

YOUTH & EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN EU COOPERATION

2014-2020 PERIOD



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Intro- duction

The 2014-2020 programming period was an intense one from the perspective of the younger generations, who were faced with the extreme effects of the economic and financial crisis of the late 2000s, the increasing impact of digitalisation and new technologies on everyday, work and social life, as well as the negative consequences of the recent COVID-19 crisis on both employment and society, all within a context of scarcity of employment and poor job quality. Europe is suffering from an employability problem among the younger generations, and social innovation may be seen as a driving force of social change for young people that can be achieved through education and training, leading to the acquisition of newly in-demand digital and non-digital skills, increased employability, entrepreneurship skills, mobility and social inclusion. In that sense, the distinction between social innovation and other manifestations of social change is that it is driven by certain actors in an intentional, targeted manner with the goal of better addressing the existing needs and problems than is possible through established practices. An innovation is therefore social to the extent that it is socially accepted and diffused throughout society, or certain societal sub-areas, ultimately becoming institutionalised as new social practice.¹

In 2014, at the beginning of the programming period, it was especially difficult for young people to make the transition from education and training into a labour market with a diminishing number of jobs, in which they had to compete not only with other unemployed young people but also with older, more experienced unemployed workers who had recently lost their jobs. Their intrinsic lack of experience, given their age and the lack of opportunities to gain experience in the labour market due to the scarce possibilities of entering it, aggravated the vicious circle in which young people found themselves.

¹<https://cordis.europa.eu/docs/results/612/612870/final1-si-drive-final-report-2018.pdf>

Young
population
in Europe:
(Between
15 and 29)

2014

17.4%

2020

16.5%

To provide a better understanding of **the dimension and context of the young population** (between 15 and 29), there are few facts and figures to be considered according to Eurostat's Labour Force statistics: youngsters involved 17.4% of the total population in 2014 and 16.5% in 2020, being quite heterogeneous in terms of gender, educational attainment, migration status and socioeconomic characteristics. In 2014, 23.5% of 15–24-year-olds across the EU were unemployed, a rate 2.16 times higher than that of the total population, and with high levels of disparities among Member States. The unemployment rates were also higher amongst youngsters with lower educational attainment—those with less than primary, primary or lower secondary education had an unemployment rate 1.6 times higher than those with higher education—and foreigners. However, between 2014 and 2019, the economic situation improved, and in 2020 the average EU youth unemployment rate (16.8%) was lower than in 2014, despite the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The economic context of 2014 was still marked by the effects of the Great Recession of 2008, and it was the first year since 2008 in which unemployment began to fall, keeping in mind that the aggregated peak unemployment rates in the EU were reached in 2013. Since then, rates recovered until 2019, with lower unemployment rates observed than before the financial crisis. However, even among young people with tertiary education, unemployment rates are higher than among the older generations. Despite the similarities in the consequences of both crises, the crisis of 2008 was systemic and began in the financial system, whereas the pandemic crisis of 2020 is cyclical and is caused by the economy coming to a halt in response to the pandemic. Although the outcome of the recent pandemic crisis remains uncertain, the rate of recovery may be determined by the speed with which containment measures are lifted.²

Regarding the context of NEETs and early school leavers, in 2014, 12.6% of young people in the EU aged 15–24 were classified as neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs), with significant variation among the different countries. However, in 2020, the EU's average proportion of 15–24 NEETs had fallen to 11.1%, while the variability between countries remained consistent with the 2014 figures. The NEET phenomenon may have its underlying cause in the problem of early school leaving, as early leavers may be more prone to stop their education or look for a job. Also, the rates of NEETs and early education leavers usually follow the business cycles of the economy.

An early leaver from education and training is defined by Eurostat (2021) as “a person aged 18 to 24 recorded in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as those whose highest level of education or training attained is at most lower secondary education and who received no education and training in the four weeks preceding the Labour Force Survey”.³ These youngsters

² <https://www.bbva.com/en/from-the-great-recession-to-the-great-pandemic-the-differences-between-the-2008-and-2020-crises/>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early_leaver_from_education_and_training#:~:text=For%20Eurostat%20statistical%20purposes%2C%20an.at%20most%20lower%20secondary%20education



may be discouraged from continuing their education and, in consequence, have more difficulties in finding a job; and, even when they find it, its quality and conditions will probably be inferior to those of other, more educated young people.

In 2014, on average 11.8% of 18–24-year-olds left school early across the EU countries, and significant differences were found between countries. The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020⁴) noted a benchmark to be achieved by 2020: the share of early leavers from education and training in the EU should be no more than 10%. The average proportion has fallen slightly between 2014 and 2020 to 10.5%, but high variability between countries remains.

As the following sections will describe in detail, NEETs and early school leavers are specifically addressed by the different European youth programmes that aim to promote employability. These employability actions are crucial to help those that may be left behind when entering the labour market, together with social inclusion measures to create opportunities for younger people to improve their social situation.

As stated earlier, younger people suffer from lower employment quality: it is not only more difficult to enter the labour market, but also to find a decent job, even for youngsters with higher educational attainment. This can be demonstrated by the proportion of temporary employment among younger employees. Despite its slight decline between 2014 (50.6%) and 2020 (46.3%) among the population aged 15–24, these figures clearly show the prevalence of this type of contract among younger people; the 2020 figure is 3.4 times higher than the average of the total working-age population. There is also a high degree of variation between countries.

In that sense, **employability measures** are also crucial to promote employment quality among those more prepared youngsters. **Mobility between**

The technological revolution of digitalisation is causing significant changes to the labour market.

and within European regions may foster the elimination of barriers and favour the exchange of ideas, as well as offering the opportunity to learn from the existing knowledge and practices in regions outside the own country, both for the more and less educated youth.

The technological revolution of digitalisation is causing significant changes to the labour market as some jobs are at risk of being substituted by machines and algorithms, while others are being transformed and yet others are being newly created. The required skill sets are constantly changing (JRC 2019).⁵ In this context, it is not only the increased difficulty of obtaining a job that affects young people. Young workers, who have seen a growth in their educational attainment since the beginning of the 2000s, are also faced with lower relative earnings, overqualification and higher levels of horizontal mismatch—working in a field of study other than the one they were educated in.

In this context, **youth employment opportunities are crucially related both to employability-enhancing skills and to the improvement of young people's access to the labour market.** The International Labour Office defines employability as “relating to portable competencies and qualifications that enhance an individual's capacity to make use of the education and training opportunities available in order to secure and retain decent work, to progress within the enterprise and between jobs, and to cope with changing technology and labour market conditions”.⁶ Also, it states that “individuals are most employable when they have broad-based education and training, basic and portable high-level skills, including teamwork, problem-solving, information and communications technology (ICT) and communication and language skills... This combination of skills enables them to adapt to changes in the world of work”.⁷ Moreover, **educational and vocational training programmes and actions** may help improve young people's knowledge and skills—both digital and other cognitive and non-cognitive skills—with the aim of increasing their employability. In that sense, **entrepreneurship** is a crucial aspect that should be fostered in younger generations so they can acquire the necessary entrepreneurial spirit and skills to create their own business projects.

