



Skills for Mountains in Transitions

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Event report

Mountain areas are facing multiple transitions affecting their economies and labour markets. Many are experiencing population decline and loss of attractiveness, leading to brain drain and labour shortages. Climate change is also affecting a significant part of the mountain economy, particularly agriculture and tourism, and poses challenges in terms of training and sectoral restructuring. In addition, the green transition, which is essential for the sustainability of mountain areas, is driving the emergence of new sectors in mountain areas, for which it will be necessary to find the appropriate skills. In this context, the Euromontana conference "Skills for Mountains in Transitions" explored the difficulties and opportunities in specific economic sectors, as well as solutions for attracting talents to mountain areas.

[Consult the speakers' presentations](#) | [View the conference pictures](#)



Juanan Gutierrez, President of Euromontana, opened the conference by underlining that the event is part of the European Year of Skills, but also of Euromontana's long-term reflection on Europe's mountain development model, including economic development. The XII European Mountain Convention, held in October 2022 in Italy, concluded with the adoption of the Sila Declaration, which calls for territories that are attractive, sustainable, resilient in the face of climate change and driven by a diversified economy. The next Convention, to be held from 15 to 18 October 2024 in Puigcerda (Spain), will further examine the challenges and solutions for the mountain economy.

Overview of the challenges and opportunities for skills and employment in mountain areas



Guillaume Corradino, Director of Euromontana, set the scene of the challenges, opportunities and approaches for employment and skills for mountain in transitions. He pointed out that the mountain youth report published by Euromontana in 2022 identified the lack of employment opportunities, including skilled and diversified jobs, in the mountains as one of the main causes of youth migration to urban areas. Faced with this brain drain and demographic challenges, but also with the economic and environmental transitions, Euromontana recommends diversifying the economy, improving infrastructures, attracting young talents at the end of their studies while respecting their life cycle, and building on the potential of teleworking. Euromontana's recommendations on skills and employment will be further refined at Convention 2024.



Following this introduction to the demographic, socio-economic and environmental transitions underway in mountain areas, **Francesco Mantino**, from the Council for Agricultural Research and Analysis of the Agricultural Economy and partner in the RUSTIK project, highlighted the skills needed for various rural transitions. He presented the major obstacles to transitions, such as labour market issues, water availability and demographic factors, as identified as part of the RUSTIK project (a Horizon 2020 project aimed at enabling stakeholders in rural communities and policy-makers to devise better strategies, initiatives and policies to promote sustainable transitions in rural areas). Mr Mantino also took as an example Italy's Strategy for Inner Areas. Between 2014 and 2022, initiatives were funded in 72 pilot areas, with a particular focus on access to services in these remote and often mountainous territories. These various projects have supported the development of skills in inner areas, such as skills in managing local development projects, traditional skills in specific sectors (such as preserving local seeds) and the development of skills associated with new professional profiles, such as community nurses.



To complete the overview of the challenges for mountain skills, **Kirsty Blackstock**, from the James Hutton Institute & partner of the MOVING project, focused on the skills required for the resilience of mountain value chains. MOVING (MOUNTAIN Valorisation through INterconnectedness and Green growth)- is a Horizon 2020 project (2020 - 2024) aiming at building capacities and co-developing relevant policy frameworks for the establishment of value chains that contribute to the resilience and sustainability of mountain areas. Dr. Blackstock stressed that mountain value chains are threatened by changing climate, demographic and land use change. She pointed out that skills are closely linked to the success of value chains, which require continually updated skills such as green skills to protect the environment, traditional skills to manufacture products, legal skills to manage quality labels and human skills to cope with conflict. For example, at a youth skills event in the Cairngorms Mountains, a wide range of skills were identified to support over 50 different jobs available in the Scotch whisky value chain. To conclude, she shared some thoughts on the importance of relational skills and on whether the EU Pact for Skills is paying enough attention to the informal and collective action skills needed in the mountains.

During the questions-and-answers session, participants shared the overall observations made by the speakers, particularly with regard to the lack of job diversification and the lack of services and attractiveness of mountain areas. Some participants also pointed out other factors that constitute barriers to attracting talents to the mountains, such as housing issues, a rural narrative that needs to be changed and the gap between graduates' expectations and the reality of the labour market and salaries.

How can we attract, retain and create skills for mountains in transitions?



