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Work plan 2023-2025

Action Group 3 ‘Labour market, education and training’

Interreg
Alpine Space



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The activities of AG 3 have a cross-sectoral value and are relevant to both educational and professional contexts.

The file rouge that links the objectives and activities proposed by the Group is providing professional profiles that both address the needs of the Alpine labour market and tackle the challenges related to the green and digital transitions, by targeting, not only, students and young people (especially those enrolled in VET schools), but also workers through life-long learning programmes, in line with the mission of the Group “*to improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in strategic sectors*”. The twin transition is creating new job opportunities, which require the creation of new professional profiles as well as the up-skilling and re-skilling of (adult) workers.

In the upcoming years, the Group aims to work in continuity with the results achieved in Alp Gov 2 and will focus on three main topics: first, experiences connected to vocational education and training; second, the acquisition and assessment of soft skills in learning and professional contexts; and third, bridging the gap between the supply and demand of jobs in the Alpine region by, on the one hand, supporting young people in identifying employment opportunities in the Alps, especially in rural area, and, on the other hand, supporting local employers in the selection of qualified personnel.

The creation of an Alpine-wide network of VET institutions can contribute to the achievement of the aforementioned objectives by facilitating the connection and exchanges across countries, enabling the mobility of students and teachers, broadening the network of companies involved in dual training experiences, and pooling courses and training modules that respond to the evolving dynamics of the Alpine and global economies. In particular, to tackle the peculiarities of the Alpine job market, VET institutions should invest in developing specific training content connected to key sectors (timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism) and useful at improving the job matching between supply and demand. Attention should be also paid to the potential contribution to circular economy practices. The Alpine-wide network of VET institutions can be a first step toward the creation of a common macroregional educational space.

Digital and remote opportunities of learning, training and working can offer a concrete solution to the abandonment of mountain areas, especially rural and inner areas. Therefore, the Group aims to contribute to the dedicated cross-cutting priority within the EUSALP framework.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

AG 3 actions aim to contribute to developing an Alpine-wide labour market as well as improving the link between workforce supply and demand. To this end, the activities foreseen in this work plan are meant to create professional profiles that respond to both the requests of the Alpine labour market and the challenges related to the green and digital transitions. First of all, people – youth in particular – should be aware of the employment opportunities available in Alpine regions and effectively prepared to meet the needs of local companies. In this context, it is foreseen to develop education curricula, up-skilling and re-skilling courses that value the acquisition of professional and technical competences as well as soft skills, which are complementary to the former and crucial to effectively operate in a working context, required in specific jobs or sectors. Attention should be paid to those sectors and value chains that are relevant throughout the entire Alpine arch – such as timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism – with the objective to strengthen circular economy (cross-cutting priority). Cooperation and exchanges of experiences are crucial to improve VET and HVET systems of the different Alpine States and Regions as well as to increase mobility of students and (future) workers. Such mobility could be further enhanced by both the creation of an Alpine-wide network of VET institutions and other relevant stakeholders (strategic flagship initiative) and the mutual recognition of HVET titles in the EUSALP area. The remote/digital dimension of learning, training and working should be promoted to foster digitalisation throughout the Alps and increase living and working opportunities in inner areas (cross-cutting priority).

2. Composition and sub-groups

As of May 2023, AG 3 is composed of 18 members representing national and regional institutions of five EUSALP Countries (Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland) and is coordinated by a steering group of the Autonomous Province of Trento led by Giuliana Cristoforetti (Local Language Minorities and European Audit Unit) and including representatives of the provincial entities dealing with the topics addressed by AG 3. Most of the members belong to the educational and professional training sectors. In addition, there are two observers: Estelle Roger (European Commission – DG REGIO) and Rainer Steindler (Alpine Space Programme).

In line with the request of the EB, the existing sub-groups will cease to operate, and the AG 3 will work on the thematic priorities listed below, under the guide of “thematic coordinators”. The thematic priorities are:

- 1) Fostering dual systems in all EUSALP countries and strengthening their potential to address market needs. One of the main activities will be testing the CEN Workshop

Agreement (CWA) “Guidelines for dual-based training systems” in companies and promote their adoption.

- 2) Valuing soft skills in addition and as complementary to the technical and professional ones due to their importance in learning processes and the labour market. The aim is to study, experiment on and promote tools and processes that enable the development and formal recognition of soft skills in work-based learning (WBL) contexts, based on the Study “*Tools and guidelines for identification and assessment of a set of soft skills related to WBL and the development of the Alpine economy*”.
- 3) Improving the connection between youth and the Alpine labour market by making young people aware of their possibilities in terms of mountain businesses, traditional professions, green jobs and remote working/training opportunities (hereinafter “Youth and Jobs” priority/activities). These activities aim to reduce depopulation trends in inner Alpine areas, support employers in finding work force, strengthen and promote vocational education in connection with job opportunities in the Alpine region.
- 4) Activities contributing to the cross-cutting priority on digitalisation.
- 5) Activities contributing to the cross-cutting priority on circular economy.
- 6) Strengthening VET and HVET cooperation in the Alpine Region with the involvement of political representatives.