Regarding the **COVID-19 crisis**, the OECD emphasises that “the young have been among the hardest hit by the economic consequences of the

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52008DC0865>

⁵ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC117505>

⁶ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R195

⁷ <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc93/pdf/resolutions.pdf>

COVID-19 pandemic. Investing in skills, education, quality jobs and mental health will help them revitalised their educational and career prospects, empowering them to face the future with confidence” (OECD 2021).⁸ This means that although the statistics for younger people improved between 2014 and 2020, the impact of the recent pandemic crisis on the younger generations has been more severe than on older ones.

As stated above, **there are clear differences among the regions of the EU** regarding the education and training of young people, unemployment rates, NEETs and early school leavers rates, temporality in the labour market and poverty. **This is one of the biggest challenges to be tackled by the different programmes that aim to help younger people and reduce inequalities both within and between countries.** Several policy tools for youth were developed for the period 2014–2020, including the European Social Fund (ESF), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the Youth Guarantee and Erasmus+, as well as EU cooperation projects like Interreg.

This study aims to analyse what **EU cooperation programmes offered in the area of “Youth and Employability Opportunities” in the period 2014–2020** and how the projects tackled employability skills and contributed to the improvement of young people’s access to the labour market.



⁸ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/youth>

YOUTH & EMPLOYABILITY PROJECTS: MAPPING AND CLASSIFICATION

- 1.1. Macrodata overview
- 1.2. Thematic clusters
- 1.3. Thematic clusters and geography

The objective of this chapter is, in the first place, to identify the projects in the period 2014–2020 that focused on improving the employability of young people.

Once the complete set of target projects has been identified, the second objective of this chapter is to group them in order to analyse to what extent Interreg's projects have been aimed at solving the problems or addressing the societal challenges in the area of young people and their employability that have been outlined in the introduction.

Using the Keep.eu database⁹, an exhaustive search was carried out, which resulted in the selection of 160 projects. In summary, the search process started by identifying projects through the keyword “Youth”. The more than 480 resulting projects were filtered in several phases:

A/

Application of keywords (employment, skills, training, self-employment)

B/

Scanning of the project description

C/

Confirmation of the suitability of the project for the purpose of the study

⁹ The Keep.eu database collects the projects carried out within the framework of the Interreg programme. Currently, it covers 96% of Interreg programmes and its coverage rate reaches 86% of all projects carried out.

Macrodata overview

During the period 2014–2020, Interreg invested 10,200 million euros to finance the different issues it addresses. Of this, more than 340 million euros were allocated to projects aimed at young people, representing 3.3% of the total Interreg budget.

Of all the projects aimed at young people (459), **160 regional cooperation projects were carried out that focused on youth and job opportunities (employability).**

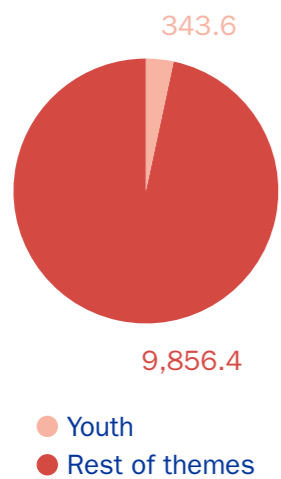
*Of all the projects aimed at young people (459), **160 regional cooperation projects were carried out that focused on youth and job opportunities (employability).***

This means that 33% of the youth budget was allocated to improving the employability of young people, a total of 116.5 million euros.

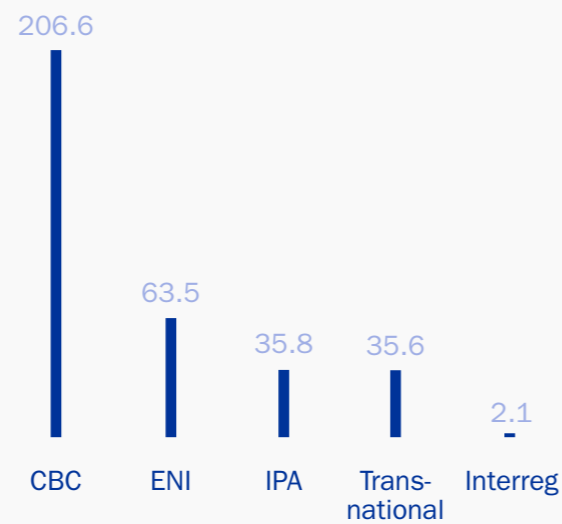
The distribution of projects by strand can be seen in the following graph.

As we can see from the distribution of projects by strand, the Cross-Border (CBC) programmes carried out the largest number of projects in absolute terms. This position is maintained in relative terms when calculating the ratio of projects carried out per number of programmes in each strand. In other words, the CBC programmes also carry out the most projects in relative terms, with an average of 1.65 projects per programme, closely followed by the Transnational programmes with 1.47 projects per programme.

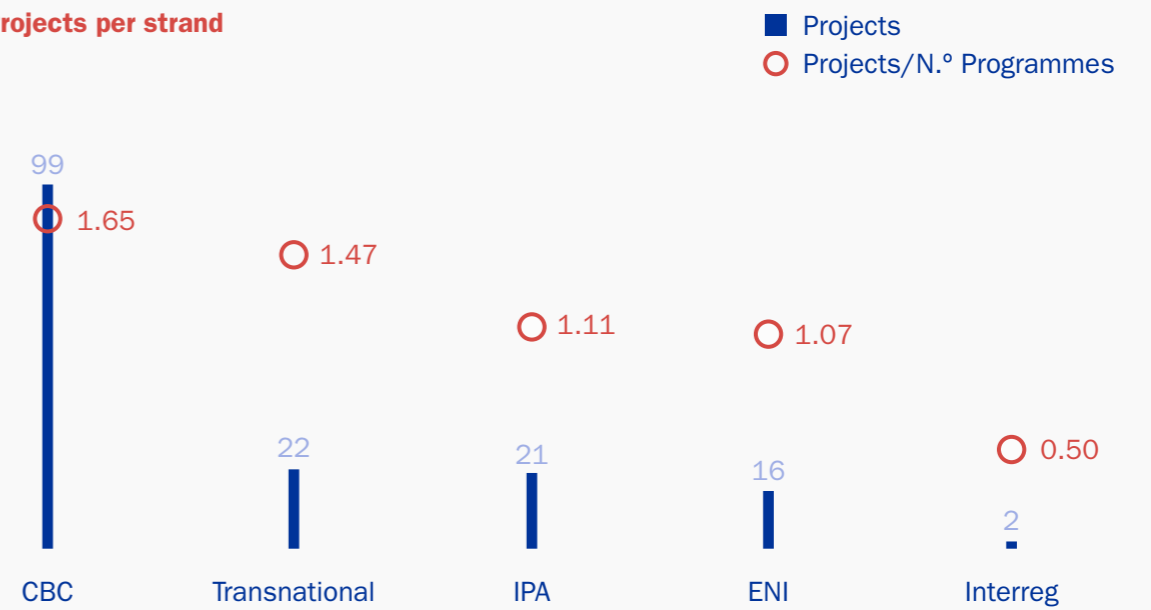
Interreg funding projects (million €)



