresses social and economic disparities. Social economy organisations play a crucial role in creating decent jobs and providing training opportunities, facilitating the transition to sustainable alternatives for those affected.

Furthermore, while economic growth is important, it can also pose challenges for biodiversity and ecosystems. To mitigate the impacts on our planet, there is a need to balance economic development with environmental stewardship. Biodiversity loss, water scarcity and flooding, for example, are complex issues that require innovative solutions. Achieving a climate-neutral society by 2050, as outlined in the European Green Deal, necessitates substantial investments and regional collaboration to address these challenges effectively.

Collaborate on resource management and green technology development

A pressing concern arises from the strain on existing resources due to the digital transition, as well as other strategic sectors such as renewable energy, the digital industry, the aerospace sector and the defence sector. Geopolitical obstacles surrounding critical raw materials further underscore this challenge. To ensure stable supply chains for sustainable technologies, international collaboration is necessary, along with an upscaling of intra-European production of green materials and technologies. Additionally, cooperation on effective recycling of raw materials is essential. A safe and sustainable supply of raw materials can be supported by extraction and dismantling facilities, and by an internal market for waste. Mutual sharing of knowledge, experiences and technologies, and the creation of common infrastructures should be contemplated. For the regions involved in this project, effective recycling of electric vehicle batteries is crucial for the automotive industry, a cornerstone of Europe's economy.

Financing this sustainable transition requires substantial investments. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that nearly 50% of the emission reductions necessary for climate neutrality by 2050 will come from technologies that are not yet on the market, while companies are only one investment cycle away from 2050. Innovative funding mechanisms and robust public-private partnerships will be necessary to support a sustainable transition.

Furthermore, concerns over energy dependence necessitate the diversification of energy sources to mitigate risks and ensure energy security for all. The uneven geographical distribution of renewable energy potential, moreover, presents challenges in harnessing these resources efficiently, and in achieving the EU's climate targets. Strategic planning and investment in innovative technologies such as energy storage and grid enhancements are crucial to balance the energy landscape across regions. Cross-border infrastructure cooperation is key for energy security since it provides additional interdependence between regions and countries, which enhances the security of supply. The EU should commit to infrastructure projects of exceptional economic and/or geostrategic importance, e.g. the Iron Rhine or international hydrogen transport. The sea ports in our regions are ready to play their role.

But also the greening of inland navigation can help the transition to climate neutrality.

We can see, however, that this is lagging behind other transport modes. This is partly due to the specific structure of this sector (predominantly SMEs/family firms owning one or two vessels) and more difficult access to financing as a result. But it is also linked to the more general impact of climate change on water transport in the EU. We – with the support of the EU – should do more to prevent extreme high water (due to flooding) or low water (due to drought) from disrupting our value chains.

Fostering a circular mindset

The transformation of society into vibrant, fair and resilient circular economies demands a shift in mindset within local communities. Education and awareness campaigns play a pivotal role in dispelling myths surrounding the circular economy and in fostering greater understanding of the environmental and social implications of global consumption, while recognising the merits of an open economy.

Investing in collaboration between the social and mainstream economies will be key to accelerating this transition. By working together across the value chain, these sectors can help promote circular practices, reducing waste and maximising resource utilisation.

Monetary incentives for recycling efforts and eco-friendly consumer choices could incentivise responsible behaviour, which will contribute to a higher certainty for users in their consumption choices (e.g. hybrid car vs electric). Besides that, it could also strengthen the local circular economy. Ensuring that EU citizens appreciate the value of their domestic industries and products can lead to greater acceptance and support for EU-based businesses, including those involved in critical materials, technology and energy production.

The concept of local production for local consumption could be an opportunity, not only for bolstering regional economies but also to

Interregional cooperation

1. Collaboration on critical raw materials to ensure stable supply chains for sustainable technologies

2. Cross-border infrastructure cooperation on projects of economic and/or geostrategic importance

reduce dependence on global markets. However, single market and international trade rules must be observed, and efficiency maintained.