All these priorities aim to improve the connection between the education and training sectors and the labour market through the creation of professional profiles that respond to both market needs and the challenges related to the green and digital transitions.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

- VET institutions and high schools;
- Professionals in the training and education sectors;
- SMEs and traditional mountain businesses;
- Business support organisations;
- YC and young peoples of Alpine countries.

The stakeholders will be targeted with dedicated communication actions and involved in some of the Group activities foreseen for the future. For instance, local companies and young people will be involved in planning and participating to the “Discover mountain jobs” workshop(s) organised under the Youth and Jobs priority. VET institutions and companies will be invited to adopt the CWA on dual-training experiences as well as to experiment on the development of soft skills in learning and professional contexts.

4. The role of the Youth Council

Involving the YC is of crucial relevance to capture the perspective of young generations and their expectations in terms of new professional profiles and employment opportunities in the Alps. For this reason, AG 3 welcomes the opportunity to include the councillor(s) since the very beginning of the planning phase of future activities, especially through the participation in AG 3 meetings and direct exchanges with AG 3 members.

In particular, the YC will be invited to contribute to the activities under the priority “Youth and Jobs” by both planning and participating in the “Discover mountain jobs” workshops, inventory and surveys. It will also be involved in drafting the project proposal aimed at developing learning and training courses focused on Alpine peculiarities in key sectors and contributing to strengthening circular economy practices.

The YC will be relevant in communicating AG 3 activities by playing an active role in the dissemination of the achievements of the Group.

Some activities of this work plan are addressed to young people living in the Alpine Region, more generally, and the YC can help promoting them among peers. For instance, the creation of the Alpine-wide network of VET institutions will eventually benefit VET students that could participate in mobility projects, follow courses provided by other schools, and enrol in new course developed to address Alpine specificities, add circular economy aspects in relevant Alpine sectors, and acquire selected soft skills in line with market requests.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

In the framework of the Alp Gov 2 project, AG 3 developed the study *Tools and guidelines for identification and assessment of a set of soft skills related to WBL and the development of the Alpine economy* (hereinafter Soft Skills Study), which proposes a common framework and tools for observing and evaluating, as learning outcomes, the soft skills considered most significant in a work-based learning (WBL) context. These skills are also “strategic” for the development of the whole Alpine region and economy since “they can be applied in many different types of jobs ... [and] can empower persons ... to find better jobs and positively contribute to the working organizations”.¹

In addition, AG 3 focused on the theme of non-academic tertiary education in the EUSALP context. A dedicated study highlighting the peculiarities and the experiences of the different national systems was presented in Bruxelles, in occasion of the event *Fostering cooperation in higher vocational education and training in the EUSALP area*. HVET could be one of the privileged tools for increasing the matching of labour supply and demand within the European Union and, more generally, could represent a response to employment crises. The

¹ I.R.E.S. (2022), *Tools and guidelines for identification and assessment of a set of soft skills related to WBL and the development of the Alpine economy*, p. 61.

conference brought together key players operating at European and national levels to launch a debate towards the future adoption of a pact for HVET, in line with the European Skills Agenda and the European Higher Education Strategy. Other topics addressed were the issue of the added value of cooperation in higher education, together with its implications in terms of inclusion, mobility, digitisation, lifelong learning and knowledge transfer. Representatives of the Friends of EUSALP Initiative intervened to highlight the political relevance of such cooperation.

Furthermore, AG 3 worked and developed a Cen Workshop Agreement – a document constructed through consensus of the parties involved – on *Quality Assurance Guidelines for Dual training systems*, which includes best practices of dual-training experiences, a code of conduct for the hosting enterprises, and the general principles of a training contract.

AG 3 organised several events. “How I Met...My future Job” was held in January 2021 and aimed at showcasing real possibilities for the youngest to stay and work in the Alpine area, not only in the traditional fields related to mountain activities. The event “Training and labour market: training trainers in dual education systems” was held in November 2022 to present some of the best practices for high quality company training. AG 3 co-organised, together with AG 5, the second edition of the Digital Alps Conference, which addressed, among the others, digitisation in the education sector and digital skills.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

AG 3 aims to work in continuity with the 2020-2022 period by further developing the topics described below. The Group will organise in-presence “AG3 labs” with the support of a facilitator, to concretely define the activities and outputs to be achieved within the year, identify funding resources (embedding), and ensure the adoption of a comprehensive and strategic approach.