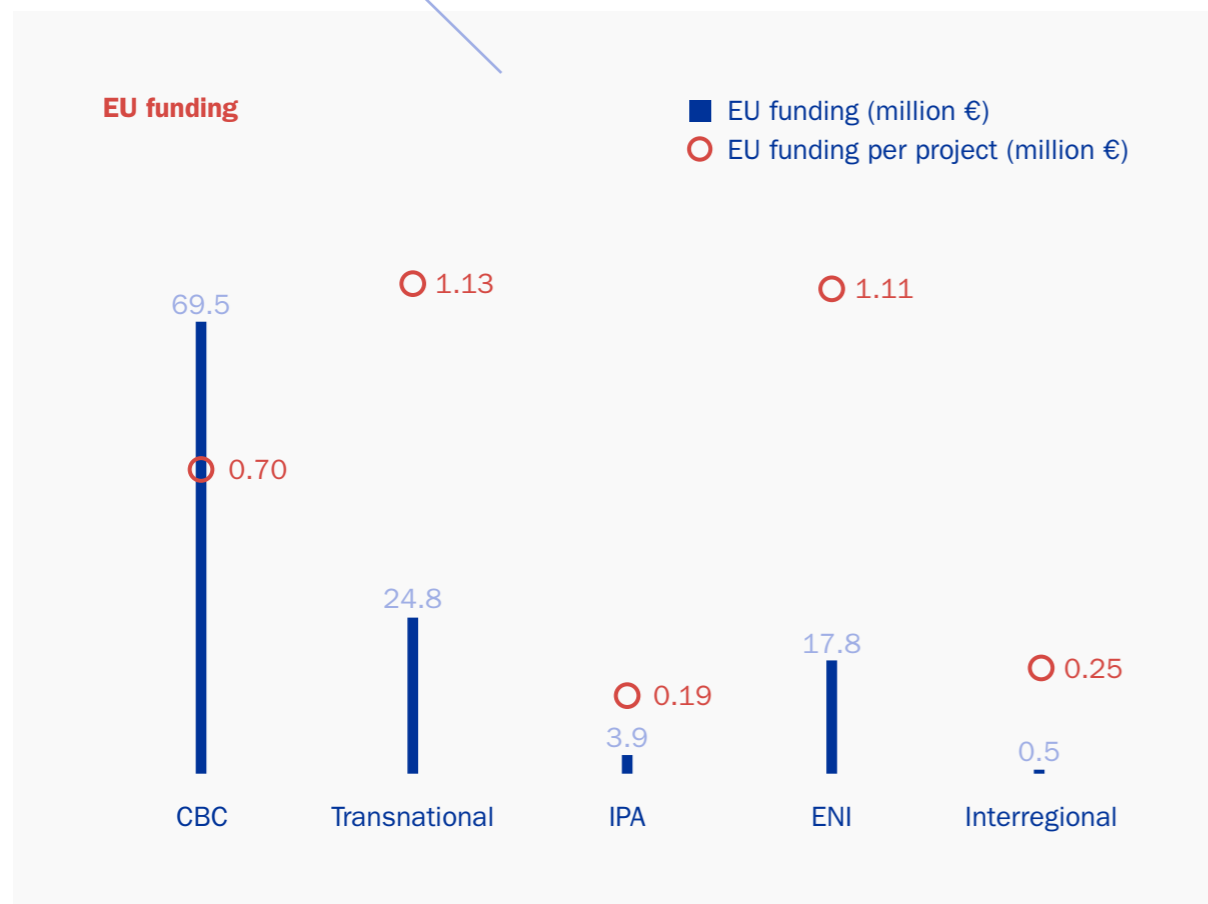
EU funding youth projects per strand (million €)



Projects per strand



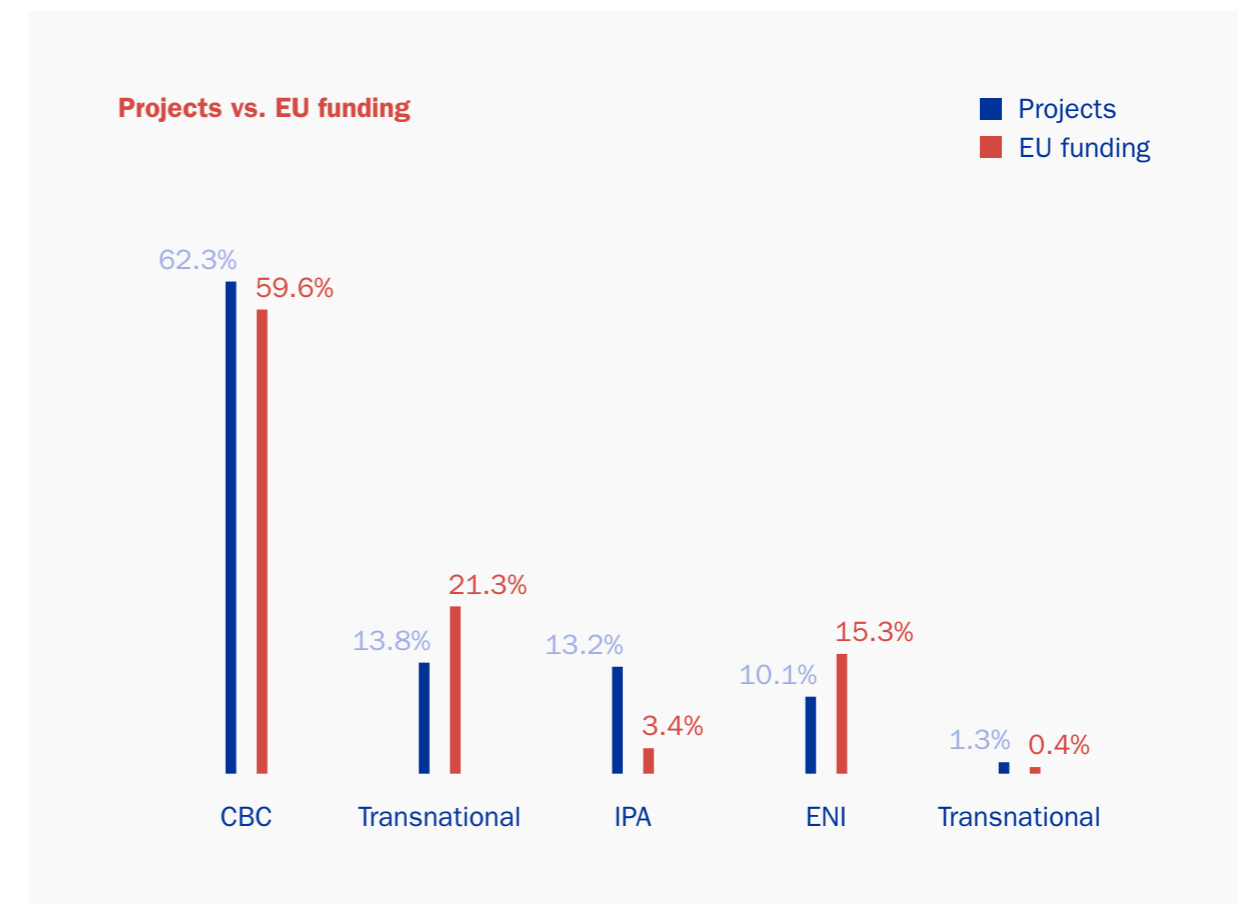
The financing of the Transnational and ENI projects outweighs the number of projects developed, while the weight of IPA and Interregional financing is less than that of their projects.