In addition, cultivating a cultural shift towards responsible business practices is important. Initiatives such as mainstreaming 'Product as a Service' could encourage businesses to lease products to consumers. This approach would both foster product longevity and maximise optimal resource utilisation. Adopting a product life-cycle perspective is thereby imperative, to assess the sustainability of business practices.

Building a sustainable regulatory framework

Another pivotal aspect lies in enhancing the framework conditions to propel the circular economy and sustainable transformation of industries. This involves refining the regulatory landscape to foster investment and business practices geared towards environmental sustainability and circularity. Implementing regulations setting common standards and guidelines can drive a shift towards durable, repairable products. Standardisation should not be limited to the EU's internal market. By working towards multilateral standards, the EU can become a global standard setter, which would give a competitive advantage to European industry and level the global playing field at the same time.

Furthermore, clear guidance and standards could support sustainable spatial planning and adaptive space reuse. Criteria could for example be included for evaluating the economic, social and environmental impacts, to ensure alignment with sustainability goals.

In addition, a robust regulatory framework is needed for the efficient sharing of mobility data and a connected EU market for goods and services. Standards for secure data sharing within this framework would enhance resource allocation and waste reduction. This also involves integrating workflows with product creation, which would enable more efficient resource use and regional collaboration.

EU support for regions

1. Regulatory framework enhancement to foster investment and business practices geared towards environmental sustainability and circularity

2. Innovative funding mechanisms and robust public-private partnerships to support the sustainable transition

3. Facilitating cross-border cooperation for renewable energy projects and transport infrastructure

4. A Europe fit for global competition

In today's globalised world and geopolitical context, European regions face significant challenges in the realms of trade, diversification, dependencies and economic security concerns. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to ensure that the European Union maintains its competitiveness and its position in global value chains, including its global standard-setting capacity.

The diminished global power of the EU and the challenging geopolitical context have sparked concerns about the EU's dependency, especially for critical resources, goods, services and technologies. A fear of losing its strategic autonomy in crucial areas has led some to push for protectionist measures, or to reconsider their trade policies and shorten supply chains for essential goods. In our view it is important to strive for open strategic autonomy. This should be built on two pillars: reinforcing the EU's competitiveness and diversifying value chains through a variety of international partnerships.

To strengthen its competitiveness without resorting to protectionism, the EU should undertake several actions conducive to deepening and broadening the single market, the main force behind European productivity and prosperity. This should go hand-in-hand with a strengthened and focused European industrial and innovation policy, supported by diverse international partnerships.

Stimulating innovation and collaboration in R&D

To stimulate innovation, the Horizon Europe programme is of growing importance. As the programme is oversubscribed, it requires increased financial allocations for the remaining duration and improved financial envelopes in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) while sticking to its core principle of excellence. Horizon Europe's budget should not unduly finance new policy initiatives; instead, synergies with other EU projects should be leveraged. Using AI to create a database of Horizon Europe projects, for example, could provide valuable insights into potential areas for cooperation and synergy. By identifying overlapping interests, complementary research and innovation projects, Europe can streamline its resources, avoid duplication, and foster collaboration between Member States and regions, research institutions and companies.

It is equally important that research and development valorisation is enhanced. When developing new programmes or evaluating the existing ones, it's crucial to maintain the strengths of EU research policy, such as ensuring bottom-up innovation. However, it's also essential to complement these strengths with a new model of collaboration between knowledge institutes, industrial actors, governments and societal actors (quadruple helix). This must lead to mutual benefits, including better funding of concrete research projects that respond directly to societal needs and commercialisation of the resulting applications. In doing so, we increase Europe's relevance internationally and avoid costly duplication (e.g. automotive sector where collaboration on electrification, semiconductors, and digitalisation is needed). The logic of excellence must be maintained.

