



COOPERATION PROGRAMME INTERREG V A ITALY-MALTA

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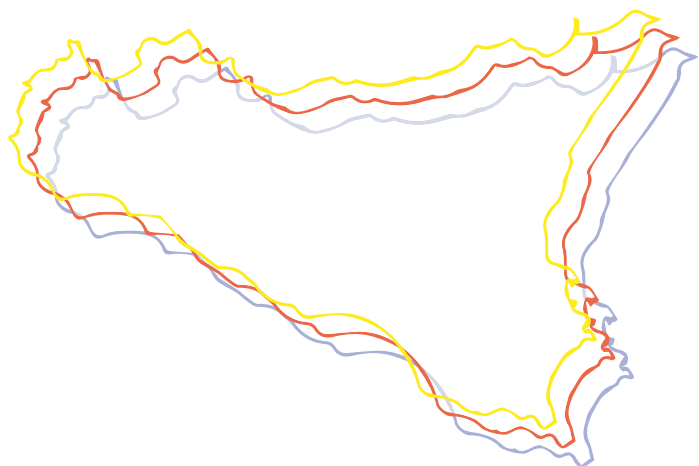
MOVE ON: CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY THROUGH THE VOUCHERS PROVISION

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GUIDE TO OPPORTUNITIES AND THE SUPPORTING INSTRUMENTS OF OCCUPATIONAL INTEGRATION OF YOUNG

April 2023



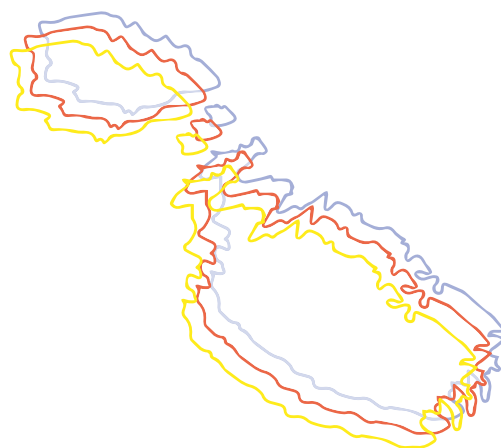
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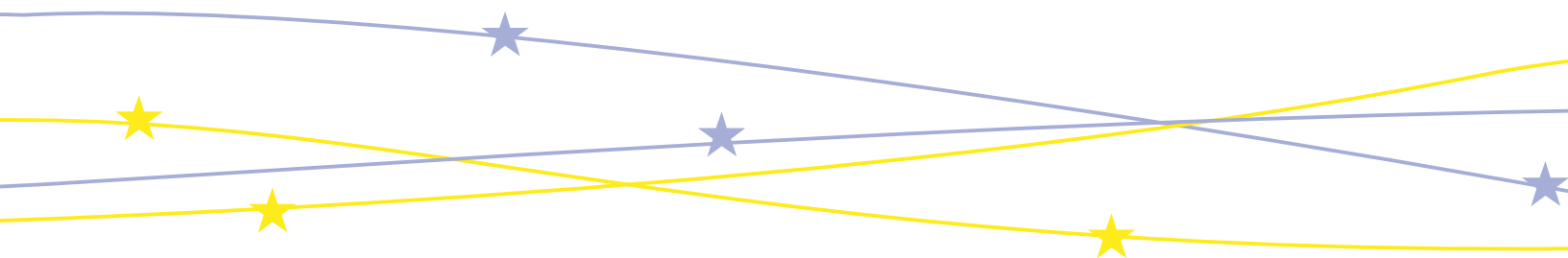
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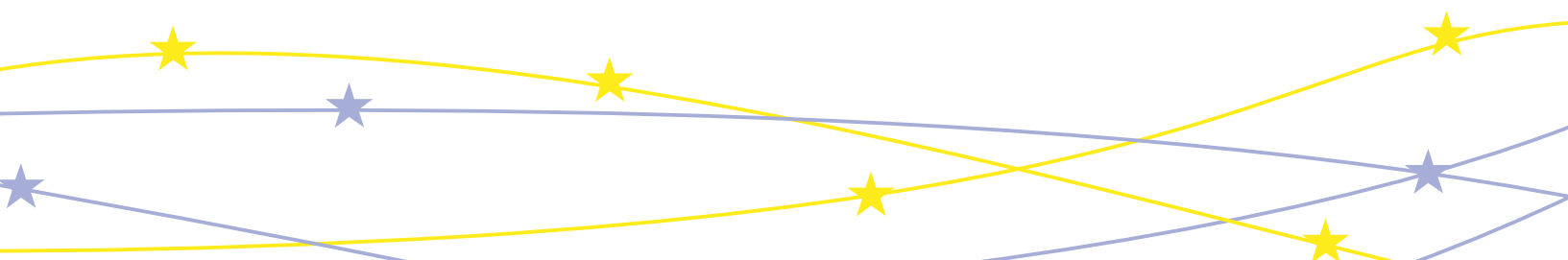


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INTRODUCTION:

AIMS AND CONTENTS OF THE GUIDE

This Guide has been created as part of the “Move on: cross-border mobility through voucher provision” project, specially the Communication Work Package. It has been primarily developed using desk methodologies and constant collaboration and exchange of ideas between project partners and associated entities.

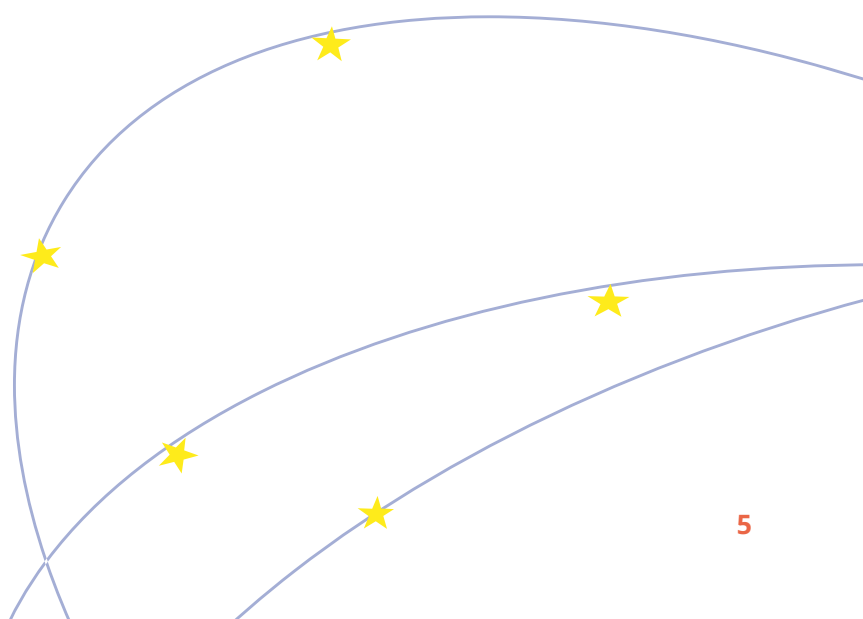
The overall purpose of this document is to provide young jobseekers, businesses and other regional stakeholders involved in “Move on” with a tool that summarises the main instruments that can help consolidate cross-border mobility experiences, and more generally, promote sustainability and capitalization of the intervention model tested by the project.

The tools presented in the Guide clearly do not exhaust the broad range of instruments that can be activated to promote employment, mobility and development in the cross-border region. In fact, new opportunities will arise as the 2021-2027 Operational Programmes of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) come into full implementation. These new events will be carefully monitored and promoted through “National Memoranda of Understanding” and the cross-border network that Move on is developing.

The Guide follows the following structure

- **Chapter 1** briefly introduces the “MOVE ON” project, focusing specifically on the significant results achieved just a few months after its completion (such as assessment and follow-up actions carried out to date, which indicate that over 93% of the interviewees believe that their mobility experience has increased their job opportunities).
- **Chapter 2** provides a brief economic overview of the cross-border cooperation area. Clear signs of recovery are being observed in both Sicily and Malta after the pandemic phase. However, some criticalities still exist regarding youth and female employment, particularly in Sicily. Therefore, specific differences between the two nations and their cooperation areas are highlighted through some synthetic indicators developed by the EU, which can be resolved through greater cooperation between the two economies, particularly in the field of professional mobility.
- **Chapter 3** presents some of the main employment support tools related to Sicily (such as tools for active job search, support for entrepreneurship, direct incentives for businesses to hire new staff), as well as highlighting some measures envisaged in two key programmes for the 2021-2027 period: the “National Programme for Youth, Women and Work” and the Regional FSE+ Programme of the Sicilian Region.

- **Chapter 4** presents some of the main employment support tools related to Malta, following a similar pattern to the previous chapter (e.g. tools for job search, training, entrepreneurship, tax incentives for hiring, etc.).
- **Chapter 5** is dedicated to some of the important tools the European Union offers to promote training, mobility and employment for both young jobseekers and employers: the EURES (European Employment Services) network and the EUROPASS platform.
- **Chapter 6** is also dedicated to tools made available by the European Union. In particular, it presents some programs of greater interest, at a territorial and/or sectoral level, first in the context of European Territorial Cooperation (the so-called “Interreg” programs), particularly for the Mediterranean area, then in the so-called “directly managed” programs by the European Commission.
- Finally, the document concludes by highlighting the added value expected from the **“Move on” cross-border network** and some possible avenues of work in terms of capitalization of the results achieved by the project, the promotion of new cross-border and transnational cooperation initiatives as well as the development of major synergies with mainstream programmes.



1. THE “MOVE ON” PROJECT

“**MOVE ON**” is a project funded under the **INTERREG V-A ITALY-MALTA 2014-2020**¹

Cross-border Cooperation Program, managed by the Sicilian Region - Regional Department of Programming and Area 7 - Program Management for European Territorial Cooperation and Supranational Cooperation, in collaboration with the corresponding Maltese Authorities.

The project, led by the consortium **Ass.For.SEO a r.l.** and partner **Hermes Corporation Ltd**, aims to promote greater balance in the labour market in the Sicily-Malta cooperation area, contributing to employment growth in priority sectors and, more generally, to the competitiveness of the cross-border area as a whole.

The main challenge that MOVE ON has faced is youth unemployment, and the project’s top priority action is supporting the work mobility program of young people and recent graduates living in the cooperation area, with the provision of mobility vouchers worth €12,000 each. Mobility vouchers have been mainly allocated for six-month internships aiming employment insertion to be carried out in SMEs and Sicilian and Maltese organisations operating in the following priority sectors for the cooperation program:

- **Blue economy;**
- **Health and quality of life** (biotechnology, Mediterranean food and diet, services and networks for human health);
- **Environmental protection;**
- **Services for sustainable tourism.**

The selection of voucher recipients, carried out through public notices, involved over **4,000 recipients and 8,000 companies** in various promotion activities. The project, launched in November 2020, has carried out an intense communication campaign alongside involvement of the target audience activities and territorial promotion events to encourage adhesion and participation in the program, overcoming, at the same time, the difficult pandemic and post-pandemic crisis.

To reach recipients, companies, and stakeholders, MOVE ON’s communication strategy team has employed both traditional and digital communication tools. In addition to developing a project website - <https://www.moveon-italiamalta.it> - the main social media channels have been used with the creation of dedicated profiles on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Furthermore, several online events dedicated to both recipients and companies have been organised, along with 12 newsletters.

¹ Priority Axis: Axis 2 - Promoting the competitiveness of the cross-border area - Investment priority: 8.e - Integrating cross-border labor markets, including cross-border mobility, joint local employment initiatives, information services and consultancy and joint training - Specific objective: 2.2 - Promoting the mobility of workers in the cross-border area through the creation of networks - Public Notice 2/2019 “targeted call” for projects under Axes 1 - 2 - 3 of the cooperation - Eligible action: B - Interventions aimed at financing cross-border mobility through the provision of vouchers.

A key role in implementing the project has been played by the two activated **territorial helpdesks**, one in Sicily and one in Malta, which have provided information and assistance to young people and companies, both in the selection and allocation phases of mobility vouchers and during the implementation of mobility programs.

Over **800 requests for information, 250 applications for vouchers, and the participation of about 90 companies in the cross-border area** were recorded for the selection process. The selection process subsequently led to the allocation of **over 100 vouchers** and the implementation of **98 mobility programs**.

The response to the work opportunity offered was overwhelmingly taken by young Sicilian recipients (over 90% of mobility experiences), which was consistent with the analysis of the cross-border area's labour market carried out in the project's initial phase. The response of Maltese young recipients was lower, while the participation of Maltese companies hosting Sicilian interns was certainly positive.