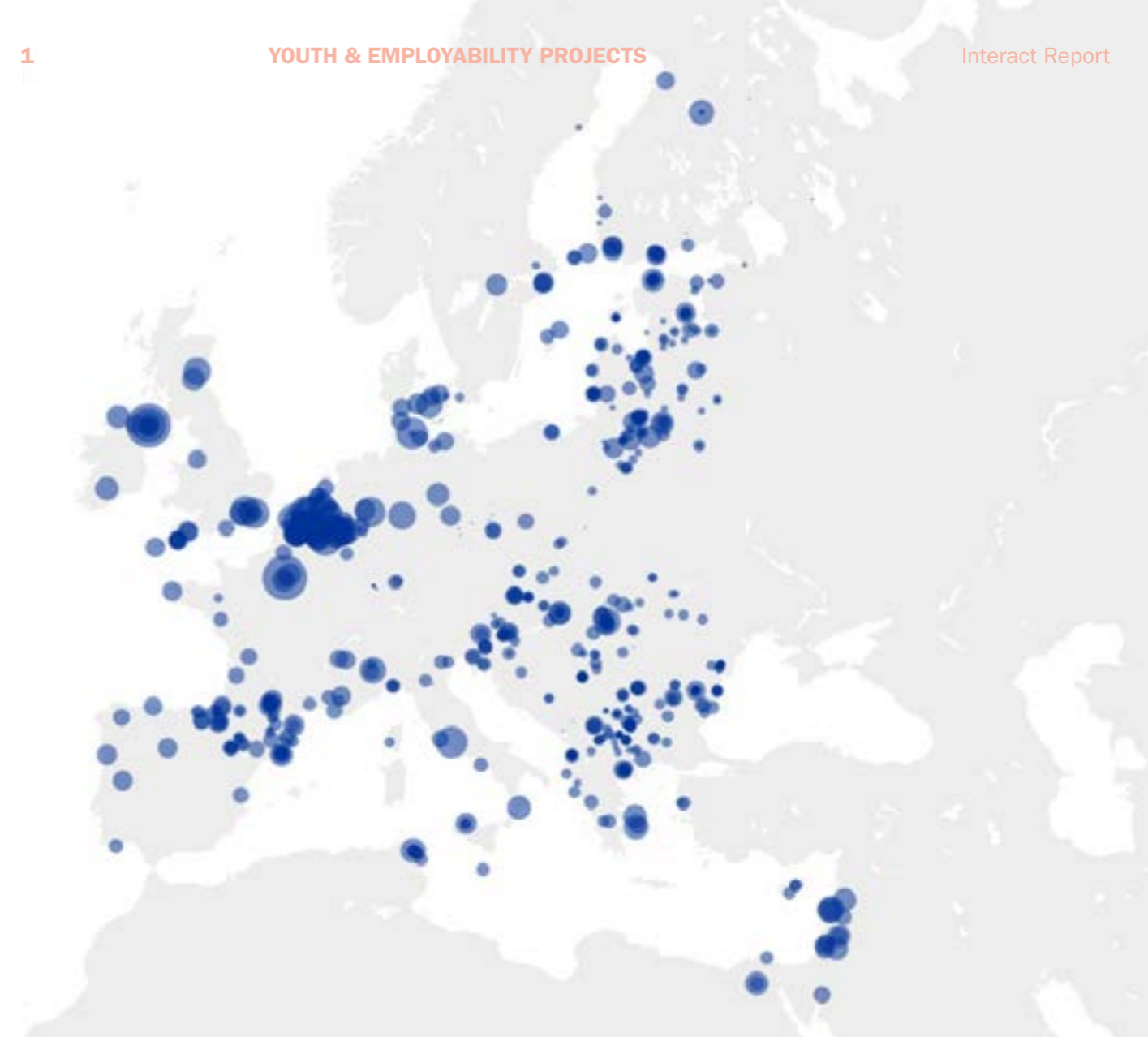


If we turn to the level of funding of the various strands, we see that CBC programmes invested the most in youth employability projects in absolute terms, followed by Transnational programmes.

However, calculating the investment per project alters this distribution: on average, the projects of the Transnational and ENI programmes were the most well-funded, with 1.1 million euros of funding per project. The average funding of the CBC projects stood at 0.7 million euros, while the Interregional projects (Urbact and Espon) (0.25 million euros) and IPA projects (0.18 million euros) lag far behind.

If we compare the weight of each strand in terms of the number of projects and the funding allocated to the group of projects, we observe that the financing of the Transnational and ENI projects outweighs the number of projects developed, while the weight of IPA and Interregional financing is less than that of their projects. This is because the average funding of the projects is very different in each strand.





↑ **Geographic distribution of budget of projects through partners.**

← **Geographic distribution of projects through partners.**

Regarding the geographical distribution of the projects, the location of the project partners allows us to carry out a detailed mapping of where they are located. The following map illustrates this distribution (each point on the map is a project partner).

As we can see, the highest density (projects per km²) corresponds to the Benelux area. However, the areas where the most projects are carried out in absolute terms are 1) Bulgaria (31) and Romania (25); and 2) the area of Lithuania (23), Estonia (19), Latvia (18) and Poland (18).

In economic terms (EU funding), the distribution is slightly modified, since the size of the projects carried out by central and western countries is greater than that of projects carried out in the countries further to the east.

You can access the interactive visualisation of this data and other graphs and maps with detailed information in [this link](#).

Thematic Clusters

One of the objectives of this study is to answer the questions: What did the EU Cooperation programmes offer in the field of “Employability and Youth Opportunities” during 2014–2020? How did the projects address employability skills and improve youth access to the labour market?

To answer these questions, the characteristics of the selected projects have been analysed and classified into **five groups** that highlight what they do to address the problems outlined in the introduction and thus improve the employability of young people.

The 160 Interreg projects carried out in this area during 2014–2020 have been categorised into **five clusters**. In addition to these five clusters, there are **two transversal elements** to young people’s problems that are also present in many of the Interreg projects: **digitalisation and social innovation**.

The list below indicates what the projects in each cluster contribute in general terms, accompanied by a noteworthy project that serves as an example to provide greater precision and clarity.



The 160 Interreg projects carried out in this area during 2014–2020 have been categorised into **five clusters**.



VET



Employability

Entrepre-
neurship

Mobility

Social
inclusion

Educational and vocational training (VET)

Projects whose purpose is to improve the knowledge and skills of young people with the aim of increasing job competencies. An example of a project in this cluster is **Open ICT Education for Youth Employability**.