Furthermore, cohesion policy is crucial as well to support research, development and innovation in the regional context. It is unique in that it allows the necessary investment and innovation efforts to be made in our industrial ecosystems, at a level as close as possible to our SMEs. Future cohesion policy should remain focused on the support of the twin transition in the regions. In this regard, it is important that cohesion policy can support all regions to overcome specific challenges, also economically strong and innovative regions. It is in the strategic interest of the

EU support for regions

1. Educate EU citizens about the environmental and social implications of global consumption to enhance support for EU based businesses and revitalise local industries
2. Undertake actions conducive to deepening and widening the single market
3. Stimulate innovation and collaboration in R&D
4. Work towards a modern cohesion policy focused on the support of the twin transition in the regions
5. Limit the use of state aid to situations such as market failure, during a profound transformation of industry in the context of global competiveness, periods of crisis or the expansion to emerging markets
6. Invest in EU-wide infrastructure for integrated supply chain management
7. Expand international partnerships through comprehensive trade agreements
8. Invest in multilateral (technical) standard-setting capacity

EU as a whole that, in the context of a rapidly changing innovation environment, the current highly innovative industrial and economic clusters are supported and strengthened, given the positive spill-over and learning effects they generate for economic actors throughout their supply chains.

Intensified exchanges between regional managing authorities and the European Commission and between different Commission services could strengthen synergies between Horizon Europe and cohesion policy, while maintaining the principle of excellence in Horizon Europe. This would contribute to increased transparency, consistency and relevance between the two instruments. The EU should also work towards a simpler and more modern cohesion policy that remains committed to long-term objectives, with sufficient opportunities for growth, such as through investment in research and innovation. The shared management of these funds should be safeguarded.

Strengthening connections between regional ecosystems and EU cluster policy is vital to promote innovation and competitiveness. Enhanced collaboration between geographically distinct clusters of businesses and research institutions will foster innovation and boost the EU's competitive advantage. In that light, maintaining the strengths of our R&D and innovation in critical sectors such as chips (semiconductors) and AI will require a bottom-up approach which is supplemented by a new model of collaboration between knowledge institutions and industrial actors. Such an approach will lead to the improved commercialisation and valorisation of the resulting applications if this approach is guided by a rationale of excellence.

Reinforcing the EU's position in global value chains

To maintain the EU's position in global value chains, it will be vital to build a connected Europe. A crucial step in this direction is investing in EU-wide infrastructure for integrated supply chain management, including traceability systems, to ensure the reliability and resilience of value chains. A well-established infrastructure can help the EU respond more effectively to disruption and improve the transparency of supply chains. This also involves allocating resources to projects that enhance connectivity and cooperation across regions. Besides building on more interconnected infrastructure (for transport, digital, energy, etc.) within, the EU should also develop diverse infrastructure and transport links with its neighbouring countries and the rest of the world. Diversification of transport routes, infrastructure and entrance points into Europe will reduce unhealthy dependencies.

In this regard, the EU should expand its international partnerships. Concluding ambitious comprehensive trade agreements or more limited agreements focusing on certain resources, products and technologies is an important driver for the diversification of value chains, and therefore the reduction of (strategic) dependencies. Regions should also increase support for the internationalisation of their SMEs, including raising awareness of and remedies for the risks of over-dependence on one or a limited number of import and export markets. Cooperation and the exchange of best practices between regional Trade Promotion Organisations can help increase capacity and raise awareness.