The internships, matching with the choices indicated by young recipients, have taken place in all the cooperation program's priority sectors, with a prevalence of **services for sustainable tourism**. Moreover, this sector has also shown the highest post-internship insertion rates in companies.

The results of the assessment and follow-up actions currently show more than satisfactory results: **over 93% of the interviewed recipients stated that the mobility experience has increased their job opportunities, and over 47% of recipients have received at least one job offer after the mobility experience**. MOVE ON, therefore, allowed Sicilian and Maltese young people to have an important opportunity for professional and personal growth.

The project partnership was supported by several associated entities, including the University of Palermo, Sicindustria, the Chamber of Commerce of Palermo and Enna, the Arrupe Training Center, the Luigi Sturzo Training Center, and important Maltese companies, which is a testimony to the involvement of important institutional, entrepreneurial, and cultural stakeholders in the area.

To promote and capitalize on the project's results, a **cross-border Network** will be established, supported by two **national Memoranda of Understanding**, aimed at promoting mobility and employment in general, within the 2021-2027 programming of the SIE Funds (European Structural and Investment Funds). In fact, by setting up a stable network of companies and stakeholders in the cross-border area, young people and companies can be assured of a contact point capable of promoting the exchange of information on employment opportunities and tools, economic growth, and cross-border and transnational partnership opportunities, and the meeting of labour demand and supply.

2. ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK OF THE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AREA.

2.1 FOCUS: SICILY²

According to Infocamere³ data, in 2022, there was a **slight growth in the entrepreneurial activity** in Sicily (positive balance between registrations and cessations equal to 2,399 companies) for a total stock of approximately 479,000 companies at the end of the year. The growth rate compared to 2021 was 0.5%, which is lower than the national average (0.79%), placing Sicily eleventh among Italian regions. This slight growth has affected all Sicilian provinces - particularly Palermo (+0.81%), Messina (+0.64%), Catania (+0.61%), and Syracuse (+0.53%) - except for Caltanissetta (0.00%) and Enna (-0.24%). At the end of 2022, the sectoral distribution of Sicilian companies is as follows (economic activities listed in order of prevalence on the total number of regional companies): Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (30.4%); Agriculture, forestry, and fishing (20.6%); Other sectors (15.4%); Construction (12%); Accommodation and food service activities (7.4%); Manufacturing (7.1%); Other service activities (3.9%); Rental, travel agencies, and support services for businesses (3.1%). According to data from the Bank of Italy (referring to the first eight months of 2022), thanks to the growth of the entrepreneurial activity in Sicily, **employment has grown by 3.9%** compared to the same period in 2021, more than the national average (3.6%), reaching a value in line with the pre-pandemic period. This employment growth, which has affected both men and women, was mainly determined by dependent work, while the number of self-employed workers has decreased. Compared to the same period in 2021, **the employment rate rises to 42.3%** (+2.5 points) and **the unemployment rate drops to 17.7%** (-2.6 points). Consequently, the number of people looking for employment has decreased by about 12%.

Therefore, in 2022, Sicilian companies are growing, and after various difficulties and uncertainties (pandemic, Russia-Ukraine crisis, energy price increases, etc.), they are hiring again, especially with permanent-work contracts (about 3,700 more than in the same period of 2021). More specifically, exclusive of cessations, almost 57,000 jobs were created in the first eight months of 2022, figures driven mainly by "Tourism" (35,783), followed by "Other services" (12,726), "Construction" (3,280), "Industry in the narrow sense" (2,869), and "Trade" (2,339).

However, despite these positive signals, it should be noted that the aforementioned employment and unemployment rates are still far from the national average (respectively 42.3% vs. 59.8% and 17.7% vs. 8.4%). **In particular, the distance of young people and women from the labour market is still very concerning.** In Sicily, in fact, the rate of the so-called "Neets" (young people who do not study, work, or train) is the highest in the country, 30.2%, a figure higher than ten points compared to the Italian average (19.8%) and practically triple compared to the EU average (10.8%). As for women, despite recent improvements in Sicily, less than one in three women (32.9%) are employed, compared to an Italian average of 51% and a European

² For updates on the regional economy:

<https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/economie-regionali/index.html>

<https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/rapporti-di-lavoro-e-relazioni-industriali/Pagine/Studi-e-statistiche.aspx>

<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/16777>

³ <https://www.infocamere.it/movimpres>

Union average of 64.9%. The employment rate for women in the region is one of the lowest in Italy, and although the gender gap has been gradually decreasing over the past few years, it remains significant. The situation is even worse for young people, with the highest percentage of “NEETs” (young people out of employment, education, or training) in the country, standing at 30.2% in Sicily. This figure is over ten percentage points higher than the Italian average (19.8%) and almost triple the EU average (10.8%).

2.2 FOCUS: MALTA

The Maltese economy achieved high levels of development compared to the EU average before the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2015 and 2019, the country registered an annual GDP growth rate of 7.2%, mainly supported by a rapid growth in the service sector, particularly in online gaming, finance, and tourism. Like other European countries, Malta was significantly affected by the pandemic but recovered quickly. In 2020, GDP decreased by 8.3% due to the reduction in international tourism⁴ and the contraction of domestic consumption caused by partial lockdowns. Consumer spending decreased by up to 10.2%, especially in retail and hospitality. Investments decreased mainly due to the construction sector's decline. However, the Maltese government issued a series of mitigating actions to protect income and promote employment.

In 2022, the improvement of business and consumer confidence, the recovery of investments, and the reopening to tourists have supported the economy's recovery, estimated at a growth rate of 9.4%. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia did not significantly affect Malta's economic growth, as the country has low commercial exposure to the two states involved in the conflict. The first months of 2023 show quite strong economic growth (+4%) due to the recovery of exports and the implementation of measures of the European Recovery and Resilience Plan⁵.

Employment continued to increase during the pandemic, albeit at a slower pace. The employment rate continued to grow and reached 78.6% in 2021. The unemployment rate, which rose to 4.4% in 2020 (well below the EU average), recovered its historical low of 3.5% in 2021. However, **the gap between male and female employment rates remains one of the largest in the EU** (16.8 percentage points compared to the EU average of 10.8 percentage points in 2021), although registering one of the largest decreases in percentage points within the EU in the last decade. This gap is present in strategic sectors as well. For example, women working in the ICT sector are only 11% of the total compared to the EU average of 19%⁶.

⁴ The tourism sector generates about 18% of the total Maltese employment - ref. <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC121262>

⁵ https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/maltas-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en

⁶ Digital Economy and Society Index 2021.

It should also be noted that Malta faces a **shortage of labour and significant skill mismatches in all sectors**. Due to a narrow labour market and an education system that produces rather poor results, the shortage of workers and specialised skills has increased in recent years. The short-term mitigating actions adopted following the pandemic should address these gaps, especially in sectors such as ICT, tourism, health, and long-term care. Despite significant improvements in training in recent years, these critical issues are fuelled by one of the **highest percentages of low-skilled workers in the EU** (36% vs EU 24.9%, 2021 data), low participation of adults (25-64 years) in learning, and a high school dropout rate (11% vs EU 9.7%). Many efforts are underway by Maltese institutions to strengthen innovation, education, and citizens' skills, including specific measures of the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The significant economic performance in recent years in some key sectors, such as tourism, has also been possible thanks to the influx of foreign workers that has given a strong boost to the labour supply and allowed a strong growth of the country's flagship markets. In the case of Malta, the influx of foreign workers has certainly had a positive impact on GDP growth, as they have been hired for the financial and online gambling sectors with salaries above the average. Other foreign workers with low qualifications, employed in some service sectors such as construction, house maintenance, and the hotel industry, may have contributed to GDP at a lower level than the average. As a result, **Maltese authorities believe that the influx of foreign workers is essential to maintain economic expansion**.

The annual report of the Central Bank of Malta confirms **the driving role of SMEs that have contributed significantly to the growth of the Maltese economy in recent years**. In 2018, only 0.2% of non-financial sector businesses were large enterprises with more than 250 employees. The vast majority of Maltese businesses (93.1%) employed fewer than nine employees, classified as micro-enterprises, while the remaining 6.7% were classified as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In terms of employment, SMEs created a total of 19,300 new jobs, more than twice that of large enterprises. Among the most urgent problems facing Maltese SMEs, in addition to the aforementioned shortage of qualified personnel or experienced managers, are production and labour costs, a burdensome regulatory framework, and competition.

Malta ranks 26th among EU member states in the number of new graduates in science and engineering, and the percentage of ICT graduates has been in a steady decline in Malta - from 10% in 2014 to 6% in 2019. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop an effective and comprehensive education system (from primary school to the highest university level) to attract and retain talents in scientific and technological careers and support the development of their skills. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that Malta is achieving poor results in terms of public-private cooperation in research and innovation (R&I), an indicator that ranks as one of the lowest in the EU in public-funded R&I by companies. Ensuring the availability of qualified talent for R&I activities and developing greater public-private cooperation will require strengthening strategic partnerships.

2.3 THE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION AREA: A SYNTHETIC COMPARISON.

This passage discusses a comparison between the labour market and innovation performance of Malta and Sicily within the Italy/Malta cross-border cooperation area.

The data and indicators presented are from the European Union sources.

Regarding the **labour market**, the table shows some key indicators from Eurostat's database, indicating that Malta has a better performance compared to Sicily and the EU average, while Sicily systematically presents figures significantly below the EU average, especially in terms of female employment. Therefore, greater cooperation between the two economic systems, particularly in the field of professional mobility, could provide a significant contribution to reducing this imbalance and stimulate greater growth in the cross-border area as a whole⁷.

		Sicily	Malta	UE
Employment rate	Male	53,2	82,7	72,5
	Female	29,1	67,3	63,3
	Total	41,1	75,5	67,9
Unemployment rate	Male	17,2	3,6	7,4
	Female	21,2	3,1	8,1
	Total	18,7	3,4	7,7
Youth employment rate (15-29 years old)	Male	36,2	7,6	13
	Female	46,4	4,7	13
	Total	40,1	6,3	13
Long term unemployment rate	Male	12	1,1	3
	Female	15,6	0,6	3,4
	Total	13,3	0,9	3,2

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/data/database>

⁷ In this regard, it should be noted that during the elaboration process of the Italy/Malta 2021-2027 Cooperation Program (see Territorial analysis of the Italy-Malta cross-border area, Version 2.1 - April 2021) the persistence of a situation in which while in Malta one of the most urgent problems of SMEs is that of the availability of qualified personnel and expert managers, in Sicily, on the other hand, the production system is unable to absorb the supply of skilled workers with a consequent loss of a significant share of the regional human capital that is forced to emigrate (the so-called "brain drain" phenomenon). Consequently, the weak exchange of skills and mobility between the two territories still figures among the weaknesses of the cooperation area, therefore it seems appropriate to continue investing to encourage greater movement of workers across borders.

In terms of **competitiveness, innovation, and skills**, this passage presents composite indices from the European Commission (RCI - Regional Competitiveness Index; RIS - Regional Innovation Scoreboard) and the Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (ESI - European Skills Index).

EU REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS INDEX (RCI) 2.0 – 2022

Sicily

Malta

This index measures the main competitiveness factors of European regions (NUTS 2) summarizing, through a set of indicators, their ability to offer businesses and residents an attractive environment for living and working.

60,8

89,4

UE average: 100

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/maps/regional-competitiveness_en

Regarding RCI, Sicily and Malta have significantly different performances, with Malta having a much higher score in all three sub-indices that make up the RCI (Basic sub-index, Efficiency sub-index, Innovation sub-index). In particular, in terms of labour market efficiency, the distance between the two areas is particularly evident, with Sicily having a score of 35.6 and Malta 107.4.

REGIONAL INNOVATION SCOREBOARD (RIS) – 2021

Sicily

Malta

This Index summarizes the performance of European regions (NUTS 2) in terms of innovation by identifying, through a set of indicators, the relative strengths/weaknesses and the main challenges to be faced.

80,69

97,42

UE average: 100

<https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard/eis>

Regarding RIS, both Sicily and Malta are “Moderate innovators,” (RIS value between 70% and 100% of the EU average) with Malta having a significantly higher score and approaching the cluster of regions defined as “Strong innovators.”

EUROPEAN SKILLS INDEX (ESI)

Sicily

Malta

The ESI, developed by Cedefop, is a composite index that summarizes the performance of the skills system of EU countries compared to an “ideal” situation, set equal to 100, in terms of development, activation and matching of skills with actual needs of the labor market.