Dual systems

The Group aims to support the adoption of the CWA “Guidelines for dual-based training systems” in companies hosting VET students in the EUSALP area, with the aim of increasing the standards of WBL experiences in all EUSALP regions/countries. To this end, a group of experts from different EUSALP countries will be created to facilitate, train and advise on the adoption of CWA in companies and become “CWA advisors” through a dedicated capacity-building course.

The CWA will undergo a testing phase in a limited number of companies to apply the standards set therein and verify their effectiveness. Based on the practice collected, the CWA could be subjected to a re-evaluation phase to improve its content and detail specific aspects, such as that of security during training periods. The CWA can be further promoted through the network of VET institutions.

Soft skills

The recognition and validation of soft skills are key processes since state/regional dual systems focus only on the recognition of technical-professional competences, but ignore soft skills, which are complementary and crucial components for future workers. Therefore, the set of soft skills identified in the dedicated Soft Skills Study will be tested in selected VET institutions and companies hosting students to explore modalities, tools and contexts that facilitate the emergence of these skills, their recognition and validation. This experience will enable the production of a new document on how to evaluate soft skills during a “trainee” period in companies. The development of tools for the recognition of soft skills by a company tutor is relevant for mobility projects and linked to the topic of **micro-credentials**, which the Group aims to address in the future in connection to both dual-based training and life-long learning experiences.

Youth and jobs

The main goal of this axis is to raise awareness of mountain professions and employment opportunities in the Alps for young people when building their professional project, and thus discourage migration towards bigger centres. The activities foreseen encompass professional training, vocational guidance and job matching between supply and demand, and include:

- adapting the French “Eductour” to the EUSALP context by creating different models of “Discover mountain jobs” sessions depending on the needs, possibilities and opportunities of each Alpine country. These workshops target young people and local companies, whose direct involvement is crucial to define the workshop context and programme and increase the participants’ commitment. A follow-up phase is based on the collection of feedbacks and a de-briefing aimed at improving the structure of the workshop;
- developing a database/map of VET institutions in the Alps (dealing with forestry, agriculture, tourism etc.) to create a network, which is the AG3 strategic flagship initiative;
- including a focus on STEM disciplines in curricular and extracurricular courses to support the selection of STEM careers and address the shortage of skilled workers.

Other Youth and Jobs activities will contribute to the cross-cutting priorities as explained below.

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

AG3 identified the need to create a network of VET schools in the Alps to strengthen cross-country connections between these institutions, which address challenges common to the whole Alpine Region. This network will build on previous and existing experiences, such as the one foreseen in the Interreg project “YOUrALPS- Educating Youth for the Alps” and the

network of vocational mountain high schools in the French Alps, by enlarging them and providing stability in terms of both human and financial means.

This network aims to:

- create a long-term connection between VET institutions in the Alps;
- share a common database of companies involved in dual training experiences to improve the connection with companies across the Alpine Region;
- enable mobility among students and teachers;
- develop specific training content targeting the Alpine peculiarities of specific sectors (timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism) and useful at improving the job matching between supply and demand;
- exchange good practices and lessons learnt on VET aspects emerging from projects, especially those funded by the ASP and relevant Interreg cross-border programmes.

Outputs of the network are:

- short-term: a web-based platform connecting the VET institutions that join the network;
- long-term: an Erasmus+ or ASP small-case project proposal aimed at developing Alpine-focused training courses and testing them within some of the VET schools participating in the network.

Stakeholders to be involved include:

- VET schools (directing bodies and teachers);
- companies hosting students enrolled in VET schools;
- project partners of EU-funded projects dealing with VET aspects.

Timeline/future steps:

- AG 3 members provide a database of VET schools potentially interested in the network to be contacted;
- identification of additional financial means;
- development of project proposal.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

AG 3 aims to contribute to cross-cutting priorities “Facilitating circular economy in short supply chain” and “Promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region”.

On the circular economy priority, the main objective is to promote the creation of professional profiles in key Alpine sectors contributing to circular economy through the following activities:

- addressing circular economy aspects in educational curricula for relevant Alpine sectors (timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism);

- creating ad hoc courses for VET institutions useful at acquiring soft and technical/professional competences required by sectors contributing to circular economy
- creating lifelong learning courses for workers that cannot access higher education opportunities but require academic level knowledge – such as those in the craft and agricultural sectors. These courses should encompass a balanced mix of theory and praxis, introduce the topic of future skills, integrate trans-sectoral competences, and include a specific focus on digital and green jobs. This action should foster innovation by easing knowledge and technological transfer between research institutions and SMEs.

The digitalisation priority is relevant to the focus of AG 3 since the **remote dimension of training and working** is inherent to today's education and job market, and should thus be addressed in any of the activities developed by the Group, in particular by pursuing the following objectives:

- a) supporting the adoption of remote working, training and learning for inner areas, including through the network of VET institutions;
- b) fostering the acquisition of digital skills in educational and professional contexts as well as the adoption/diffusion of digital learning practices.