IPA CBC
Albania – Kosovo



Open ICT Education for Youth Employability

The goal of the project is to provide open access to critical IT knowledge to students at high schools and vocational schools via the creation of a regional Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform. In addition, it seeks to empower the youth to find employment, launch an entrepreneurial initiative and/or pursue further studies in a high potential field by supporting them in actively utilizing the newly acquired knowledge. Finally, the project aims to support the regional knowledge centres (universities, high schools, vocational schools) in increasing the practical applicability of their IT teaching to the needs of the labour market, and create a network of IT skills enthusiasts, learners and pioneers in the region.

Employability

This group refers to projects that offer actions, tools, information, etc. on the labour market to help young people enter the labour market. **Skills Navigator** is a representative project in this cluster, which also integrates other transversal aspects such as the digitalisation of the economy.

INTERREG V-A
Belgium - The
Netherlands



Skills Navigator

The Flemish - Dutch Delta is good for an employment of around 5 million people. By the digitization, automation and robotization of the port sector, there is a sharply increasing demand for higher technical profiles. On the one hand this opens up unprecedented opportunities for all economic sectors in and around the port areas, but on the other hand this poses major challenges for both the labour market and education. If the region wants to maintain its position as a forerunner in innovation, it must be able to provide the right people with the necessary '21st century skills'. With the input of 14 partners 'Skills Navigator' ensures an optimal match between labour demand and supply. In doing so, it focuses on developing the necessary digital skills of both school-age youngsters as (re) entrants on the labour market between 16 and 26 years.

Entrepreneurship

These are projects aimed at fostering the entrepreneurial spirit and helping young people develop skills to create their own business projects. An interesting example of this type of project is **AYCH**, which, as in the previous case, also adopts a transversal approach, since it not only promotes entrepreneurship but does so through building on a model of social innovation.

INTERREG VB
Atlantic Area



Atlantic Youth Creative Hubs (AYCH)

AYCH will build a model of social innovation for young people supporting social entrepreneurship, employment and education in the creative and cultural industries, across the Atlantic Area. Connecting people, ideas, skills, technologies and enterprises across a network of hubs the project will unlock the creative, entrepreneurial potential of young people focussing on key themes such as innovation, co-creation of products, social entrepreneurship and employability. Central to the delivery of the project is the establishment of a network of transnational, connected and multidisciplinary hubs that will stimulate idea generation, pre-start-up and early-stage business start-up support to young people both distanced from the labour market and those seeking a career, or self-employment in the creative sector.

Mobility

This cluster focuses on projects aimed at promoting the mobility of young people, eliminating barriers and favouring the exchange of ideas. **GOPY** illustrates a cross-border mobility project reinforcing the territorial dimension in its approach.

INTERREG V-A
Spain - France -
Andorra



Generator of Opportunities for Mobility in the Pyrenees (GOPY)

GOPY is a project that aims to develop and structure the field of learning mobility throughout the cross-border territory. The objective is to strengthen skills and inclusion within the territory, promote the development of the skills that employers need by promoting the potential that exists in our space. It is in particular through the creation of a structuring service for educational mobility based on a network of mobility actors and innovative digital tools that these objectives will be achieved. 3 digital platforms will be developed:

- A platform of matching between educational mobility offers and the search for opportunities of young people.
- A skills portfolio platform.
- An e-learning platform to strengthen the skills of education

Social inclusion

These projects aim to improve the employability of young people who are in a disadvantaged situation due to different circumstances, creating opportunities that allow them to improve their social situation. An example of a project in this cluster is **emPOWERing marginalised communities through SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**.

INTERREG IPA CBC
Bulgaria - Former
Yugoslav Republic
of Macedonia



emPOWERing marginalized communities through SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

This project is focused on youth, youth Roma, minorities and people with disabilities from the cross-border area. Through the software entrepreneurship training tool adapted for low-educated people and people with disabilities, the project aims to improve the employability skills of the target beneficiaries. The project address to development of Entrepreneurship Gaming Platform, teaching of basics of entrepreneurship and production process concepts; implementation of Training and mentoring on Herbs planting, growing and harvesting and Experimental and Educational herb fields study visits.the necessary digital skills of both school-age youngsters as (re) entrants on the labour market between 16 and 26 years.

Beyond the thematic classification in the clusters above, there are **cross-cutting themes** that should be mentioned.

The first of these is **digitalisation**. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, this is a characteristic that is transforming the labour market and forcing current and future workers to constantly acquire new skills. Thus, digitalisation is almost inextricably linked to the concept of life-long learning. For all these reasons, and as we have seen in some of the examples of projects carried out by Interreg, it is highly recommended that the digitalisation dimension to be included in most future projects.

The second cross-cutting dimension is **social innovation**. Progress towards socially and environmentally sustainable development in Europe requires the anticipation and development of new skills and competencies to respond to new jobs (“green”, “white” and ICT-related jobs), new ways of working, and a resource-efficient and low-carbon economy. One project carried out within the Interreg framework that contemplates this transversal vision is **SB Bridge**.

INTERREG V-A
Poland - Denmark
- Germany -
Lithuania - Sweden
(South Baltic)

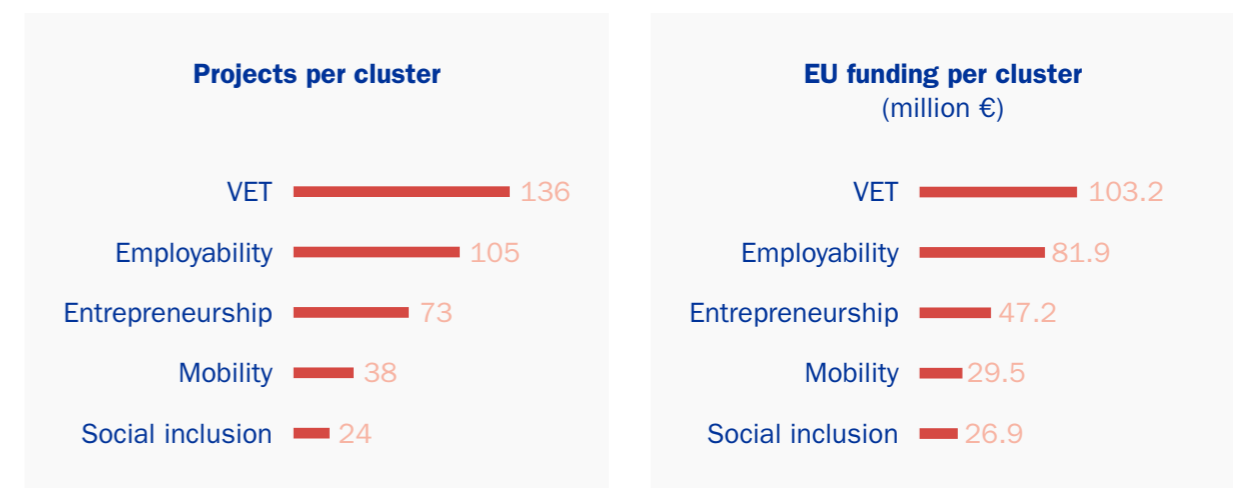


Building bridges for green-tech future (SB BRIDGE)

The challenge to be addressed by the project “SB Bridge” is to improve motivation for green and blue related studies and jobs for pupils, who are bridging from school to tertiary or vocational training, increase number of youngsters with interest for green and blue studies and reduce the mismatch between higher education and their graduates and the green and blue labour market. The targeted project SB Bridge is based on the concept where cross boarder events of a competition (in theoretical and practical tests) to arouse students’ interest in technics and innovation. The purpose is an innovative approach to raise motivation and develop a matchmaking between skilled pupils and graduates and SMEs within the SB region. The intended project will develop this concept towards blue and green industries and required skills to the whole SBP Region by involving more partners: APs, SMEs and other interested groups.