15

58

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/european-skills-index-esi>

Also in this case the Maltese performance is better than the Sicilian one (the figure reported refers to Italy as a whole). This situation is more evident with respect to one of the three components of the ESI, the “Skill matching”, which refers to the ability to effectively use skills in the labor market and to prevent its imbalances (e.g. unemployment, shortage or excess of

supply of skills in certain occupational fields, overqualification, etc.).

For this specific component, Malta has an indicator of 75 (the second highest in Europe) while Italy has an indicator of 31 (the fifth from last among European countries). For example, according to a recent report published on 29 March 2023⁸, Italy is the EU country that has reported the highest number of shortage occupations, 205, while Malta is among the countries that reported the lowest (16).

More specifically, in terms of major ESCO⁹ occupational categories, the shortages reported by Italy are mainly concentrated on specialist and technical professional figures in the “Professionals” and “Technicians and associate professionals” categories, while those reported by Malta mainly concern the “Service and sales workers”, “Craft and related trades workers” and “Operational” occupations. The two areas, therefore, declare skill shortages concentrated in different fields and these employment shortages could also be filled through greater labor mobility within the cross-border cooperation area.

⁸ EURES (European Employment Services) - ELA (European Labour Authority), Report on labour shortages and surpluses, 2022.

⁹ ESCO - European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/classification/occupation_main

3. MAIN EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT TOOLS – SICILY

3.1 ACTIVE JOB SEARCH TOOLS

The main instruments to support employment in Sicily include active job search tools. The primary point of reference for job seekers is the Employment Centers (CPI), which are a fundamental component of the “Network of Employment Services”¹⁰. CPIs are public structures, coordinated by the Regions/Autonomous Provinces, which, in addition to carrying out administrative activities, such as activating/terminating employment relationships, issuing certificates of unemployment, enrolling in mobility lists and protected category lists, etc., provide various services to facilitate the meeting between job demand and supply and implement various active labour market policies¹¹. In recent years, significant investments have been made to strengthen the CPIs, and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan ¹² (PNRR) has started a significant investment to modernize their structures and services. This investment involves 500 CPIs and includes activities to renew and restructure the facilities that house the CPIs, innovate their information system to facilitate interoperability with other systems, and strengthen the skills of their employees ¹³.



To find the nearest CPI, individuals can use the following link:
<https://www.anpal.gov.it/cerca-sportello>.

Job demand and supply matching services are also provided by **Employment Agencies**, private operators authorised by ANPAL (National Agency for Employment Policies)¹⁴, registered in a specific electronic register, and accredited **entities for employment services** at the regional level. Employment Agencies can be divided into five categories: Generalist Staffing Agencies (perform intermediation, personnel search and selection, and support for professional reemployment); Specialist Staffing Agencies (can only supply workers on a permanent basis); Intermediation Agencies (perform mediation activities between job demand and supply); Personnel Search and Selection Agencies (provide consultancy services for identifying candidates on behalf of the client); and Professional Reemployment Support Agencies (activities aimed at reemployment in the job market for employees).

¹⁰ Legislative Decree no. 150/2015 Provisions for the reorganization of the legislation on employment services and active policies, pursuant to article 1, paragraph 3, of Law 183/2014 (GU n. 221 of 23/09/2015 - Ordinary Supplement No. 53).

¹⁰ For an overview of the services provided by the CPI to job seekers: Decree no. 4/2018: guidelines for active policies (2018 - 2020) - Annex B: Specification of the essential levels of services to be provided throughout the national territory.

¹² The PNRR, approved by the European Commission in August 2021, provides for a series of reforms and investments to be implemented in the period 2021-2026 through European funds (Next Generation EU - NGEU) and national resources from a specially created Complementary Fund. For more information: <https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/content/sogei-ng/it/it/home.html>

¹³ The CPI strengthening plan integrates with other significant reforms launched by the PNRR, in particular the “National New Skills Plan” which aims to reorganize the training of workers in transition and the unemployed through the strengthening of the vocational training system, the definition of essential levels of quality for upskilling and reskilling activities in favor of the beneficiaries of support instruments as well as through a greater diffusion of continuous training for employed persons.

¹⁴ ANPAL is a public agency that promotes the right to work and training, coordinates the national network of employment services and is responsible for the labor market information system. Furthermore, ANPAL is the leader in Italy of the European Social Fund+, a European structural fund dedicated to investments in education, training, employment policies and social inclusion.

Accredited entities at the regional level for employment services provide the following services: Mandatory Services (reception and first information; first-level guidance; specialist or second-level guidance; job demand and supply matching and job support); Specialist Services (intensive assistance aimed at employment through placement and professional reemployment; guidance aimed at training; design and employability of disadvantaged individuals and persons with disabilities; services for starting a business initiative; starting work or training experience abroad, also through mobility programs).



On the ANPAL website it is possible to search for both Agencies for work and Subjects accredited to services for work at the level of region:
<https://myanpal.anpal.gov.it/albi-informatici/?public=ok>

Lastly, it should be noted that accredited entities operate at the regional level for the **identification, validation, and certification of skills in compliance** with the general rules, essential levels of performance, and minimum standards referred to in Legislative Decree 13/2013¹⁵. These services are increasingly becoming popular, thanks also to the gradual creation of a single information backbone¹⁶ and the interoperability of various central and territorial databases currently in existence, as they promote both the usability of skills acquired in informal and non-formal contexts (e.g., volunteer experiences) in the labour market and greater participation in lifelong learning.g.

3.2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT TOOLS

The Italian government provides different types of financial support to promote entrepreneurship, especially for young people with concrete and innovative business ideas. The main reference point is Invitalia, the National Agency for the attraction of investment and business development, controlled by the Ministry of Economy and Finance.

¹⁵ Definition of the general rules and essential performance levels for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and of the minimum service standards of the national skills certification system, in accordance with article 4, paragraphs 58 and 68, of the law 28 June 2012, no. 92 (GU General Series n. 39 of 02/15/2013).

¹⁶ The central point is represented by the Atlas of Jobs and Qualifications, a tool that is constantly being updated and evolving, as a result of the collaboration of various institutional subjects. Furthermore, its construction and maintenance envisages the involvement of employers and trade unions, bilateral representatives, professional associations, experts and stakeholders of the work-learning system. It is organized into three sections: Atlas of Work, Atlas and Qualifications, Atlas and Professions.
<https://atlantelavoro.inapp.org/>

Below are some of the tools managed by Invitalia and currently operational (March 2023). Some of them (Smart&Start, Nuove Imprese a Tasso Zero) have been redesigned by the PNRR, particularly aiming at a female point of view¹⁷.

RESTO AL SUD

BENEFICIARIES

The incentive is intended for those between **the ages of 18 and 55**.

AIMS

Resto al Sud aims to support the birth and development of new entrepreneurial activities and freelance activity in specific territorial areas:

- Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardegna, Sicilia;
- Areas of the seismic crater of Central Italy (Lazio, Marche, Umbria)
- Minor islands of Central Nord

and different sectors such as industry, handicraft, transformation of agricultural products, fishing and aquaculture, supply of services to companies and people, tourism, commerce, and freelance activities.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

- renovation/maintenance of real estate (maximum 30% of the expenditure programme);
 - new machinery, plant and equipment;
 - computer programs and ICT services;
 - management expenses (e.g. raw materials, consumables, utilities, rental fees, leasing fees, insurance) up to a maximum of 20% of the expenditure programme;
- Planning, promotion, consultancy and employee personnel expenses are not eligible.

FINANCING

The incentive covers up to **100% of expenses** with a maximum financing of **€50,000 for each applicant**, which can reach up to **€200,000** for companies composed of four partners. For sole proprietorships, with a single proponent, the maximum loan is **€60,000**.

To support the need for working capital, a further non-refundable grant is contemplated:

- 15,000 euros for sole proprietorships and professional activities carried out on an individual basis;
- up to a maximum of 40,000 euros for companies.

The grant is disbursed upon completion of the spending programme, together with the balance of the grants awarded.

¹⁷ The PNRR also provides for a new instrument aimed at female entrepreneurs: the "Fondo Impresa Donna". This Fund, of 200 million euros, supports the birth and consolidation of businesses led by women and finances investment programs in the sectors of industry, craftsmanship, transformation of agricultural products, services, commerce and tourism. At the moment applications are not being accepted due to exhaustion of resources.

The benefits are made up as follows:

- 50% non-repayable contribution;
- 50% bank loan guaranteed by the Guarantee Fund for SMEs; the interests are entirely borne by Invitalia.

Applications are evaluated based on the chronological order of arrival, there are no notices, deadlines or rankings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<https://www.invitalia.it/cosa-facciamo/creiamo-nuove-aziende/resto-al-sud>

ON - OVER ZERO INTEREST RATE START-UPS

BENEFICIARIES

Micro and small businesses composed mostly or entirely of **young people between the ages of 18 and 35 or women of any age**. Natural persons can also apply for a loan with the commitment to set up the company after any admission to the concessions.

Companies established within the previous 5 years can access the loan with different rules and methods depending on whether they are companies established for no more than 3 years or companies established for at least 3 years and no more than 5 years.

The incentive is valid for the entire national territory.

AIMS

Financing companies with investment projects that aim to implement new initiatives or to expand, diversify or transform existing activities in the **manufacturing, services, commerce and tourism sectors**.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

Some examples of business plan expenses:

- masonry and similar works (maximum 30% of the eligible investment);
- machinery, plant and equipment;
- computer programs and ICT services;
- patents, licenses and trademarks;
- specialist consultancy (maximum 5% of the eligible investment);
- expenses related to the signing of the loan agreement;
- costs for setting up the company.

FINANCING

The incentive covers up to **90% of the total eligible expenses** for projects in the manufacturing, service, trade, and tourism sectors, **with costs up to €3 million**.

For this incentive there are no rankings or deadlines; applications are examined in the order in which they arrive. More specifically, the application evaluation process involves two phases:

- The first phase consists of an **in-depth interview** to verify the skills (technical, organisational, managerial, etc.) of the entrepreneurial team and the internal coherence of the project to be

financed, in particular with respect to the potential of the market. If the proposer passes the interview positively, an integration of the application presented on the online platform will be required with information on the economic-financial plan of the business project;

- The assessment of the application is completed with a **second interview** aimed at assessing the economic-financial sustainability of the initiative on the basis of the proposed expenses and the requested subsidies.

The business plans must be launched after the submission of the application and must be concluded within 24 months from the date of stipulation of the loan agreement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<https://www.invitalia.it/cosa-facciamo/creiamo-nuove-aziende/nuove-imprese-a-tasso-zero>

ITALY SMART&START

BENEFICIARIES

Innovative startups established for no more than 60 months and registered in the special section of the business register (for the requirements that qualify the “innovative startup”: Legislative Decree 179/2012 article 25). More specifically, the following categories are eligible to apply:

- small innovative startups established no more than 60 months ago;
- a team of individuals who want to set up an innovative startup in Italy, even if resident abroad, or foreign citizens in possession of the “startup Visa”¹⁸;
- foreign companies committed to set up at least one office in Italy.

AIMS

Support the birth and growth of innovative startups in all regions and stimulate a new entrepreneurial culture linked to the digital economy, enhance the results of scientific and technological research, encourage the return of “brains”(qualified workers) from abroad. The entrepreneurial project, therefore, must possess at least one of the following characteristics:

- have a significant technological and innovative content;
- be oriented towards the development of products, services or solutions in the field of digital economy, artificial intelligence, blockchain and the internet of things;
- be aimed at the economic valorization of the results of public and private research.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

Capital goods, services, personnel expenses and business operating costs.

- Some examples of business plan expenses: new plant, machinery and equipment; hardware/software components; patents, trademarks and licenses; certifications, know-how

and knowledge related to the production needs of the company; licenses and rights for the use of industrial property rights; software licenses; design, development and testing of IT architectural solutions and technological production systems; specialist advice; salary costs relating to employees as well as costs relating to collaborators; business incubation and acceleration services; investments in marketing and web marketing.

- Some examples of company operating costs: raw materials; services necessary for carrying out the company's activities; hosting and housing; use of third party assets.

The costs must be incurred within **24 months** of signing the contract.

FINANCING

Smart&Start Italia finances business plans with expenses between **100,000.00 euros** and **1.5 million euros**. It offers a **zero-interest loan**, without any guarantee, to cover **80% of eligible expenses**. This percentage can rise to **90% if the startup is made up entirely of women and/or young people under the age of 36** or if among the shareholders there is an expert with an Italian research doctorate (or equivalent) who works abroad and wants to return to Italy.

