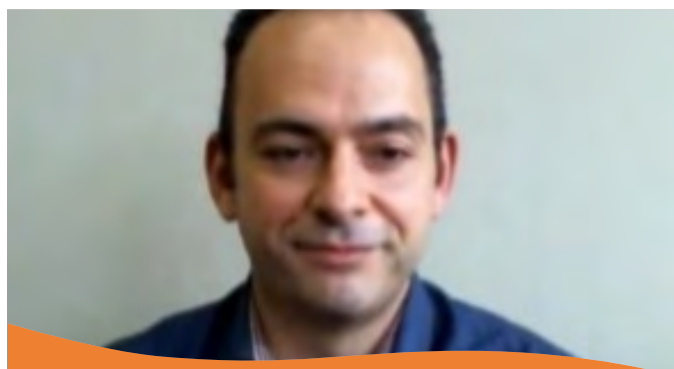




# The role of regions and cities in supporting apprenticeships, upskilling, and reskilling in the health sector

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) &  
European Committee of the Regions | 23 March 2021

As the final in a series of three roadmap events leading to a high-level conference on apprenticeships, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission's European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) organised an online event in close cooperation with the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL), the German delegation at the CoR, and the Basque Government. The live-streamed discussion explored local and regional initiatives for training, upskilling and reskilling health workers, taking into account the future skill needs of the sector.



The knowledge of the future influences the decisions made today. For a number of key-sectors, including health care, we aim to provide this knowledge through the Cedefop Skills Forecast.

**Ilias Lievanos**, Expert, Cedefop Department for Skills and the Labour Market

Chairing the meeting, **Ilias Lievanos**, Expert at the Cedefop Department for Skills and the Labour Market, opened the floor by presenting the results of the [Cedefop Skills Forecast](#), which offers quantitative projections of the future trends in employment. The Skills Forecast projects that, by 2030, the EU health care sector will have grown by 10.1% and added close to 2.2 million jobs to the European economy. However, the Skills Forecast also foresees considerable national differences developing within the EU, driven by factors such as ageing populations and migration. By 2030, for example, health sector employment in Romania will grow by 47.4%, whereas in Lithuania employment in the sector is predicted to shrink by 14.4%.

## COVID-19: THE VET AND HEALTHCARE SECTORS JOINING FORCES

Representing a regional perspective, **Rikardo Lamadrid**, Director of Technology and Advanced Learning and Regional Minister for Education at the Basque Government, highlighted that the VET system and the health department collaborate closely in the Basque country through a shared strategy.

During the pandemic, this collaboration led to a range of concrete health measures, including the production of face masks and face shields, repairing of breathing equipment in VET centres, and development of a ventilator prototype using 3D printing. **Leire Herboso**, Biosciences and Sustainability Researcher for TKNIKA (the Basque VET Applied Research Centre), further explained how difficult it was to produce face masks during the early stages of the pandemic. Responding to a shortage, the Basque VET sector found ways to locally source the raw materials and opened a textile laboratory to better understand the design of medical face masks – a process which eventually led to the regional production of face masks, employing a significant number of VET students. Among these VET students, **Leire Cortaberria** stressed how meaningful and satisfying the experience of supporting the health authorities and society in such challenging times was.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

Kicking off the panel discussion, **Maria Pascual Garcia**, Head of the Unit for International VET Projects at the Regional Ministry of Education of the Government of Catalonia, explained how networks of VET-providers function as hubs of innovation that continuously update their curricula in dialogue with companies according to the changing needs of the labour market. As COVID-19 broke out, the VET-networks mobilised and provided technical support and material to hospitals while adapting the curriculum for students in the health care sector to ensure continuity in their training. **Birgitta Sacrédeus**, CoR Member and Regional Councillor and Member of the Dalarna Regional board, Sweden, shared how COVID-19 had led to a significant increase in the number of people interested in becoming a nurse. During the pandemic, the region of Dalarna developed successful lifelong learning initiatives for older workers, and



**Birgitta Sacrédeus**,  
Regional Councillor, Member  
of the Dalarna Regional  
board, Sweden



**Romy Karier**, Councillor  
of the Municipality of  
Clervaux, Luxembourg

offered reskilling programmes (for flight attendants, for example) allowing workers to become nursing assistants. More broadly, the health sector serves as an efficient gateway into the labour market and holds untapped potential as an integration tool for migrants. **Karin Reiber**, Professor for Nursing Education at the Esslingen University of Applied Sciences, highlighted the general issue of staff shortages in nursing and the crucial importance of making the profession more attractive. While intrinsic values, such as meaningful work and helping others, are of great importance to many, factors such as wage, working hours, and working conditions need to be improved. As the last panellist, **Romy Karier**, CoR Member and Councillor of the Municipality of Clervaux, Luxembourg, called for a greater level of harmonisation in health care qualifications across EU Member States. To integrate lifelong learning prospects, nursing training programmes should provide bridges that enable nurses to transition from lower diploma to higher qualifications, such as a bachelor's degree.

## Q&A: AI AND ROBOTICS, AND UP-AND RESKILLING

In the final Q&A, the audience raised questions with the panellists covering a broad range of topics, from robotics to qualification programmes. In response, **Karin Reiber** highlighted that integrating AI solutions in health care can serve as a way to attract young people to work in the sector. **Birgitta Sacrédeus** shared a successful example of an autonomous shower in elderly homes that does not require staff and allows elderly people to shower independently. Responding to another question related to upskilling, **Maria Pascual Garcia** highlighted that Catalonia is taking part in an EU programme on micro-credentials, and offers simplified qualification procedures for experienced VET and health sector professionals. Considering reskilling initiatives, **Romy Karier** explained that second chance programmes allowing mid-career professionals to become nursing assistants were launched in Luxembourg, requiring a time commitment of two days a week for three years.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rounding up the discussion, **Norbert Schöbel**, Team Leader in Vocational Education and Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning at DG EMPL, praised innovative regional initiatives and emphasised the unique role regions and cities play by acting both as important employers and the main catalyst for policy reform. Responding to the intervention by CEDEFOP, it was recommended to participants that they read the recent [Cedefop briefing note, 'Apprenticeship: A pill for every ill'](#). Finally, the audience was encouraged and welcomed to attend upcoming EAfA events, including:

- A webinar on 'Inter-company Training Centres and Centres of Vocational Excellence' on April 21.
- An EAfA Live Discussion on 'How employers can be encouraged to establish apprenticeships: Understanding the barriers to implementation in SMEs' on April 28.
- The main conference on 'The Role of Regions and Cities in Delivering High Quality Apprenticeships' on June 3–4.

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