Thematic Clusters and Geography

Before starting the geographic analysis of the clusters, it should be noted that in the process of assigning projects to clusters, most projects have been assigned to more than one cluster. Obviously, there are intersections between the different clusters, and because the actions they perform fit into different clusters, a project generally ends up being classified within two or more clusters. For this reason, in the figures analysed below, the total sum is higher than the total number of projects (160) and financing (116 million) in the database.



The analysis of the territorial distribution of the projects is of special importance because, as mentioned in the introduction, **the problems and challenges raised are not distributed homogeneously throughout the entire territory of the European Union.** Therefore, it is relevant to observe in which geographical areas each of the identified themes is addressed with greater or lesser intensity.

In the following five maps, we can see the distribution of the project partners for each cluster.

You can access the interactive visualisation of this data and other graphs and maps with detailed information in [this link](#).

Entrepreneurship



Mobility



Educational and vocational training



Employability



Social inclusion



Projects per geographic area, strand and cluster

Continuing the geographical analysis, in this section we will analyse how the clusters are distributed geographically, considering each of the strands. To do this, we have first grouped the projects into five geographic areas: North, South, East, West and Centre. Subsequently, we have observed how the projects are distributed among these areas, at the same time taking into account the strand and cluster to which they belong.

The results are displayed in the following grids.

Cross-Border Programmes

The northern and western programmes finance projects from all five clusters, while the southern and eastern are more focused on employability and VET projects.

The CBC programmes located in the central area are show a longer presence of projects focusing mainly on youth and employability.

ENI

While projects in the north are more oriented towards employability and entrepreneurship, in the south they focus on skills, mobility and aspects of social inclusion.

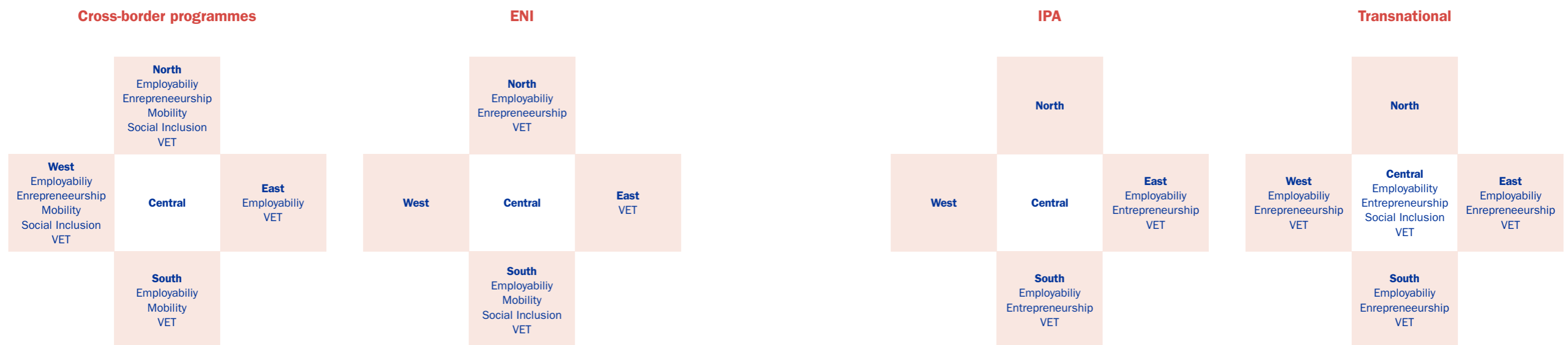
IPA

The projects in this strand focus on the Balkan area and mainly on issues related to improving employability and entrepreneurship.

Transnational

These projects have a lower presence in the northern programmes, being the programmes located in the central area the ones with more presence and themes carried out.

The Interregional strand has not been analysed geographically as it only has two projects.



Rural aspects: isolated areas and depopulation

To conclude this analysis from a territorial perspective, it is convenient to make an approximation of the rural dimension, because many young people's employability problems are at least partly to do with this aspect; it forces them to dedicate themselves to certain activities, or otherwise to emigrate to urban areas, thus aggravating the depopulation of many rural areas.

It should be noted that several Interreg projects address this problem from different perspectives. Specifically, 12% of the total of 160 projects selected in the database had this purpose. The **EnvironmentYou** project, whose focus also includes sustainability, should be highlighted in this regard.



INTERREG V-A
Greece – Bulgaria



Environmental Management Enhancement by Youth-run SMEs (EnvironmentYou)

The challenge to be addressed by the project “SB Bridge” is to improve motivation for green and blue related studies and jobs for pupils, who are bridging from school to tertiary or vocational training, increase number of youngsters with interest for green and blue studies and reduce the mismatch between higher education and their graduates and the green and blue labour market. The targeted project SB Bridge is based on the concept where cross boarder events of a competition (in theoretical and practical tests) to arouse students' interest in technics and innovation. The purpose is an innovative approach to raise motivation and develop a matchmaking between skilled pupils and graduates and SMEs within the SB region. The intended project will develop this concept towards blue and green industries and required skills to the whole SBP Region by involving more partners: APs, SMEs and other interested groups.



BENCH- MARKING: Erasmus + ESF/YEI Interreg 2014-2020

- 2.1. Macroanalysis
- 2.2. Microanalysis

Macro- analysis



In this section, we compare the following European programmes of 2014-2020 period: Interreg, Erasmus+, YEI and the European Social Fund (ESF). As can be seen in the table below, the thematic focus of each programme is quite similar, **the main difference between the funds and programmes lies in the territorial approach, being Interreg the only one where the regional and cooperative aspect acquires a relevance that distinguishes it from the others.** This approach allows projects to tackle problems that affects to a specific geographical area or to border areas between countries, such as issues relating to labour regulations between adjacent regions of different countries, knowledge of languages, etc.

Interreg is the only one where the regional and cooperative aspect acquires a relevance that distinguishes it from the others.