Startups based in Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardinia and Sicily can take advantage of a **non-repayable grant equal to 30%** of the loan, thus repaying only 70% of the loan received. This possibility has also been extended to innovative startups located in the seismic crater of central Italy. The loan must be repaid over **10 years** starting from the 12th month following the last loan installment received.

Startups established for less than a year can also count on technical-managerial tutoring services in the start-up phase (e.g. financial planning, marketing, organisation, etc.).

There are no rankings or deadlines for this incentive. Applications are reviewed within 60 days based on the chronological order of arrival.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<https://www.invitalia.it/cosa-facciamo/creiamo-nuove-aziende/smartstart-italia>

¹⁸ This tool is managed by the Ministry of Enterprise and Made in Italy and aimed at entrepreneurs from non-EU countries who intend to start a new innovative startup in Italy, individually or as a team. It offers a fast digital procedure to apply for a one-year entry visa for self-employment.

NEW SELFEMPLOYMENT

BENEFICIARIES

It is aimed at residents in the national territory belonging to one of the following categories:

- **Neet**, i.e. adults who at the time of submitting the application are enrolled in the Youth Guarantee program, aged 29 or less and are not engaged in other work activities or study or professional training courses;
- **Unemployed women**, i.e. adult women who at the time of submitting the application are not employed in other work activities;
- **Long-term unemployed**, i.e. adults who, at the time of submitting the application, are not employed in other work activities and have submitted a declaration of availability for work (DID) for at least 12 months.

For inactive and long-term unemployed women, it is not necessary to register with the Youth Guarantee.

More specifically, the following are eligible to apply for funding:

- sole proprietorships; partnership; cooperatives/social cooperatives, composed of a maximum of 9 members;
- established no more than 12 months after the date of submission of the application, provided they are inactive;
- not yet established, provided that they are established within 90 days of any admission to the concessions;
- professional associations and companies between professionals established no more than 12 months after the date of submission of the application, provided they are inactive.

AIMS

The incentive finances initiatives in all sectors of the production of goods, supply of services and commerce, also in the form of franchises, such as for example: tourism (accommodation, catering, services) and cultural and recreational services; personal services; environmental services; ICT services; energy saving and renewable energies; services to manufacturing and artisan companies; retail and wholesale trade; processing and marketing of agricultural products, with the exception of the cases referred to in article 1.1, lett. c), points i) and ii) of EU Reg. no. 1407/2013; also excluding fishing and aquaculture, primary production in agriculture and, in general, the sectors excluded from article 1 of EU Regulation no. 1407/2013.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

The following expenses can be financed: tools, equipment and machinery; hardware and software; masonry works (within the limit of 10% of the total eligible expenses); management expenses (e.g. rental of real estate and leasing fees; utilities; IT, communication and promotion services; insurance premiums; raw materials; consumables; semi-finished and finished products; wages and salaries).

FINANCING

This incentive finances 100% of investment projects with an amount between **5,000.00 and 50,000.00 euros**. It is possible to request three different types of financing: **microcredit** (from 5,000 to 25,000 euros); **extended microcredit** (from 25,001 to 35,000 euros); **small loans** (from 35,001 to 50,000 euros); the last two types of financing are currently not operational. These are interest-free subsidized loans, without guarantees, repayable over **7 years** with monthly installments starting 12 months after the loan is disbursed. Those who obtain the loan must commit to set up the company and identify an operational headquarters (if not already done in the application) within 3 months of the granting of the loan and must complete the investment within 18 months of signing the loan agreement.

There are no tenders, deadlines or rankings; funding requests are evaluated based on the chronological order of arrival.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<https://www.invitalia.it/cosa-facciamo/creiamo-nuove-aziende/nuovo-selfiemployment>

3.3 MAIN HIRING INCENTIVES FOR COMPANIES

This text discusses the role of **incentives in job creation**, and how they have contributed to the steady growth of new jobs in recent years. The use of incentives to stimulate employment is a fundamental tool, especially for small companies (up to 15 employees), which account for about half of all incentivized employment relationships.

The text then goes on to describe the various incentives available to employers, which include long-standing tools, such as those for hiring workers over 50 years of age who have been unemployed for more than 12 months, apprentices, disabled workers, and those from struggling companies. The incentives are also periodically refinanced as part of the European cohesion policy. An orientation tool for these incentives is the “National Repertoire of Incentives” recognized by employers, managed by Anpal, and regularly updated.

➤ A useful orientation tool is represented by the “**National Directory of incentives**” recognized to employers, managed by Anpal and periodically updated: <https://www.anpal.gov.it/repertorio-nazionale-degli-incentivi>

The **Law on the 2023 Budget** (Law no. 197 of 2022) strengthens some of the incentives already provided in previous years, such as those related to the hiring of people **under 36 and disadvantaged women**, and establishes a new benefit for private employers who hire recipients of the ‘Citizenship Income’¹⁹ (an allowance given by the state to economically disadvantaged people). The text presents the main features of the first two incentives presented in **the 2023 Budget Law** and **the Decontribuzione Sud**, whose extension for another 12 months was recently approved by the European Commission (decision of December 6, 2022).

¹⁹ This incentive is recognized for a maximum period of 12 months and consists of the exemption from paying 100% of social security contributions payable by employers, with the exclusion of INAIL premiums and contributions, up to a maximum limit of 8,000.00 euros on an annually, recalculated and applied on a monthly basis. It applies to private employers who, from 1 January to 31 December 2023, hire ‘citizens income’ (financial aid paid by the government to economically disadvantaged people) recipients with permanent contracts or with the transition from fixed-term contracts to permanent ones. Domestic work relationships are excluded. The exemption is an alternative to the incentive provided for by the decree establishing the RDC (Decree Law of 28 January 2019, n. 4) which recognizes the employer, in the event of hiring, the residual months of RDC due to the worker who is hired.

RECRUITMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 36²⁰

The Law on the 2023 Budget extends to **new permanent-contract hires**, as well as the **conversion of fixed-term contracts into permanent contracts**, a temporary 100% contributory exemption of up to €8,000 per year for the hiring of **people who have not yet turned 36 years of age** (instead of the 30 years required by the current regulations) and who have not held permanent contract employment with the same or another employer throughout their working lives.

The benefit is subject to the authorization of the European Commission and it is granted for a maximum **period of 36 months** as provided for in the current regulations, which is temporarily **raised to 48 months** for hires at a location or production unit in the regions of Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Basilicata, Sicily, Puglia, Calabria, and Sardinia. However, the exemption does not apply to apprenticeships, domestic work contracts, follow-up permanent contracts for apprenticeships, and hires within six months from obtaining a degree by students who have performed school-work activities or apprenticeships with the same employer.

RECRUITMENT OF WOMEN WHO ARE IN CONDITIONS OF DISADVANTAGE ²¹

The Law on the 2023 Budget also extends a **temporary 100% contributory exemption of up to €8,000 for fixed-term and permanent hires**, as well as for the conversion of a previous incentivized relationship, for disadvantaged women. The benefit is subject to the authorization of the European Commission and is granted for **12 months** for fixed-term contracts and **18 months** for permanent hires or conversions for women:

- Over 50 years of age and unemployed for more than 12 months.
- Of any age, residing in regions eligible for funding under the European Structural Funds, without a regularly paid job for at least six months (see the Regional Aid Charter 2014-2020 as amended by decision C (2016) final of September 23, 2016);
- Of any age who work in sectors with a marked gender disparity, with a male-female disparity rate exceeding the average by at least 25%, and who have not had a regularly paid job for at least six months (see the DM of November 16, 2022);
- Of any age, residing anywhere, and without a regularly paid job for at least 24 months.

²⁰ The same exemption is provided for under the Stability Law for 2018 (art. 1, paragraph 100, Law 205/2017) for the hiring of persons who have not completed 30 years of age, to the extent of 50% of the contributions due by the employer up to 3,000.00 euros on an annual basis.

²¹ The same exemption is provided for by Law n. 92 of 2021 (art. 4, co. 8-11) for the same recruitment to the extent of 50% of the contributions due by the employer.

DECONTRIBUTION SOUTH²²

It's an incentive that **provides partial contribution** relief to employers for all employment relationships, both permanent and fixed-term contracts, and apprenticeships.

The geographic scope of the incentive is linked to the workplace's location, which must be located in **less developed or transition regions**. These regions are those that, in 2018, had a gross domestic product per capita lower than 75% of the EU27 average or between 75% and 90% and had an employment rate lower than the national average.

It grants an exemption from the employer's social security contributions by up to 30% for permanent contracts, fixed-term duration, and apprenticeships. However, it excludes premiums and contributions due to the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL). **The relief is valid until 2026 and will gradually decrease to 20% in 2027 and 10% in 2029** to fixed-term and permanent contracts and apprenticeship contracts.

It should be noted that the maximum aid amount under the Temporary Crisis Framework has been increased to **€300,000 for businesses in the fishing and aquaculture sectors and €2 million for all other eligible businesses**. Furthermore, if an employer operates in several sectors subject to different maximum aid limit, each activity's relevant limit must be respected. In any case, the overall maximum amount of aid per employer must not exceed €2 million.

The fiscal relief can be combined with other incentive contributions, subject to the general principle that the oldest incentive is applied first, followed by the most recent one on the remaining amount.

Workers operating in the financial sectors, primary production of agricultural and domestic products and persons expressly excluded by article 1, paragraph 162 of the 2021 Budget Law are excluded from the subsidy.

3.4 4 MAIN REFERENCE PROGRAMS IN THE 2017-2027 PLAN OF THE ESI FUNDS

The promotion of employment and entrepreneurship is at the heart of **the Planning 2021-2027 of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)**, particularly the **European Social Fund+ (ESF+)**. The various programs provided by this planning, both national (PN) and regional (PR), have been approved by the European Commission in recent months, are entering the implementation phase and will provide many opportunities in the coming years, alongside with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR).

²² Article 1 of Law 30 December 2020, n. 178.

The **PN Giovani, donne e lavoro 2021-2027**²³, approved in December 2022, under Priority 1. Facilitating entry into the labour market: employment policies for young people (Youth Employment), will activate numerous measures, including: Support in finding work and internships; Promotion of apprenticeships; Incentives for hiring; Incentives for promoting self-employment (especially in the areas of the environment and circular economy or for those who create a business in areas of interest to local development plans); Creation of opportunities for activation and self-employment in the social economy sector; Interventions for young professionals registered with professional orders (particularly for the first years of registration with the payment of social security and welfare contributions due); Participation in the European Commission's "ALMA" initiative (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve)²⁴.

The **PR FSE+ 2021-2027 Regione Sicilia** also places the promotion of youth employment, including through self-employment, at the centre of its strategy, according to a model of complementarity and integration with other programs, particularly the aforementioned PN "Giovani, donne e lavoro" and the "GOL - Guarantee of Workers' Employability Program"²⁵. In particular, the PR FSE+ Regione Sicilia, approved by the European Commission on December 8, 2022, under Priority 1 "Employment," provides many measures to support youth employment, including:

- Promotion of internships (as the main active labour policy tool to strengthen the skills of young Sicilians and support them in finding employment);
- Training for the creation of new employment (based on the experimentation carried out with Notice no. 33/2019 and with particular reference to the green, digital, and sustainability transition);
- Support for employment (employment aid through aid schemes that will provide incentives for both permanent and the transition of fixed-term contracts into permanent ones), especially in the key sectors of the "S3 - Smart Specialization Strategy" of the Region: agri-food; blue economy; energy; life sciences; smart cities and communities; tourism, culture, and cultural heritage; environment, natural resources, and sustainable development;
- Strategy of intelligent specialization" of the Region: agribusiness; economy of the sea; energy;

²³ The Authority in charge of the PN is ANPAL. The interventions, in general, will be implemented by Regions, autonomous Provinces and central Administrations identified as "Intermediate bodies". The coordination of Anpal will be shared with the competent central administrations and the economic and social partnership.

²⁴ ALMA aims to help the most disadvantaged young people aged between 18 and 30 enter the job market. The courses will be addressed primarily to young people with specific weaknesses (long-term unemployed, poor educational results, insufficient professional skills, from migrant backgrounds, with disabilities). The pathways to be activated basically involve staying in another EU state (between 2 and 6 months) supplemented by specific accompanying and consultancy services.