In the context of environmental transitions, **Anna Giorgi**, Director of UNIMONT - University of Milan, outlined the various initiatives undertaken by UNIMONT to create skills for sustainable mountain development through research, innovation and education. These actions include specific training courses, such as the Bachelor's degree in Sustainable Development and Protection of the Mountain Environment, from which 531 people have graduated, and the new international and interdisciplinary Master's degree in Valorization and Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas (MountainSide), which trains professionals in sustainable mountain development and management at Edolo. UNIMONT's efforts to boost green skills in the mountains are also reflected in research and innovation projects, such as the new Horizon Europe MountResilience project, which began in September 2023. Coordinated by UNIMONT, the project will help to develop mountain stakeholders' skills to promote the resilience of their territories in the face of climate change, particularly in the tourism, agriculture and water management sectors.



Still in the education field, **Einar Schibeavaag**, from the Ryfylke Cooperation Council (Norway), presented the opportunities for diversification in the primary sector through the creation of Rogaland Vocational School. The starting point of the initiative was a regional stakeholder survey that highlighted the need to help farmers seize new business opportunities to diversify their revenue. The project of vocational school was born of this need and developed together with the National Center for Mountain Agriculture. The objective is to provide farmers with the skills to become entrepreneurs and diversity their activities, whether in the primary or tertiary sector. The Rogaland Vocational School is currently in development and looking for exchange of experiences with similar initiatives in Europe.



Natalija Mamula, EU Projects Manager, at PINS Local development agency, focused on teleworking and the skills associated with it as an opportunity for mountain development. Through the GO REMOTE project (EEA grants), PINS is targeting young people aged between 20 and 29, mainly unemployed or NEET, and companies offering remote jobs. Through mentoring and training, the project trains these young people with new skills, including those inherent in teleworking, and connects them with employers in the Gorski kotar region (Croatia). Thanks to these initiatives targeting young people from disadvantaged areas facing demographic, social and economic barriers, 48 young people have found employment. In doing so, the initiative supports disadvantaged young people while harnessing the potential of new skills and trends, such as teleworking.

During the questions-and-answers session, participants felt that these practices were relevant to their regional context, and that if replicated, they could help develop, attract and retaining skills in their mountain areas. Participants also highlighted the importance of developing education offers locally, with content grounded in the realities of the territory, placing local communities at the centre of the education project.

How can policies contribute to strengthening skills in mountain areas?



Alexia Rouby, Policy coordinator of the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas - European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture, outlined how the EU Rural Vision and the Rural Pact contribute to attracting and retaining skills. She pointed out that the skills issue is set in a context of major trends, with demographic change, a shift towards digital and green transition, and new lifestyles and ways of working. Ms Rouby also stressed the importance in rural areas of both hard skills, such as those associated with manufacturing or digital literacy, and soft skills, like the sense of cooperation and entrepreneurship. She then presented how the European Commission is encouraging the development of skills in rural Europe, notably through the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, the EU's flagship initiative for rural areas. Although the Rural Vision is not primarily focused on skills, it will contribute to this objective by supporting the social economy, digital skills, green skills and access to education and training. In addition, specific measures from the Common Agriculture Policy and Cohesion Policy contribute to these objectives. Through the Rural Vision, the Rural Pact (an initiative aimed at bringing together all the players who want to cooperate for rural development) some organisations have made a commitment linked to skills, emphasised Ms Rouby. In France, for example, the national Rural Parliament has set up the "Institut des hautes études des Mondes ruraux", a high-level institute on rural areas to train civil servants, journalists, senior executives, lawyers and other profiles in rural issues. In addition to the Rura Vision, concluded Ms Rouby, the European Commission has launched other skills related initiatives, such as the EU Pact for Skills and the new talent booster mechanism.



Juanan Gutierrez, President of Euromontana, closed the conference reviewing the various transitions underway in the mountains, some of which are difficult to grasp. He stressed the need to understand and analyse the skills needed now and in the future for the economic sectors and value chains in the mountains, as well as the importance of education and training. In addition, the President of Euromontana welcomed the progress of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas and the opportunities that the Rural Pact offers to cooperate and collectively move forward on these issues. On this topic, he invited participants to join the Euromontana "mountain community group" on the Rural Pact platform, which will be used to fuel discussions on these issues over the coming months. Finally, he invited all those who wish to continue exploring the issues of skills, employment and sustainable economic development in the mountains to join the XIII European Mountain Conference in Catalonia in October 2024.