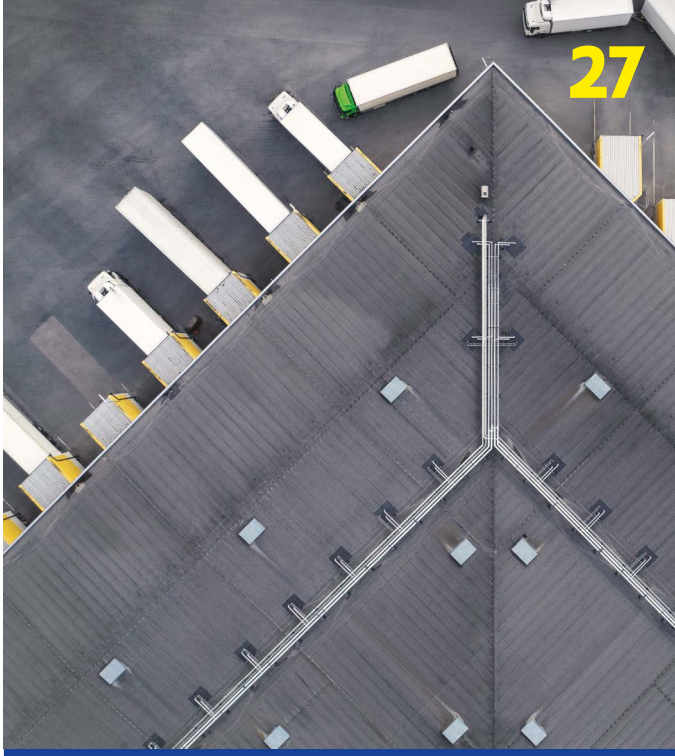
Furthermore, regions could explore how procurement could be used as a lever to enable the negotiation of better deals for critical materials, technology and energy sources. By collectively addressing challenges in the supply chain, the EU can exploit its global leverage.

A fair competition policy has proven to be crucial for economic prosperity. In order to avoid the disruptive effects of a subsidy race, it is imperative that we maintain a state aid framework that safeguards the single market.

However, the use of the state aid may be justified in a limited number of situations, such as in cases of market failure, during a profound transformation of industry in the context of global competitiveness, in periods of crisis or for the expansion of an emerging market. All regions should have equal opportunities to make use of these options. However, this should always take place within a strictly defined and targeted framework, with clear rules and limited in time, and should be equally applied to all regions and Member States to ensure a level playing field. Furthermore, the EU also needs to work with international partners on enforced (multilateral) state aid rules to foster a global level playing field for industrial development.

Our competitiveness can also be enhanced globally if we remain committed to developing technical standards and promote these to our trading partners. Fragmented standards create additional barriers to international trade. If the EU works proactively to develop new standards (e.g. on emerging technologies such as cloud computing and self-driving vehicles) with like-minded partners, we can guarantee high and uniform standards that are easy for our companies to use. This would again give the EU a comparative advantage.

Reinforcing global competitiveness and connectivity in the face of regional challenges therefore requires a collaborative and strategic approach. Opportunities for cooperation, combined with proactive strategies and EU support, will enable European regions to not only survive but thrive in an interconnected world.



Interregional cooperation

1. Explore the role of procurement in achieving cost efficiencies, negotiate better deals and collectively address challenges in the supply chain

2. Strengthen links between regional ecosystems and EU cluster policy to promote innovation and competitiveness

3. Facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange among different regions to create synergies that benefit the entire EU

4. Allocate resources to projects that enhance connectivity and cooperation across regions

5. European regions skilled for the future

The challenges faced by European regions in the realm of skills and the labour market are multifaceted, reflecting the complex nature of the global economy. One of the challenges the EU faces is related to demography, notably a demographic decline that will unfold in the near future and will affect the pool of young talent. The working age population in the EU is expected to shrink over the coming years and decades, with a decrease of an additional 35 million people by 2050.[3] The EU's workforce is currently the most educated in its history, although skills mismatches are persistent and expected to grow with regard to the green and digital transitions. The availability of skilled staff remains one of the most important problems
for a quarter of the EU's SMEs, according to the 2019 SAFE survey.[4]

2023 was claimed as the European Year of Skills and is aiming to provide new momentum to reach the EU 2030 headline targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights of at least 60% of adults in training every year, and at least 78% in employment. When facing workforce shortages, skills mismatches are an even more pressing issue that requires employees to have a better understanding of their own skills and capabilities, and overall, for there to be a better understanding of the skills needed for current and future jobs, as well as how to implement upskilling and reskilling in the workplace. Better matching of tools and collaboration between all the stakeholders involved, including the public employment services (PES), can be essential in combatting skills mismatches.