²⁵ GOL is a program launched with the PNRR, in connection with the PPC enhancement plan and the New Skills Plan. Until 2025 it represents the main tool for the promotion of employment and, more precisely, it aims to improve the job placement of people through personalized paths of taking charge by the CPI and therefore of orientation and up-skilling and re-skilling at specially accredited entities. GOL is implemented by the Regions and autonomous Provinces on the basis of Regional Implementation Plans (PAR) approved by Anpal; the various PARs are gradually entering their implementation phase with the preparation of specific "training catalogues" to be offered to the target users.
<https://www.anpal.gov.it/programma-gol>.

life sciences; smart cities and communities; tourism, culture and cultural heritage; environment, natural resources and sustainable development;

- Measures for self-entrepreneurship (promotion of entrepreneurial activities, both individual and corporate, through the provision of real and financial services, with particular attention to the social economy sector);
- Activation of a Microcredit Fund (soft loans to incentivize the birth of self-employment projects through the Microcredit Irfis-FinSicilia tool), a measure that will coordinate with the financial instruments that will be activated within the PR FESR Regione Sicilia 2021-2027.

The operational launch and implementation of these measures will be the subject of specific monitoring and promotion actions within the Protocols of Understanding and the cross-border Network activated by Move on.

4. MAIN EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT TOOLS – MALTA

4.1 TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKING FOR EMPLOYMENT.

Jobsplus, formerly known as **Employment and Training Corporation** (ETC), is the primary employment service provider in Malta, established in August 1990 by the Employment and Training Services Act. The legal form it was given was that of a public body managed by a chairman and board appointed by the government and senior staff. This institution has been operating along the lines dictated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Labor (MEYE) since April 2003. The primary functions of ETC, as established by the aforementioned law, were to provide a public employment service and to train people to improve their skills to find employment. In its early years, it focused on registering jobseekers and providing career guidance services. Its training function focused on delivering courses and managing apprenticeship programmes. The opening of regional job centers and the introduction of the fingerprint recognition system for registration were among the first steps taken on the employment front. Key achievements in training services have included the delivery of a broad range of training programs attended by thousands of individuals, including non-job seekers, and the expansion of apprenticeship programs.

The ETC has been relevant in the preparation of Malta's accession to the EU and such accession has increased financial resources thanks to the European Social Fund (ESF) used to expand services offered and to facilitate the **employment of disadvantaged** and disabled people as well as the training of employees. ETC has started to contribute to the development of employment policies, both at local and European level. It has joined the European network of public employment services through which good practices are shared between organisations. Employment policies have continued to be introduced and improved over the years and have started to be aimed at specific target groups to maximize effect. Cooperation agreements have been made with a number of NGOs for the provision of better services. The ETC has been useful in recommending and implementing family-friendly and other labor market measures which have led to an increase in female employment.

In June 2016, thanks to an Act of the Parliament, the name Employment and Training Corporation was changed to **Jobsplus**. The name change is part of a wider branding strategy aimed at positioning Jobsplus as an innovative and dynamic organization that excels in meeting the needs of employers, job seekers and employees.

Jobsplus takes care of developing knowledge and skills of the unemployed registered in the register of people looking for employment through, among other things, the offer of a variety of courses that aim to increase the chances of entering the labor market. Furthermore, some courses organized by the Organization allow participants to obtain the necessary authorizations, established by national legislation, to obtain employment in specific professional categories. Most courses are available all year round and are delivered by part-time trainers or private training providers.

The courses offered by Jobsplus focus on the growth of basic skills, commercial and non-commercial training, care services training and IT literacy/training. Many of the courses are offered at two levels: basic or advanced. The basic level provides general and introductory training, the advanced level is more specific and provides specialist training.

Jobsplus also aims to attract unemployed people who need help to re-enter the job market, or those already employed but who would like to develop new skills in order to safeguard their position in the job market. Jobsplus offers training opportunities to people registered in the register of jobseekers, in parallel with other bodies such as the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology²⁶.

In line with the Maltese National Strategic Action Plan for Continuing and Higher Education 2022-2030²⁷ and the National Reform Program 2023²⁸, Jobsplus offers compulsory training courses to all newly registered as a way to inspire and motivate them to look for a job since their first months of membership. Failure to attend courses may result in the loss of unemployment benefit. Even long-registered people are obliged to attend training courses, which are also directed by employment counselors and tutors.

Furthermore, registered jobseekers can directly ask Jobsplus to attend its courses and are exempt from paying participation fees, with the exception of courses that concern safety or which allow for the obtaining of particular authorisations.

Since 2005, a considerable number of registered people have been informed of the activation of basic training courses by Jobsplus. The contents of the training are defined on the basis of the occupational and qualification needs of the participants, as well as the eligibility criteria outlined for the course.

In addition to training courses, the Organization tries to overcome the obstacles that prevent the growth of employment by offering the various categories of registered subjects (from newly registered people to job seekers over 40 or young job seekers), other initiatives (e.g. seminars on active job search, practical experiences, on the job training opportunities, etc.).

While each course organized by Jobsplus has the aim of increasing the participants' chances of actively entering the job market, some courses offered, due to their particular structure, are aimed at a specific type of participant and provide training in the field within the working environment and learning methods based on experience. These programs are described below.

²⁶ Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology is a vocational education and training institution. Founded in 2001, MCAST offers 180 full-time and over 300 part-time professional courses ranging from certificates to doctoral degrees.

²⁷ https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Documents/MFHEA%20National%20Strategic%20Plan%202030.pdf

²⁸ https://mcesd.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/MCESD_NRP-1.pdf

TRAINING PAYS SCHEME

The Training Pays Scheme is part of the FSE.01.001 – Training for Employment project and aims to help people develop and/or improve their skills by participating in further training outside the workplace. The initiative offers assistance in the form of a scholarship to help participants pay for training costs. The scholarship will be equal to 75% of the cost of the training, excluding VAT. For training programs leading to level 4 of the MQF (Malta Qualifications Database), the reimbursement limit is set at €1,000 for the maritime sector and €3,000 for ICT. This grant is awarded to the participant upon successful completion of their training.

Eligible candidates are: those who on the date of application have completed compulsory schooling and are aged up to 64 years; those who are under 25 and do not participate in the NEET Youth Guarantee II Activation Programme; those whose primary occupation is not self-employment; those who are not employed by the training service provider where they will be training. Participants who are already employed as teachers or have a teaching related occupation at an English language school cannot apply for CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and/or TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) under the Training Pays Scheme.

The complete list of eligible training programs is available at the following link:

<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemes-jobseekers/training-pays-scheme/tps-trainees/fileprovider.aspx?fileId=36283>

To be eligible for a refund, you must select a training program included in the catalog. For training programs not included in the catalogue, it is still possible to submit the request at least 2 weeks before the start date of the course as long as the training program meets the following criteria: the training program is not offered by Jobsplus; the training program is offered by a training provider approved by the MFHEA (Maltese Higher Education Authority) or by a self-accredited body or by an equivalent body in the case of non-accredited courses; the training program is equivalent to MQF level 5 or MQF levels 6 and 7 or a non-accredited course recognized by the aviation, maritime and ICT sector. The minimum cost of the training (excluding VAT) is €100. Grant applications will be approved on the chronological order of arrival.

The application (together with supporting documentation) should be sent by email to tps.jobsplus@gov.mt.

WORK EXPOSURE SCHEME

The Work Exposure Scheme is part of the FSE.01.001 Project – Training for Employment and aims to facilitate the transition to the world of work by providing job seekers with initial practical training which will support them in obtaining the knowledge, skills and competences needed to find and keep employment. This scheme is designed to meet contemporary labor market demand, matching jobseekers preferences to the demands of employers.

On-the-job training will take place at the employer's premises where the trainee is referred. During the program the trainee must attend 240 hours of internship/training within a maximum period of 12 weeks. Participants are entitled to an allowance paid by Jobsplus for each hour of attendance calculated on the national minimum wage. The maximum hours in the workplace in a week must not exceed 40 hours. Internships starting in June, July and August may have a shorter duration.

The Plan is open to people who, on the application submission date, meet the following criteria: they are between 20 and 64 years of age; are not currently employed; have never participated in the Work Exposure Scheme. In the case of non-EU/Swiss citizens or citizens of third countries, a valid residence permit is also required which covers at least the entire duration of the initiative. Please note that trainees cannot be placed with a former employer and the number of trainees that can be placed with an employer will be determined at the discretion of Jobsplus.

ACTIVE YOUTH SCHEME (AYS)

This is a series of initiatives dedicated to young people and promoted by the Youth Empowerment Program that give young people the opportunity to create projects in areas such as research, sustainability, social welfare and non-formal education. Most of the work is done by volunteers who offer their skills and free time. The concept of team value is at the heart of the program. Through a solid support and mentorship system, young people gain the confidence to share their vision and, through co-working, they are supported in the creation of projects, encouraged to take responsibility and implement their decisions. This personal development process is enriched by various training opportunities, locally and abroad, which YMCA Malta offers its members through its international network. The YMCA in Malta has four active programmes: the Residential Programme, the Youth Empowerment Programme, the Welfare Programme, and the Social Activities Programme.

For more information:

https://youth.europa.eu/volunteering/organisation/69426_en; <http://ymcamalta.org/>

STUDENTS' SUMMER WORK OPPORTUNITIES'

This is a summer job program for students promoted by The Students' Maintenance Grants' Board (SMGB) of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, in collaboration with the Institute for the Public Service within the People and Standards' Division sponsored by the Council of Ministers, which offers the possibility for full-time students to apply for summer job opportunities. Applications are open to full-time students who have finished compulsory secondary school (Module V/Year 11) and those currently studying at post-secondary, vocational and tertiary levels, including those in their final year of studies. Interested students should submit an online application at the following address, <https://edurecruitment.gov.mt/>, and upload all required supporting documents. Students from non-EU countries can also send their application after checking with Jobsplus if they need a valid permit to work in Malta. Therefore, these students are required to upload a Jobsplus work permit together with their application. All students found eligible to participate in the program after acceptance of the application file will have to take an online test.

For more information:

<https://education.gov.mt/en/studentsgrants/Pages/Initiatives%20and%20Opportunities/Summer-Work-Opportunities.aspx>

BE ACTIVE

Be Active is a competitive program where youth organizations apply for funding by developing a community project around a number of priority topics. The program is managed by the Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ agency under the activities of the Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth, Research and Innovation and the Parliamentary Secretariat for Youth, Research and Innovation.

Through the publication of specific calls, the Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ aims to provide support to youth organizations in the development, planning, implementation and evaluation of projects that aim to provide opportunities for participation through active citizenship of the respective members, as well as for the community and society. The initiatives proposed by the organizations must concern at least one of the following themes: Youth empowerment; Human rights; Well being; Intergenerational dialogue; Environment; Social integration.

For more information: <https://youth.gov.mt/scheme-beactive/>

4.2 TOOLS TO SUPPORT COMPANIES FOR RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.

TAX INCENTIVES - APPRENTICESHIP AND JOB PLACEMENT (L.N. 179 OF 2014)

With the Tax Incentive Scheme, employers in all sectors and types can benefit from a deduction of €600 from taxable income for each internship activated lasting at least 26 weeks. Internships must be offered to participants following internship and/or apprenticeship programmes. The deduction is allowed only if the applicant employer does not benefit from another deduction, tax credit or other form of assistance in relation to the expenses in question from the State or other public body. The responsible for internships is Jobsplus (<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemes-jobseekers/tax-incentive-scheme>) while that for apprenticeships is Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).

Employers can contact the MCAST AWBL department on 2398 7120/7145 or industrypartner@mcast.edu.mt.

YOUTH GUARANTEE SCHEME EMPLOYERS

The Youth Guarantee Programme, FSE.01.002 – YOUTH GUARANTEE 2.0 NEET Activation Scheme II is aimed at employers looking for an additional resource in their company or who are available to provide work experience that can have an impact on the professional life of a young person. The NEET Activation Scheme II provides young NEETs (16-25 years old) with personal/professional training and constant mentoring, thus facilitating the process of transition from education to paid work, consequently improving their employment prospects, quality of life and social integration. The program consists of two main phases: training and work placement phase when each candidate receives approximately four weeks (for a total of 80 hours) of soft skills training (e.g. how to write a CV, how to prepare for an interview, improve motivation and communication skills, etc.). During phase 2 the participant is offered one of two options: an internship (maximum 240 hours) with an employer according to the applicant's abilities and wishes (this placement lasts approximately 12 weeks - 80 hours every 4 weeks) or if the applicant wishes to improve their level of education they can choose a course at an accredited institution such as MCAST/ITS (in this case an apprenticeship program of maximum 240 hours will take place).

Each participant will be paid an allowance after the training and job placement/training phase based on the participation rate.

For information:

Youth Guarantee team, number 2598 1161/2/4, email youthguarantee@gov.mt.