Objective a) would be pursued by:

- exchanging on remote working, training and learning practices adopted in EUSALP countries, including through the network of VET institutions;
- fostering awareness on existing opportunities of remote working for young peoples through dedicated workshops;
- developing the concept of "multi-activity" mountain jobs combining physical with remote working activities.

Specific activities aimed at pursuing objective b) include:

- promoting the diffusion of digital skills as soft skills required by the Alpine job market;
- liaising with the Pact for skills initiative for promoting digital skills in peripheral areas;
- exchanging on digital learning solutions (DLS) to promote the development and adoption of blended learning in VET institutions.

Collaboration with other AGs is also expected beyond the aforementioned priorities.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

AG 3 aims to strengthen its communication strategy towards both EUSALP actors and external stakeholders.

The AG 3 webpage on the EUSALP website will be regularly updated with news on the Group's activities and events. The studies developed in the current and previous periods will be also uploaded.

Specific communication campaigns will be targeted to companies, professionals and practitioners – and their networks – operating or interested in the EUSALP area and dealing with the topics of the Group. To this end, each AG 3 member should create a database of relevant national, regional and local contacts to forward them the information and achievements of the Group, in line with the GDPR requirements.

To better target local stakeholders, some AG 3 events could be organised with a transnational dimension, but in linguistically homogenous areas. This element will allow for an effective involvement of the local public and enable the creation of transnational knowledge communities/networks to facilitate the exchange of experiences across regions and countries. English translation will always be available to ensure the participation of all interested EUSALP actors.

AG 3 wishes to participate in initiatives organised at EU level, such as the European Vocational Skills Week and the MRS Week. In addition, it will propose an annual event connecting to the priorities of the annual Presidency, ideally to be hosted in the context of the Annual Forum or as part of the Presidencies' calendar.

2. Events

- Capacity building on the CWA targeting experts from different EUSALP countries to be trained as “CWA advisors”, in order to support the dissemination and effective application of the CWA at national level;
- dissemination of the CWA at national/regional level with the support of the “CWA advisors” to involve local companies and business support organizations for its promotion (a series of events could be organised in linguistically homogenous areas, each focusing on a specific sector: timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism);
- evaluation workshop gathering “CWA advisors” after the pilot implementation;
- strong involvement in the Macro Regional Strategies Week 2023 (panel discussion on “Skills for resilient societies” and presentation of AG 3 main achievements and future activities on skills for 2023-2025);
- presentation of the Soft skills Study in Trento and in the framework of the European Vocational Skills Week;
- AG 3 in-person labs (Autumn 2023 and 2024) to concretely develop activities with the support of a facilitator;
- “Discover mountain jobs” workshop in France (Summer 2024);
- event on HVET Cooperation;
- annual event on AG 3 topics in line with the Presidencies priorities (ideally in the context of the EUSALP Annual Forum).

Other topics:**HVET cooperation**

On the one hand, there is the intention to further support the political process behind the mutual recognitions of HVET titles in the EUSALP areas. In this regards, the dedicated 2022 HVET Study underlines the benefits in terms of mobility for the EUSALP-wide labour market. On the basis of this Study a Roadmap for cooperation and a connected Declaration could be developed. On the other hand, an exchange among practitioners on existing practices of HVET systems (state- or regional-based, extent of company participation, learning and training solutions, professional opportunities connected to HVET, etc.) could foster the development of more effective HVET systems and solutions in EUSALP countries.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	0
n. cross-border/transnational events	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop on the CWA targeting experts from different EUSALP countries; - Workshop on Soft skills involving stakeholders from other MRS (with the support of DG Regio). 	
n. joint policy recommendation	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging the mutual recognition of educational titles, in particular relating to Higher Vocational Education and Training (HVET); - creating a common Alpine system for the validation and certification of soft skills acquired in learning and WBL contexts. 	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme	1
Creation of a web-based platform connecting VET institutions operating in the Alps (based on the SFI)	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes	1
Development of Alpine-focused training courses and testing them within some of the VET schools participating in the network, with a student mobility component	
n. of papers / research works to be published	3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roadmap towards a Declaration on a common Alpine space of education in the Alpine Region (potential focus on cooperation in the mutual recognition of HVET titles). - Paper on the evaluation of soft skills during a “trainee” period - Definition of “multi-activity” mountain jobs 	
budget to be raised with European funding	tbd
please describe if possible	
Other:	
Experts from EUSALP countries trained as “CWA Advisors”: minimum n. 10 (2 for each EUSALP country represented in AG 3)	
CWA adopted in companies: minimum n. 15 in the EUSALP area	
Soft Skills recognition and validation procedures tested: minimum n. 4 pilot areas in the countries represented in AG 3	
“Discover mountain jobs” workshop: minimum n. 1 workshop organised	