There's also the issue of insufficient quality jobs, stemming from factors such as poor working conditions, low pay and unstable contracts, brain drain, a lack of work-life balance and a lack of development or career advancement opportunities. EU regions often find themselves in a 'war for talent', competing for the limited pool of (tech and green) talent available. The availability of workers with the appropriate technical, soft and transversal skills will be crucial for the viability of the twin transitions and EU competitiveness, emphasising the need for reskilling and upskilling. Moreover, foresight mapping of the skills required for the future will be key, especially for SMEs. Hence, ensuring that European regions facing a talent development trap become more resilient and attractive is crucial for the EU's competitiveness and its commitment to leaving nobody and no place behind.

Interregional cooperation

1. Cooperate to create hubs of excellence attracting skilled professionals
2. Create collaborative strategies among EU regions to attract skills and talent to SMEs
3. Encourage partnerships between educational institutions and businesses
4. Jointly pool data to forecast the evolving skills needed in the job market

Attracting and elevating talent

In addressing skill shortages and elevating talent in the European Union, multiple actions can be taken. First, it is important to foster the availability of quality jobs, which are jobs characterised by sufficient renumeration, labour market security and the quality of the working environment[5] for mobile (EU) workers. This includes work-life balance and flexible working arrangements. Such measures are expected to attract talented individuals (and in certain cases their families), thereby enhancing the retention and recruitment of skilled professionals. Life-long learning remains crucial in light of the constantly evolving job market, which is also reflected in the three 2030 headline targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Ambitiously, a European centre akin to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) could be established which would dedicate its work to high-end technological research and development. It would foster groundbreaking research but also serve as a beacon attracting top-tier talent from around the world. Simultaneously, EU-wide high-end research universities and centres should be developed, creating hubs of excellence that attract skilled professionals and researchers.

Additionally, implementing mobility programmes for young talent that connect businesses within the same or related sectors could serve as a valuable initiative to enhance the attractiveness of individual enterprises. Furthermore, there is potential to establish a matchmaking platform supported by the EU, aiming to facilitate mobility in response to regional demands.

EU support for regions

1. Establish a European centre akin to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
2. Support EU-wide high-end research universities and centres
3. Harmonise the EU legal migration acquis
4. Maximise Erasmus+ for dual learning

Strategic frameworks for skills recognition

A proper understanding and valuing of skills and qualifications is fundamental in order to achieve a better match between the supply of skills and the needs of the labour market. Use of the ESCO, the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations, should be optimised. It can also help individuals to acquire and update skills throughout their life as they move between different types and levels of education, and between education and employment, within and across countries.

As businesses struggle to attract skilled workers, the EU will support its Member States with the attraction and retention of international talent through the newly introduced EU Talent Pool. It is still to be seen how this will play out in practice. In order to succeed, European policymakers have to look beyond job opportunities and legal pathways to engage in a broader discussion on factors like integration, quality of labour market opportunities and labour mobility. Against this backdrop, taking into account the current fragmented and limited EU legal migration acquis, the EU should provide a well-defined and comprehensive EU migration framework to attract international talent and streamline it as a cost-effective way for SMEs to identify potential future employees.

SMEs' access to skilled workers

SMEs often experience difficulties in hiring and attracting skilled workers and retaining knowledge within the organisation, especially in competition with large enterprises. This situation underscores the urgent need for collaborative strategies among EU regions. By pooling data, European regions could get involved in the evolving skills needed in the job market, allowing educational institutions and training programmes to align their curricula with the demands of SMEs but also other enterprises. Furthermore, person-centric approaches and customised training programmes, tailored to the needs of a region, as well as sufficient funding for this, are key. This would enable European regions to create a diverse, dynamic labour force capable of navigating the challenges posed by the evolving job market and digital age, leaving no one behind. European regions should encourage partnerships between educational and training institutions, businesses and other stakeholders to ensure that the skills being taught align with the needs of the SMEs. Moreover, maximising the potential of existing programmes, such as Erasmus+ for dual learning, can bridge the gap between education and SMEs by offering practical, hands-on experience.