MATURE WORKERS SCHEME

Income tax will be deducted from employers, including self-employed, who employ people between the ages of 45 and 65 from 2014 onwards. A maximum of 11,600 euros of tax deductions on taxable income for the first two years of work for each eligible employee is to be granted. This will translate into savings of €5,800 per year. Furthermore, employers who hire employees of “mature age” can benefit from an additional tax deduction equal to 50% of the cost of training up to a maximum of 400 euros per employee. Among the eligibility criteria, employers must hire people over the age of 45 registered in the register of the unemployed for the previous 6 consecutive months before employment. The time span between the last date of registration and the letter of commitment for employment must not exceed 15 days.

For information: matureworkersscheme.jobsplus@gov.mt

INVESTING IN SKILLS 2.0

This program was launched to promote the training of people actively participating in the labor market with the aim of increasing productivity and improving adaptability. This scheme is part of the Operational Program II of the European Social Fund of Malta - “Investing in human capital to create more opportunities and promote the well-being of society”. The intervention has a 3 million euro budget to promote training activities. These activities will be financed (80% of eligible costs) by the ESF. All employers are eligible, regardless of their legal form. These include: partnerships, companies, family businesses, associations, self-employed individuals or other partnerships, NGOs and social partners established throughout Malta as long as the business is not in difficulty. Jobsplus will carry out checks to ensure that each applicant company is financially sound.

For more information: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemesjobseekers/investing-in-skills>.

INTERCEPT PROJECT

The INTERCEPT Project aims to promote the potential of young people in the green business sector. The project is aimed at NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) and “green” companies. 300 NEETs aged between 25 and 29 in Italy, Malta and Lithuania will be selected, trained and subsequently be able to undertake a 3-month paid internship in a “green” company. The aim of the project is to increase job opportunities in the context of the current challenges against global climate change. The participation of vulnerable groups, such as young people falling under the NEET category is part of the initiatives to ensure that the transformation aimed at by this program is inclusive and sustainable. Supporting them to acquire the skills and work experience needed to access green jobs is an investment with a high return potential and a promising tool for social inclusion.

For more information: <https://interceptproject.eu/opportunities-for-green-companies/>

BRIDGING THE GAP SCHEME

This incentive is designed to support the worker in the transition period from unemployment to employment. It allows the employer to evaluate the worker's performance in the workplace before hiring. The employer and Jobsplus enter into an employment placement agreement. Workers receive a weekly allowance from Jobsplus equal to 80% of the minimum wage. The worker will have to waive his rights and any social security benefits if the period of job placement exceeds twenty-eight weeks. Employers participating in this scheme are exempt from social security contributions, wages and sickness pay. During this phase of job placement, the employer can benefit from the support of Jobsplus officials to improve their company organization in terms of human resources.

For more information: iesd.jobsplus@gov.mt.

ATYPICAL WORKING HOURS

The Maltese government has introduced a number of employment policies in recent years in order to encourage people to enter the world of work. These incentives include free childcare, tax refunds and the In-work Benefit scheme. In the latest budget package, a new measure was introduced to encourage workers to work in specific sectors with atypical hours. All private sector employees who work in shifts, at weekends or after 18.00, and whose basic salary does not exceed €20,000 per year will benefit from a new In-Work Benefit of €150 per year. The sectors included in this scheme are: accommodation and food services, administrative and support services, manufacturing, transport and storage, wholesale and retail trade. Around 40,000 employees will benefit from this scheme. In order to implement this budgetary measure, Jobsplus is carrying out a data collection activity of all the employers concerned in order to identify the employees who have worked with the same employer for at least six months in atypical hours in the sectors listed above.

For more information: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/atypical>

ACCESS TO FINANCE (SOFT LOAN)

Access to Finance (Soft Loan) is a financial instrument designed to support companies engaged in a manufacturing or service activity with the aim of supporting company projects, launching new products or entering a new geographic market, addressing environmental issues and digitize processes. These businesses can be supported through a subsidized loan to cover part of the financial needs of up to one million euros. All limited liability companies registered in Malta engaged in a manufacturing or service activity can apply for the soft loan. The requirements for accessing the subsidized loan are the following: a) the applicant must not have charges relating to VAT, income taxes and social security; b) the applicant must not carry out activities specifically excluded from the de minimis regime (State Aid Regulation); c) the applicant must have at least one full-time employee registered with Jobsplus who is resident and pays income tax in Malta.

An eligible company can apply for the subsidized loan to: a) support a development or expansion project based on a business plan prepared for the development of a new product or to enter a new geographic market; b) addressing environmental issues such as water use, water treatment, waste treatment; c) optimizing business processes through digitization and advanced technologies; d) projects aimed at achieving a high level of sustainability.

Projects must have an implementation period not exceeding eighteen (18) months and the loan can cover up to 75% of the costs related to the proposed project. The loan must be guaranteed by a specific surety to cover at least 50% of the loan amount requested. The loan amount cannot exceed: a) 1 million euros (or 500,000 euros for companies carrying out road

haulage transport) and must be repaid over a period of five years; b) or €500,000 (or €250,000 for companies that carry out road freight transport) and must be repaid over 10 years.

For more information: <https://www.maltaenterprise.com/support/access-finance-soft-loan>

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

This measure facilitates high value-added projects, including new business ventures, business expansions and transformations that will contribute to Malta's development. This scheme can support various business project activities such as the initial development phase of companies intending to establish an operating unit in Malta, expansion projects, business consolidation and re-programming of business processes. Support can take the form of a tax credit or cash grant. The initiatives supported should lead to new business opportunities, generate employment, strengthen competitiveness, expand its reference market.

This incentive, managed by the Malta Enterprise Corporation, has an annual budget of 5 million euro and a total budget of 15 million euro. Support can be granted to enterprises following the submission of an application together with a business plan or business case justification, which will be evaluated by Malta Enterprise Corporation. Projects related to the following activities will be considered for support in the form of cash grants or tax credits: a) construction; b) waste management and environmental solutions; c) research and development activities; d) supply of industrial services and solutions for production; e) digitization of processes; f) development of digital services and systems (including video games and entertainment); g) maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft and other electromechanical equipment; h) craft works; i) services which by nature are not limited to geographical scope and are internationally scalable.

Projects that do not address the above issues but can lead to increased business performance and foster innovation can be supported through tax credits. Malta Enterprise Corporation will also consider projects submitted by business associations which bring common benefits to all enterprises engaged in one or more of the sectors listed above. Malta Enterprise Corporation can grant tax credits or cash grants of up to €200,000.

For more information: <https://www.maltaenterprise.com/support/business-development-2021>

BUSINESS RE-ENGINEERING AND TRANSFORMATION SCHEME

The aim of this scheme is to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to relaunch their commercial activity, reorganize their employees, product and/or service portfolio, optimize the use of technology and adopt green technologies and processes. SMEs are eligible to ask for external consultants who will support it to make significant changes, accelerate development, improve market access. The aid is granted in the form of a cash grant to cover 50% of the costs incurred up to a maximum of 5,000 euros for a consultancy service per company. Beneficiaries can access this measure only once in an 18-month period.

The Malta Chamber of Commerce has compiled and published a list of service providers in the area of business reorganization and transformation. Applicants who may find it difficult to locate a consultant with the required skills and competences can contact the Malta Chamber or visit its website to view the list. The measure is open to all small and medium-sized enterprises carrying out an economic activity in Malta and employing between 10 and 250 workers at the time of requesting support.

For more information: <https://www.maltaenterprise.com/reengineering-and-transformation>

5. MAIN EUROPEANS INSTRUMENTS FOR EMPLOYMENT PROMOTION.

There are several tools available at the European level for job seekers, including **EURES (European Employment Services)**, a vast cooperation network launched in 1994 that involves the European Commission, the European Labour Authority²⁹ (ELA), the public employment services of all EU countries and other partner countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland), as well as other authorised entities. The overall goal of EURES is to facilitate one of the fundamental principles of the European single market, the free movement of workers, by providing appropriate information and support services to both workers and employers. EURES is a network active in 31 countries, composed of **over 1,200 “Eures advisers”** who provide various services, particularly assistance in job search and application phases, information about the destination country (e.g. social security, taxation, healthcare, etc.).

The central hub of the network is the EURES portal - https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index_it³⁰ - where, among other things, it is possible to create and manage one's own profile to search for information on foreign countries/sectors of interest and to receive personalized communications based on one's interests. More generally, through the EURES portal, it is possible to access the following main services:

- information, guidance, and other support services, both for workers and employers;
- updated information on living and working conditions in the countries participating in the network;
- matching services for job vacancies;
- participation in “Job Days” through the European (Online) Job Days platform³¹;
- information and support services to facilitate integration in the destination country;
- specialized services for workers/employers in cross-border areas;
- specialized services for workers/employers regarding seasonal work.

EURES, therefore, also offers services to employers interested in identifying the skills they need within the wider European job market, where there are increasingly young, qualified, and motivated people available for international mobility. In fact, according to the latest statistics in this area³², in 2020 about 13.5 million European citizens lived in another EU country, about 10 million of these were of working age, specially in the 20-49 age group. More generally, between 2011 and 2019, the percentage of citizens with a high level of education who moved to another European country increased by four percentage points; however, citizens with a medium level

²⁹ <https://www.ela.europa.eu/en>

³⁰ In April 2023, the Eures portal had: 3.9 million jobs; 1 million CVs; 5,000 registered employers.

³¹ Hundreds of EURES events take place across Europe every year, all free and easily accessible. The best known are the ‘European Job Days’, which provide an ideal environment to meet potential employers, on site and online, to benefit from live Q&A sessions and one-to-one consultations with job mobility experts and other industry experts.
<https://europeanjobdays.eu/en>

³² European Commission, Intra-EU Labor Mobility at a glance: main findings of the Annual Report on Intra-EU Labor Mobility, 2021.

of education who moved to another country represent the largest group (just over 40% of the total number of citizens who moved abroad).

Eures advisers support European employers before, during, and after the hiring process (e.g. registration and dissemination of job offers, providing information on the equivalence of European education systems and their qualifications, matching CVs to job offers, conducting videoconferences for interviews, etc.). Specifically, through the Eures portal, employers - in addition to being able to access numerous information and updates on employment and professional mobility in Europe - can benefit from various free services, including:

- “Find candidates”: allows you to create a profile and search the CV database; in addition, it is possible to receive new CVs corresponding to your needs by email, save them, organize them, and send requests for further information to potential candidates;
- “Post a job”: explains how to make a job posting visible on the Eures portal;
- Presenting your “vacancies” during “European Job Days”.

Another important European initiative is **EUROPASS**, a portal of the European Commission launched in 2005, and recently renewed (July 2020), through which it is possible to access tools and services for guidance, education, training, and work. In particular, the portal - <https://europa.eu/europass/it> - offers services to better enhance one's skills, qualifications, and experience, making them more transparent and accessible to educational and training institutions, as well as potential employers across different EU countries.

The main features of the EUROPASS portal are:

- Personal profile: you can create a profile to record your skills, qualifications and experience in one secure place online;
- Online editor: helps you create your own CV (four different models available), based on the information entered in your profile, and cover letters;
- “My skills” and “My interests”: sections that summarize key aspects of the user and allow for personalized suggestions on study and work opportunities consistent with the user's profile;
- Library: personal archive where users can store their diplomas, cover letters or other documents;
- “My applications”: application tracker that helps keep track of the various applications sent;
- Self-assessment test of digital skills (the possibility of also offering online courses to fill any gaps is planned for the future).

The **EUROPASS** portal also provides information on various tools such as Europass Mobility, supplemental information to certificates, and supplemental information to diplomas. It also offers opportunities for training and employment in Europe, interoperability with EURES, and skill intelligence tools Cedefop - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training³³.

In Italy, ANPAL is the national reference point for training and employment, and it has launched **SkillON** - <https://skillon.anpal.gov.it/home> - a project aimed at promoting other important European tools besides Europass, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF³⁴) and Euroguidance³⁵.

ANPAL is also the national contact point for EURES Italy and coordinates the **EURES Targeted Mobility Scheme (TMS)**, an initiative funded by the European Commission through the Employment and Social Innovation program. EURES-TMS³⁶ promotes professional mobility in Europe by providing services and financial benefits to both young candidates and employers. The program has achieved significant results, such as 1,570 hires as of March 31, 2023, and its success has opened up the possibility for its continuation in the 2021-2027 planning period of European funds. Overall, these European initiatives provide various tools and services to support job seekers and employers in promoting the free movement of workers across Europe. They are designed to enhance transparency and accessibility to employment opportunities³⁷ and qualifications across different EU countries, which is particularly relevant in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

In addition, initiatives such as EURES and EUROPASS also contribute to promoting social and economic cohesion within the European Union by reducing barriers to employment and facilitating the movement of workers across borders. By providing information, guidance, and support to both job seekers and employers, these tools help to create a more efficient and effective labour market within the EU, which can lead to increased productivity, competitiveness, and growth. Moreover, the availability of these resources can be especially beneficial for young people who are just starting their careers and looking for opportunities to gain experience and develop their skills. By providing access to job vacancies, training programs, and other resources, these initiatives can help to address the issue of youth unemployment, which has been a persistent challenge in many EU countries in recent years.

Overall, the EU's efforts to promote employment and mobility through initiatives such as EURES and EUROPASS demonstrate its commitment to creating a more integrated and prosperous Europe. By leveraging technology and collaboration across borders, these initiatives have the potential to unlock new opportunities for workers and employers alike, while also contributing to the long-term growth and success of the EU as a whole.

³³ The Cedefop portal offers a range of online tools in the field of skill intelligence to analyse the dynamics emerging in the labor market and the demand for new skills.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/online-tools>

³⁴ EQF (European Qualification Framework) is the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. It was born in 2008 to make the qualifications awarded in the various EU countries transparent and recognizable, in a simple and shared way. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) established in 2018 is linked to the EQF at national level.

³⁵ EUROGUIDANCE was created by the European Commission in 1992. It is a pan-European network that supports the development of the skills of guidance operators/intermediates and promotes the exchange of information on national guidance systems and on study and training opportunities in the member countries of the network.

³⁶ <https://euresmobility.anpal.gov.it/it/>

³⁷ For more information and insights, the following sites are particularly noteworthy:

EC - Directorate General for Employment: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/home.jsp?langId=it>

European Youth Portal: https://youth.europa.eu/home_it

2023 European Year of Skills: https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index_it

6. MAIN EUROPEAN INSTRUMENTS TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT

The European Union provides many programs to support international cooperation projects in numerous areas. These programs are essentially divided into two major “blocks”, the first consisting of **European Territorial Cooperation Programs (CTE)**, commonly known as Interreg programs, and the second consisting of the so-called “**direct management**” programs of the European Commission. Below are presented some of the most interesting programs, at territorial and sectoral level, first in the context of CTE and then in the context of direct management programs.

6.1 MAIN EUROPEAN INSTRUMENTS TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT

Interreg VI-A Italy-Malta 2021-2027

The European Commission, with implementing decision C(2022) 9624 final of 13.12.2022, adopted the Interreg VI-A Italy-Malta cooperation program for 2021-2027, financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) under the “European territorial cooperation” objective.

The program has a budget from the European Union of over 46 million euros, to which a national co-financing is added for a total budget of around 57.6 million euros. It will support interventions in favour of innovation and competitiveness, the environment, sustainable tourism, as well as the governance of the administrations involved. Special attention will be given to needs of cross-border territories through strong involvement of civil society, participation of young people and women, also through the instrument of small projects, and the provision of capitalization projects.

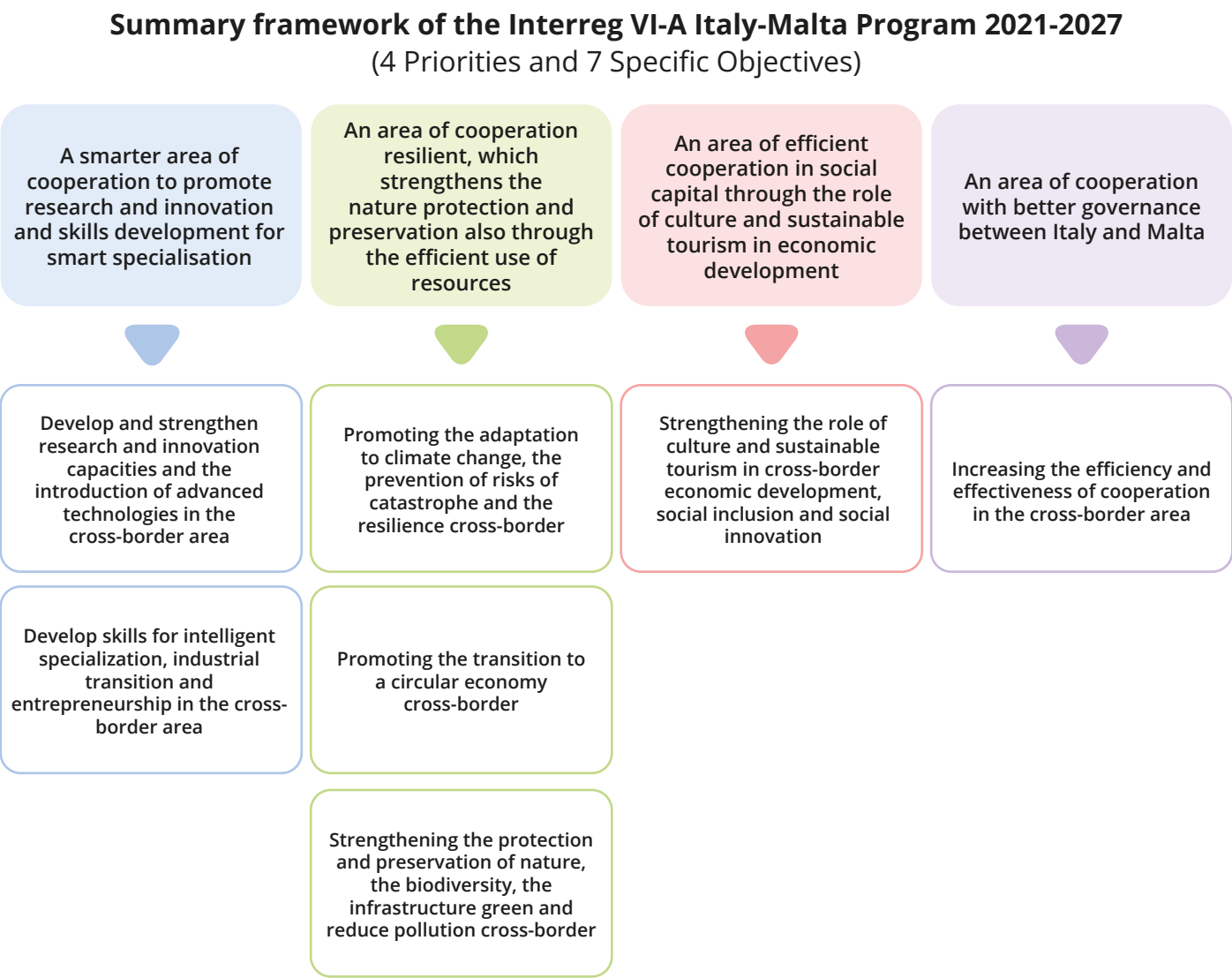
In continuity with the previous planning period (2014-2020), Interreg VI-A Italy Malta will ensure thematic concentration by contributing to three strategic objectives (SOs), defined in the Common Provisions Regulation for the ESI Funds, to which an Interreg specific objective (ISO) is added.

The **strategic objectives** are as follows: SO1: a smarter Europe, through the promotion of innovative and smart economic transformation and regional connectivity to ICTs; SO2: a greener Europe, through low-carbon emissions, transition to a clean and fair energy, green and blue investments, circular economy, adaptation to climate change and their mitigation, risk management and prevention, and finally also sustainable urban mobility; SO4: a more social and inclusive Europe, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights; ISO1: Better governance of cooperation.

The following **four priorities** have been defined for these strategic objectives.

- > Priority 1 - A smarter cooperation area to promote research and innovation and skills development for smart specialization.
- > Priority 2 - A resilient cooperation area, which strengthens the protection and preservation of nature also through efficient use of resources.
- > Priority 3 - A cooperation area efficient in social capital through the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development.
- > Priority 4 - A cooperation area with better governance between Italy and Malta.

Within these priorities, **seven specific objectives** are set out, through which the program will address the common challenges of cross-border cooperation. The following summary scheme of Interreg VI-A Italy-Malta’s overall strategic framework, taken from a program summary³⁸, illustrates this strategy.



The aforementioned summary presents an interesting exemplification of the types of operations that will be supported during the implementation period of the program (2023-2029)³⁹ for each of the program’s specific objectives.
For more information: <https://italiamalta.eu/>

³⁸ It's possible to access the full version of the program from the link <https://italiamalta.eu/consultazione-finale-sul-programma-interreg-vi-a-italia-malta/>. It should also be noted that with DDG n. 135 of 10/03/2023, the Managing Authority of the Interreg VI-A Italy-Malta Program established the Monitoring Committee.

³⁹ For example, with respect to the central themes of the Move on project, the following operations appear very interesting: “Qualification and mobility of human capital through interventions aimed at creating skills for the new generations of entrepreneurs, managers, researchers, technicians and operators in the of mutual interest such as the green and blue economy, the circular economy, health and quality of life, etc., but also the cultural and creative industries, social enterprises, etc., through cooperation with international networks and Mediterranean knowledge, skills and abilities”.

Interreg Euro-Med 2021-2027 Program

Interreg Euro-Med involves 69 regions from 10 EU countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) plus 4 IPA countries (Candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia). The geographic area covered represents about 25% of the EU and represents over 140 million people. The main objective is to contribute to the transition towards a climate-neutral and resilient society, to counter the impact of global changes on Mediterranean resources, while ensuring sustainable growth and the well-being of its citizens. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN's Agenda 2030 and the European Green Deal, the Program will finance projects focused on 4 missions: 1. Strengthening an innovative sustainable economy, consolidating a competitive innovation ecosystem with quadruple helix stakeholders and supporting the transition to a circular economy; 2. Protecting, restoring, and valorizing the environment and natural heritage; 3. Promoting green livable areas; 4. Improving sustainable tourism (a mission that crosses the previous three). The Program's complementary priority is better territorial governance for the Mediterranean.

The budget for the Program is approximately 281 million euros, secured by European funds (ERDF and IPA, totaling 225 million euros), supplemented by contributions from participating countries. Continuing from 2014-2020, the Program's Managing Authority is the Région Sud - Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, supported by the Joint Secretariat, both located in Marseille. In addition to these central structures, National Contact Points are responsible for animating the Program in the various national territories involved. The working languages are English and French.

Euro-MED 2021-2027 is built on an overall strategy called the "Results Amplification Strategy," which integrates capitalization and governance support mechanisms as inseparable processes to promote the transfer of project results into practices and policy definition at the European, national, regional, and local levels.

The target group of the Program is made up of public authorities engaged at various levels (national, regional, and local) in policy definition, along with other entities responsible for their definition and implementation. The main actions aim to strengthen the skills of public decision-makers to improve decision-making processes towards more coherent and integrated policies. Other key actors for their role and relevance in supporting the transformation towards an innovative and sustainable economy are universities, research centres, the private sector, mainly small and medium-sized enterprises, and organizations (development agencies, chambers of commerce, networks and clusters, etc.). Citizens, local communities, and associative forms are another target group of the Program, as they can benefit not only from the output of projects but also from being involved in dissemination and communication actions aimed at orienting the change of socioeconomic models and behaviours.

For more information: <https://interreg-euro-med.eu/en/>

Next Mediterranean Sea Basin Program 2021-2027 (NEXT Med 2021-2027)

With a budget of over 281 million euros, the Program finances cross-border cooperation projects involving 15 countries in the Mediterranean area, namely: Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Jordan, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey.

Based on the experience of the ENI CBC Med 2014-2020 program, Interreg Next Med 2021-2027 aims to promote Euro-Mediterranean cooperation within the framework of the European Union's Cohesion Policy. In particular, the Program aims to contribute to intelligent, sustainable, and fair development in the Mediterranean basin, supporting balanced, long-lasting, and wide-ranging cooperation and multilevel governance. Its mission is to finance cooperation projects that address joint socioeconomic and environmental challenges and needs in the Mediterranean, such as the adoption of advanced technologies, competitiveness of companies and job creation, adaptation to climate change, transition to a circular and efficient economy, education and vocational training, health, and the development of virtuous territorial governance processes.

The Program has four general objectives, which are then divided into nine specific objectives:

- A more competitive and smart Mediterranean;
- A greener, low carbon and resilient Mediterranean;
- A more social and inclusive Mediterranean;
- Better governance of cooperation for the Mediterranean.

The budget available amounts to some EUR 281 million, of which EUR 253 million allocated by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Pre-accession Instrument (IPA III) and the Neighbourhood Instrument, Development Cooperation and International Cooperation (INDICES).