Conclusions

This report emphasises the important role that European regions play in addressing the challenges currently faced by the EU, both internally and externally. The report identifies five key areas of intervention: SMEs fit for the future, European regions fit for the digital world, European regions fit for sustainable transition, a Europe fit for global competition, and European regions skilled for the future.

SMEs fit for the future
- Building and connecting resilient ecosystems and establishing a smart regulatory framework
- SMEs in the green transition

A Europe fit for global competition
- Stimulating innovation and collaboration in R&D
- Reinforcing the EU's position in global value chains

European Regions fit for the digital world
- Harmonising data governance: balancing innovation and privacy protection
- Bridging the digital divide
- Trust in digital technologies

European regions skilled for the future
- Attracting and elevating talent
- Strategic frameworks for skills recognition
- SMEs' access to skilled workers

European regions fit for a sustainable transition
- Collaborate on resource management and green technology development
- Fostering acircular mindset
- Building a sustainable regulatory framework

Its recommendations are ambitious yet actionable, aiming to highlight both opportunities for interregional cooperation and areas where European regions require more support from the EU. They highlight the importance of incorporating strategic foresight exercises in both regional and EU policies, establishing frameworks for cross-border cooperation, addressing tensions between the green and digital transitions, creating an environment that promotes the growth and internationalisation of SMEs, and developing skills and attracting talent, while remaining committed to long-term objectives and enhancing the EU's competitiveness.

This report presents the results of a joint strategic foresight exercise by regional administrations on the four resilience dimensions of the EU. This exercise has facilitated the exchange of views among the government leaders during the Leaders Meeting "Fit for the Future: Global Challenges, Regional Solutions", organised by the Minister-President of the Government of Flanders on 18th April 2024. During the Leaders Meeting, the government leaders of innovative European regions sent a strong signal to the EU that European regions have important levers to tackle global challenges. This culminated in the signing of a political declaration, which you can read here:

Annex

REGIONAL GOOD/BEST PRACTICES:

1. **Athumi: Trust in data collaboration - Flanders**

1. Mission and Core Focus:

- Athumi, a pioneering data utility company initiated by the Government of Flanders, is dedicated to fostering a new era of prosperity by championing individual and business control over data.
- The company's overarching mission revolves around encouraging and facilitating secure data collaboration, emphasising the growth of innovative data solutions within companies while maintaining stringent control over data.

2. Innovative Data Management Approach:

- The core strategy involves empowering citizens to share their personal data securely via intelligently designed data vaults, marking a departure from conventional data management practices.
- Athumi offers tailored solutions. Citizens will have access to secure data vaults, streamlining daily tasks such as data sharing with potential employers, car rental companies, healthcare service providers, banks, etc.

3. Empowering Individual Control and Privacy:

- Athumi places strong emphasis on individual control over data, granting people the authority to decide what data to share, with whom, and under which specific circumstances. This approach ensures maximum protection of individual privacy, fostering a sense of empowerment in data sharing activities.

4. Strategic Partnerships and Ecosystem Integration:

- Athumi's commitment to success is evident in its strategic partnerships with organisations such as Randstad, Microsoft and Doccle.
- The collaboration with itsme® is particularly noteworthy, as it facilitates secure data access and consent for sharing through the itsme® app, demonstrating a holistic approach to data security and convenience.

2. **i2CAT – The Internet Research Centre – Catalonia**

1. Mission and core focus:

- A research and innovation centre based in Barcelona committed to designing and building the digital society of the future by leveraging the knowledge gained from cutting-edge European and local R&D projects in the fields of 5G/6G, IoT, immersive and interactive technologies, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, blockchain, space communications and digital society technologies.
- i2CAT wants to lead the challenge of designing the digital society of the future based on research and innovation in advanced digital technologies.
- The centre promotes mission-driven knowledge to solve business challenges, co-create solutions with a transformative impact, empower citizens through open and participative digital social innovation with territorial capillarity, and promote pioneering and strategic initiatives.