Per maggiori informazioni: <https://www.enicbcmmed.eu/>

Interreg Europe Program 2021-2027

The objective of the programme shall be to contribute to the improvement of regional policies and regional development programmes, in particular investment programmes for growth and employment and territorial cooperation, by promoting the exchange of experience, innovative approaches and capacity building through the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practice in regional development policies.

Interreg Europe, approved by the European Commission in 2022, covers a total of 255 regions, including 242 regions of EU Member States, plus 6 Norwegian and 7 Swiss regions. It is structured around a single transversal priority, the specific objective "better governance of cooperation" priorities that support actions to strengthen the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders involved in the implementation of territorial strategies. This implies that beneficiaries can cooperate on all issues of shared relevance in line with their regional needs, provided that they are part of the political and specific objectives⁴⁰ of the European Cohesion Policy, namely: a smarter Europe; a greener Europe; a more connected

Europe; a more social Europe; a Europe closer to citizens.

In addition, Interreg Europe supports the Policy Learning Platform to capitalise on good practice and facilitate policy learning on an ongoing basis. The platform enables regional policy actors across Europe to draw on relevant experience and practice to strengthen their institutional capacity to better target their territorial development choices. The platform offers a range of activities and services and also supports networking and the exchange of experiences between actors.

Interreg Europe 2021-2027 is co-financed by the European Union with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and has a financial availability of about 379 million euros.

For further information: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/>

6.2 NEXT MEDITERRANEAN SEA BASIN PROGRAM 2021-2027 (NEXT MED 2021-2027)

The European direct management programs are one of the tools that the European Union uses to financially support the development of projects that contribute to achieving the objectives of the Commission for the 2021-2027 budget: a European Green Deal; a Europe ready for the digital age; an economy that serves people; a stronger Europe in the world; promoting our European way of life; a new momentum for European democracy. Programs falling under this category are divided into thematic areas and provide specific calls for proposals issued and managed directly by the European Commission and its executive agencies. The Commission is responsible for publishing the programmatic guidelines and calls for proposals, selecting projects, and monitoring them, disbursing funds to beneficiaries without further intermediate steps. The objective of the European direct management programs is to contribute to achieving the EU's political objectives in various sectors, through the implementation of projects developed mainly by consortia made up of entities belonging to several EU countries (and also to third countries). Each program may have distinct application rules, and the methods for managing and reporting on the activities carried out, as well as their related expenses, may also differ.

Horizon Europe Program

Horizon Europe is the European Union's Framework Program for Research and Innovation for the period 2021-2027. It is the successor to Horizon 2020. It lasts for seven years and has a total financial allocation of €95.5 billion (at current prices), including the €5.4 billion earmarked for the Next Generation EU recovery plan. It is the world's largest transnational research and innovation program. Horizon Europe finances Research and Innovation (R&I) activities - or activities supporting R&I - mainly through open and competitive calls for proposals. The research and innovation activities funded must focus exclusively on civil applications.

⁴⁰ Regulation (UE) 2021/1060, art. 5; Regulation (UE) 2021/1058, art. 3.

The overall objective of Horizon Europe is to achieve scientific, technological, economic, and social impact from EU investments in research and innovation, so as to:

- Strengthen the EU's scientific and technological base and promote its competitiveness in all member states;
- Implement the strategic priorities of the EU and contribute to achieving European policies, helping to address the global challenges of our time, as outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate;
- Strengthen the European Research Area.

The Program, therefore, intends to maximize the EU's added value by focusing on objectives and activities that cannot be effectively achieved by individual Member States. Participation in Horizon Europe is open to any legal entity, regardless of its location, including legal entities from non-associated third countries or international organizations, subject to any exceptions established in the Work Program or specific call. In the vast majority of collaborative projects, the consortium must be composed of at least three independent legal entities, each established in a Member State or associated country. Additionally, at least one of the entities must be established in a Member State. Horizon Europe provides for the launch of research and innovation missions aimed at increasing the effectiveness of funding by pursuing big, clearly identified objectives and solving some of the biggest challenges of our time. Each mission will include a portfolio of actions - research projects, policy measures, or even legislative initiatives - aimed at achieving a bold, measurable, and relevant objective for society within a predetermined time frame, which could not be achieved through individual actions. Moreover, the Horizon Europe Missions aspire to mobilize additional resources at the European, national, and local levels, to link activities across different disciplines and types of research and innovation, and to make it easier for citizens to understand the value of R&I investments.

The European Commission has identified five mission areas: Cancer; Adaptation to climate change, including the transformation of society; Healthy oceans, seas, coastal and inland waters; Climate-neutral and smart cities; Healthy soil and food.

For more information: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

The European Single Market Programme

The Single Market Programme (SMP) is the EU's funding programme that supports the single market in achieving its full potential and ensures Europe's recovery from the pandemic. It has a budget of €4.2 billion for the period 2021-2027. The programme aims to enhance the functioning of the EU single market by simplifying legislation, supporting businesses, and providing assistance to consumers. It also supports the implementation of the EU's Digital Single Market strategy, which aims to create a seamless and competitive online marketplace for businesses and consumers across the EU.

Objectives of the new Single Market Programme: Maintaining a high level of food safety; Providing consumers with even better protection; Increasing the competitiveness of businesses, in particular SMEs; Improve the governance of the single market and respect for rules; Produce and disseminate high-quality statistics; Develop effective European standards.

The following are the sectors concerned.

Food protection

- Prevent, contrast and eradicate animal diseases and harmful organisms for plants.
- Promote the sustainability of food production and consumption.
- Support the improvement of animal welfare.
- Improve the effectiveness, efficiency and reliability of official controls.

Tools: Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed; EU reference laboratories and reference centres; Financing of emergency measures; Training actions for competent authorities in the fields of food, feed, animal health and welfare and plant health.

Consumer protection

- Ensure that the products placed on the market are safe and that consumers know the rules.
- Help national authorities work together effectively and communicate quickly.

Tools: Rapid alert system for dangerous products; Consumer Protection Cooperation Network to tackle illegal practices at EU level (e.g. misleading advertising campaigns); European Consumer Centres, through which citizens can solve problems, for example when shopping online; Online dispute resolution system, which helps consumers settle disputes out of court.

Competitiveness

- Provide different forms of support to businesses, especially SMEs, by providing financial support in the form of grants and loan guarantees from the InvestEU Fund.
- Facilitate access to markets and reduce administrative burdens.
- Support the diffusion of innovation and address global and societal challenges.
- Promote a business-friendly environment and an entrepreneurial culture

Tools: Enterprise Europe Network to offer an integrated consultancy package to SMEs on how to innovate and grow internationally; Debt and equity financing will be available under the SME

strand of the InvestEU Fund.

An effective single market

- Implement and enforce existing rules and develop them further in areas including company and contract law, anti-money laundering and free movement of capital.
- Ensure that financial services respond to the needs of consumers, civil society and end users.
- Strengthen the Commission's tools and expertise for effective competition enforcement in the digital age, such as the use of big data and algorithms.
- Improve the functioning of the single market by helping public purchasers make the best use of citizens' money.

Tools: Future single digital gateway providing online administrative services to citizens and businesses; Internal Market Information System for the exchange of information between authorities; SOLVIT, problem solving network for citizens and businesses.

For more information:

https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/single-market-programme/overview_en

Programma Digital Europe

Digital Europe aims to strengthen European digital capabilities, encouraging the use and development of new technologies by businesses, public administrations and citizens. This program has the task of guiding and accelerating the European digital transformation, encouraging economic recovery. To achieve these objectives, investments in various areas will be strengthened.

Investments in supercomputing: Europe's supercomputing and data management capabilities will be strengthened through the purchase of world-class supercomputers capable of easily processing billions of pieces of information. The aim is to take advantage of the use of supercomputing in areas of public interest such as health, safety, the environment and enterprises (including SMEs).

Investments in artificial intelligence: thanks to the incentive for the use of artificial intelligence by public administrations and businesses. A true European data space will also be set up and access to data in general will be facilitated. Experimentation on artificial intelligence in areas of interest such as health will be strengthened and supported and Member States should encourage cooperation in this regard. In doing so, the adoption of artificial intelligence will have important effects not only on digital products and services but also on traditional sectors and on everyday life.

Investments in cybersecurity: coordination between the different Member States will be

strengthened through investments in infrastructure and tools necessary to ensure the security of the digital single market. Expertise in cybersecurity will be shared and supported in the European economy. In addition, European optical communications and cybersecurity capabilities will be strengthened through Quantum Communication Infrastructures. Finally, capacities and competences will be strengthened between Member States and the private sector to bring industry-wide consistency to network and information systems security. Investments for the development of advanced digital skills: there will be concrete support to training through programs and internships, and upgrading the skills of the existing workforce through short training courses on the latest updates in the key capacity areas. Investments to ensure the use of digital technologies in society and in the economic fabric: high impact implementations will be supported in areas of public interest such as healthcare, the Green Deal, smart communities and culture. The network of European innovation centers will be strengthened, aiming to have one innovation center in each region to help businesses take advantage of digital opportunities. The use and updating by businesses (including SMEs) of advanced digital technologies will be encouraged and the action of European public administrations and businesses will be supported to distribute and have access to advanced technologies, such as the blockchain.

For more information: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/digital-programme>

CONCLUSIONS

The guide presents various tools that can be activated to promote employment, entrepreneurship, mobility, and, more generally, economic development in the Italy-Malta cross-border cooperation area. The guide also highlights that additional tools are about to be activated within the European cohesion policy 2021-2027, including the new Italy-Malta Interreg VI A cross-border cooperation program, which, among other things, highlights the opportunity to **continue investing in greater mobility of workers and skills in the cooperation area**.

Therefore, it is important to monitor the evolution of these tools and promote their greater use, as well as to promote greater knowledge of “skill intelligence” tools to identify the main evolutionary trends in the labour market, both in Sicily and Malta, and possible areas of synergy and complementarity for new work mobility initiatives. In this sense, Move on is activating a cross-border network that can be referred to, even after the project is completed.

More specifically, the **“Move on Cross-border Network”** in addition to carrying out monitoring and analysis of policies and implementing tools in the field of employment promotion (at local, national, and European levels), intends to network institutions and stakeholders interested in identifying and promoting joint initiatives in the field of work mobility as well as in other areas that can make the cross-border economic system and labour market more efficient.

In particular, such initiatives can be promoted within the Interreg programs that affect the Mediterranean area (in addition to the Italy-Malta program itself, also Next MED and Euro-MED) as well as other European programs and initiatives (e.g. the “Employment and Social Innovation - EaSI” component of ESF+, Erasmus+, in addition to the aforementioned Horizon Europe, SMP/ Cosme, etc.). In this way, the network will help to overcome some weaknesses identified during the implementation of the 2014-2020 cross-border cooperation program (“poor involvement of institutional actors in the area within cooperation projects on competitiveness”; “inability to start operations on start-ups and spin-offs”).

The Move on Cross-border Network also aims to address another weakness identified by the new Italy-Malta 2021-2027 cooperation program: “weak coordination of actions financed by the Italy-Malta 2014-2020 program in the field of cross-border mobility of young people with ESF programs in the area.”

In this regard, it is highlighted that the ESF+ 2021-2027 OP of the Sicily Region intends to promote the creation of partnerships to carry out cross-border, interregional, or transnational⁴¹ cooperation activities in order to add value in the areas of interest of ESF+ and seek to capitalize on the results of already funded projects. In particular, the areas of application of ESF+ cooperation actions may concern regional S3 sectors, blue and green skills, recognition of

qualifications, mobility and exchange programs for researchers, and capacity building actions. The ESF+ also provides for the possibility of activating the European Commission's "ALMA " initiative (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve), aimed at providing mobility opportunities to the most disadvantaged young people.

Malta's ESF+ 2021-2027 program also provides for the possibility of supporting transnational and cross-border cooperation in order to promote mutual learning and thus strengthen the effectiveness of policies implemented through ESF+⁴². It also provides for the possibility of supporting the ALMA initiative.

The Move on Cross-border Network aims to contribute to the implementation of these provisions by providing the know-how and results achieved by the Move on project.

⁴¹ According to the Regulation laying down common provisions on the European Structural Funds (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of 24/06/2021), Article 23 - Content of programmes, paragraph 3, letter d), paragraph vi) interregional actions, cross-border and transnational with beneficiaries located in at least one other Member State or outside the European Union.

⁴² According to the ESF+ Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of 24/06/2021), Article 15 - Transnational cooperation: "Member States may support transnational cooperation actions under any of the specific objectives set out in Article 4 paragraph 1 letters a) to l)".