2. Objectives:

- Leading and managing initiatives that support and contribute to the definition and implementation of digital policies
- Promoting innovation for industry and industrial ecosystems
- Boosting technology transfer

3. Research:

- i2CAT has a leading position in the research and development of digital advanced technologies within the European R&D ecosystem. To date, the i2CAT Foundation has obtained 23 projects within the Horizon Europe funding programme (2021-2027) with an assigned budget of more than 9.5 million euros.

4. Research topics:

- Smart Networks and Services
- Immersive and Interactive Technologies
- Distributed Artificial Intelligence
- Cybersecurity and Blockchain
- AI-driven Systems
- Space Comms

5. Innovation Business Development:

- i2CAT promotes strategic alliances with private companies and the innovation ecosystem players to co-create in fields such as Smart Environment, eHealth, Industry 4.0, Autonomous and connected Mobility, or Creative Industries.

3. **Basque Hydrogen Corridor: Pioneering the Future of Energy – The Basque Country**

1. Mission and Core Focus:
   - The Basque Hydrogen Corridor embodies the region's commitment to leading the energy transition, with hydrogen at the forefront, to drive decarbonisation and economic growth.
2. Public-Private Partnership:
   - More than 120 organisations, including companies, technology centres and local authorities, form a strong public-private partnership driving the Corridor's initiatives.
3. Comprehensive Value Chain Collaboration:
   - As a pioneering 'Hydrogen Valley', the Corridor promotes collaboration across the hydrogen value chain, from production to use in advanced applications.
4. Economic and Environmental Impact:
   - The initiative is expected to mobilise €3,000 million, create over 1,300 direct jobs and 6,700 indirect jobs, while significantly reducing emissions by over 1,600,000 tonnes per year.
5. Innovation and Industry Leadership:
   - By engaging companies and stakeholders, the Corridor aims to establish itself as a hub for innovative hydrogen technologies, contributing to regional economic development and global industry leadership.

4. #upperVISION2030 Strategy for economy and research - Upper Austria

1. Mission and Core Focus:

- To survive in global competition and to secure the long-term viability of Upper Austria as a location for business, industry and research, a uniform vision of the future of Upper Austria is needed that can be flexibly adapted to new trends and developments.
- #upperVISION2030 serves as a strategic framework for action for the location site partners and supports the rolling planning of measures in the annual cycle.

2. Method

- With the realignment of the economic and research strategy pursues the following objectives

  a. Analysis of current economic, social and technological trends
  b. Agile and rolling site development
  c. Coordination of all location site partners on the key topics and
  d. Creating transparency

3. One concrete example:

- One example of the concrete implementation of the strategic goals defined in the fields of action is the development of the "Technology Roadmap: Sustainable Plastics Solutions".
- Based on the vision of positioning Upper Austria as a recognized model region for sustainable plastics solutions and circular economy, a structured process was started on how this vision can be achieved. The aim was to create a technology roadmap with a time horizon of 2030, which should include specific topics and options for action.
- The workshops with the different stakeholders in the value chain resulted in three specific topics: 1) Design4Circularity, 2) Collection/Sorting/Recycling and 3) Materials/Technology/ Research & Development.
- The roadmap is strategically embedded in the Plastics Location 2030 initiative with the three main pillars of RTI activities, qualification and image.

Endnotes

[1] EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2020, Strategic Foresight Report https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0493&from=EN

[2] The EU Ecolabel is the only EU-wide ISO 14024 Type I ecolabelling scheme. Recognised throughout Europe, it includes multiple criteria and tackles the main environmental impacts of products throughout their full lifecycle, from the extraction of raw material to disposal.

[3] BUSINESS EUROPE, 2023, Analysis of Labour and Skills Shortages, 2023-10-23_analysis_of_labour_and_skills_shortages.pdf (businesseurope.eu)

[4] EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2020, An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe, SME Strategy (europa.eu)

[5] OECD, Job Quality, Job quality - OECD

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