Programme	Territorial Framework	Main Themes	Fund
Interreg	Across regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility. - Social inclusion, fighting poverty and any discrimination. - Education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning. - Entrepreneurship and SME's 	ERDF
Erasmus +	Across countries	Youth mobility	Erasmus
YEI	Whitin one country and/or region	NEETs	ESF
ESF	Whitin one country and/or region	Employment, learning and inclusion to all citizens.	ESF

Territorial cooperation programmes: Interreg (2014–2020)¹⁰

The European Union works to close gaps in **development, growth and quality of life within and across Europe's regions with the scope of territorial cooperation**. Specifically, young people's labour market vulnerability and young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) are common issues across regions, regardless of the young people's gender, economic situation, social origin or age.¹¹ The growing mobility of young people within the EU, which is critical to the EU's position as a knowledge-based economy, means that the European Union offers a broad array of opportunities. **For more than 30 years, Interreg and cooperation policies have discovered solutions for young people by collaborating, forming partnerships and exchanging knowledge to increase educational levels, qualifications, skills, international competencies and job opportunities for everyone.** All of those considering in a very particular way the territory and the challenges emerging from the border and non-border regions.

Other programmes related to youth and employment opportunities include Erasmus+ and ESF/YEI, which are summarised below.

For more than 30 years, Interreg and cooperation policies have discovered solutions for young people by collaborating, forming partnerships and exchanging knowledge to increase educational levels, qualifications, skills, international competencies and job opportunities for everyone.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/interreg-2014-2020/

¹¹ https://interreg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Handbook_Volunteer-Youth.pdf



Erasmus+¹²

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to **support education, training, youth and sport in Europe**. The Erasmus+ indicative financial envelope for the period 2014-2020 was €16.4 billion, providing opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain experience and volunteer abroad. The final budgetary execution for 2020 amounted to €3.78 billion (€506 million more than in 2019) and supported close to 640,000 learning experiences abroad, financed around 126,900 organisations and funded around 20,400 projects in that year alone.¹³ The 2021–2027 programme has an estimated budget of €26.2 billion, nearly double the funding of the 2014–2020 programme.¹⁴

During the 2014–2020 period, the goal of Erasmus+ was to contribute to the EU's strategic framework for education and training (ET2020),¹⁵ as well as the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion. **It also aimed to support its partners' long-term development in higher education and contribute to the achievement of the EU Youth Strategy goals.**¹⁶

¹² <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/es>

¹³ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/es/node/2744>

¹⁴ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/what-is-erasmus>

¹⁵ The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) is a forum that allows Member States to exchange best practices and learn from each other. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_en

¹⁶ The EU Youth Strategy is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019–2027, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018. EU youth cooperation shall make the most of youth policy's potential. It fosters youth participation in democratic life; it also supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. It consists of 11 European Youth Goals: 1) Connecting EU with Youth; 2) Equality of All Genders; 3) Inclusive Societies; 4) Information & Constructive Dialogue; 5) Mental Health & Wellbeing; 6) Moving Rural Youth Forward; 7) Quality Employment for All; 8) Quality Learning; 9) Space and Participation for All; 10) Sustainable Green Europe; 11) Youth Organizations & European Programmes. Source: https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en

Some of the specific issues addressed in the 2014–2020 programme included **reducing unemployment, especially among younger people; adult learning, especially of new skills and skills required by the labour market; encouraging young people to participate in European democracy; supporting innovation, cooperation and reform; reducing early school leaving; and promoting cooperation and mobility with other EU partner countries.**

Some of the programme's main concerns focus on activities that promote social inclusion, equity, and active citizenship in formal and non-formal education, training, youth, and sports. The programme also focuses on measures to promote educators' and youth workers' professional development, particularly in coping with early school leaving, students with disadvantaged backgrounds and classroom diversity.

The assessment's mid-term review of Erasmus+ is generally favourable. Thirty years since its founding in the sphere of higher education, Erasmus+ has grown into a flagship EU programme. The general public, as well as all stakeholders, places a high value on the programme. It is generally ranked as one of the three most favourable outcomes of European integration by citizens. Learner satisfaction is said to be above 90%, while staff satisfaction is even higher.

YEI¹⁷

The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of Youth Guarantee Schemes until 2021. Under the Youth Guarantee, Member States should put in place measures “to ensure that young people up to the age of 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within 4 months of leaving school or becoming unemployed”.¹⁸ The YEI was established by the EU in 2013 to assist young people living in areas where youth unemployment was more than 25%. **This effort focuses solely on NEETs**, including long-term jobseekers and those who are not registered as jobseekers. Apprenticeships, traineeships, job placements and further education leading to a qualification are typically funded by the YEI.

*YEI assists young people living in areas where youth unemployment was more than 25%. **This effort focuses solely on NEETs***

The YEI is intended as a supplement to existing national-level initiatives, including those funded by the **European Social Fund (ESF)**.

The total budget of the YEI was €8.9 billion for the period 2014–2020. Although the initial budget was €6.4 billion, the EU raised it due to the persistently high levels of youth unemployment. A special YEI budget line provides half the budget, which is supplemented by a matching amount from the ESF. The ESF resources are complemented by national co-financing from eligible Member States. ESF guidelines are followed when implementing the YEI.

According to the Commission's evaluation, EU support for youth employment has clearly benefited young people.¹⁹ By 2018, 3.8 million people had taken part in the EU's YEI and ESF programmes, just under half of which were women and 70% of which were under the age of 25. The bulk of participants in both ESF and YEI are low skilled.

Approximately 1.4 million operations resulted in direct employment, with additional positive outcomes including employment-focused education and training, as well as self-employment. One prevalent difficulty across YEI programmes was reaching NEETs because many of these young people were not listed as unemployed. Identifying this target group often required significant canvassing and persuasion for group members to come forward to register.

¹⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1176>

¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1176>

¹⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1176&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9793>

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23027&langId=en>

During the public consultation for the programme's evaluation, participants regularly voiced positive opinions on the effects of the EU assistance they had received to help their integration into the labour market. The benefits of the ESF/YEI programmes, according to the organisations, are primarily tied to the development of skills and qualifications, as well as assisting young people in finding employment.

The YEI has a sole national or regional approach.

ESF²⁰

The ESF, which has a broader scope than the YEI, provides further support for youth employment policies. It includes assistance with system-related operations as well as assistance for regions that are not eligible for YEI financing.

The ESF is Europe's main instrument for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens. It works by investing in Europe's workers, both young people and all those looking for a job, in order to create more and better jobs and a socially inclusive society. One of its priorities is to equip workers with new skills, and businesses with new ways of doing business. Other priorities are related to improving access to employment, such as helping young people make the transition from school to work or training lower-skilled job seekers to boost their employability. Indeed, many ESF projects include vocational training and lifelong learning opportunities to help people acquire new skills. Another priority is to assist people from disadvantaged groups to find work. This is part of the process of increasing social inclusion.

The ESF funds tens of thousands of local, regional and national employment-related projects throughout Europe: from small, local projects to nationwide projects. People are the main focus of the ESF, and it includes projects relating to education systems, teachers and schoolchildren, young and older job seekers, and potential entrepreneurs.

Among the activities carried out by the ESF is one called "Creating chances for youth". The ESF devotes significant resources to helping NEETs or young people who have left education and who are looking for a job.

There is a high degree of complementarity between YEI and ESF regarding their objectives, activities and results.

²⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

²¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=35&langId=en>

*Probably, the biggest difference between the programmes lies in the territorial approach of the projects; **Interreg is the only one where the regional and cooperative aspect acquires a relevance that distinguishes it from the others.***

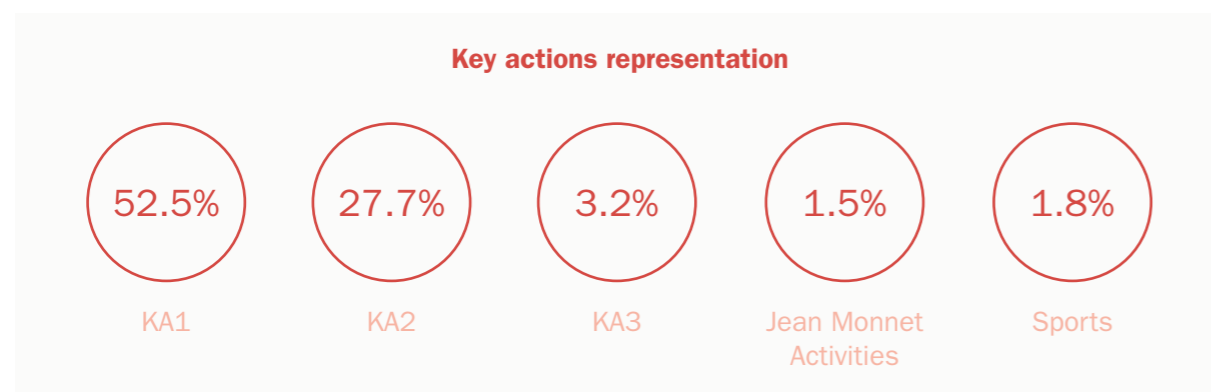


Micro-analysis

Below, there are the general lines followed by the Erasmus+, ESF/YEI and Interreg programmes and their projects in relation to youth and employability opportunities, fallen under 2014-2020 period.

Erasmus+

Erasmus projects can be classified according to several key actions: Key Action 1 (KA1), Key Action 2 (KA2), Key Action 3 (KA3), Jean Monnet Activities, and Sports. In the last available budgetary execution, that of 2019,²² KA1 represented 52.5% of the budget commitments; KA2 represented 27.7%, KA3 3.2%, Jean Monnet 1.5% and Sports 1.8%.²³



²² Erasmus+ Annual Report 2019: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/30af2b54-3f4d-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

²³ The remaining budgetary commitments are distributed among management fees for national agencies, administrative expenditure and international cooperation.

KA1 is related to individuals' learning mobility and aims to enhance the skills, employability and intercultural awareness of participants. KA1 supports three main types of activities:

- **Mobility in the field of education, training and youth:** offering possibilities for students, trainees, recent graduates, young volunteers, professors, teachers, trainers, young workers, staff of educational institutions and civil society groups to learn and/or work in another country. It includes activities relating to student and staff mobility in higher education, both between and within programmes and partner countries, as well as school education and youth mobility, vocational and education training (VET) for learners, and staff mobility.
- **Erasmus Mundus joint master's degrees** provide students with mobility options within fully integrated study programmes that encourage excellence, quality improvements, and the internationalisation of higher education.
- **Erasmus+ master's loan schemes:** these give students pursuing a master's degree in another Member State easier access to EU-guaranteed loans with favourable terms.

KA2 involves cooperation to promote innovation and the exchange of good practices in the fields of education, training and youth, with the goal of having a long-term impact on organisations, individuals and policy systems. **Support for policy reforms in keeping with the general European policy agenda is part of KA3.** It also supports networks and tools that promote transparency and the recognition of skills and qualifications.

The **Jean Monnet activities** include actions and operating funds to support specific institutions that assist in teaching and research about the European Union throughout the world, notably in higher education; finally, the Erasmus+ **Sports** chapter promotes the European dimension in sport.

Erasmus+ projects directly related to youth and employability are mainly connected to the following topics and implementations:

- **Educational and vocational training:**
- Exchange of good practices between schools in terms of career guidance, entrepreneurial learning and combating youth unemployment, early school leaving and failure in education.
- Initiatives for students in the age most at risk of leaving school too early to motivate them to complete their formal education and help them gain knowledge, skills and self-confidence.

Employability

- Exchanges to discuss and be creative about how technology can serve employability.

Entrepreneurship

- Training staff to tackle youth unemployment and promote youth entrepreneurship for young people who want to start their own business.
- Involve young people in entrepreneurial activities with mentors to support them.

Mobility

- Exchanges to improve young people's entrepreneurial skills as well as to promote their participation in the EU labour market.
- Youth exchanges to provide guidance and empowerment with tools to understand how they can transform their interests into goals for the future.

Social inclusion

- Youth exchanges aimed at improving knowledge, skills and competencies of young people with fewer opportunities, migratory/refugee backgrounds and special needs to promote, among other goals, participation in the labour market in and beyond Europe.
- International training courses for youth workers aimed at empowering and building up the competencies of young people to initiate and run social initiatives and projects based on community needs.
- Obtaining information on the economic situation of young people through surveys and consultations. Learning how young unemployed people and young workers in precarious situations view their situation and cope with it.
- Implementation of methods of non-formal education to enable the training of long-term NEET youth.
- Promoting exchanges among NEETs to raise awareness and knowledge, to support them in developing their skills, and to increase their intention to apply for jobs.

ESF

The ESF funds tens of thousands of projects across the EU in areas relating to specific themes, such as strengthening employment and mobility (with projects relating to opening pathways to work, creating chances for youth, boosting business and caring for careers), better education (with projects relating to opening doors to learning, helping people aim higher, and training that works), giving opportunities to all (with projects that fight marginalisation, promote social enterprise, support local partnerships and encourage inclusive approaches), and better policy services (with projects aimed at creating more effective institutions and partnerships for progress). Of these themes, the one related to **creating chances for youth**²⁴ within the overarching theme of **strengthening employment and mobility** is the most similar to the target of tackling youth unemployment and fostering employability. Within this theme, the ESF devotes resources to helping young people who have left education and training and are looking for a job to take the first steps into the labour market, with a specific emphasis on helping those who are classified as NEETs.

Many ESF activities provide opportunities for young job searchers, particularly those with lower qualifications.

²⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=534&langId=en>

Many ESF activities provide opportunities for young job searchers, particularly those with lower qualifications, to gain marketable skills and qualifications. These activities also assist young people in the process of searching for a job by providing individual career counselling, CV writing tips and interview skills, as well as frequent accompaniment during the job-seeking process and first months at work. Apprenticeships, internships and short-term job opportunities, in addition to training courses, are encouraged to give young people the opportunity to develop work-related skills and experience. These activities frequently result in employment contracts.

Furthermore, several projects specifically encourage the mobility of young people to gain language skills and work experience in places where their abilities are in demand. In addition to these ESF activities, as stated above, YEI provides extra help for young people, with an emphasis on NEETs and regions with youth unemployment rates above 25%.

ESF projects directly related to youth and employment can be broken down into the following topics:

Educational and vocational training

- Digital skills for NEETs.
- Providing a positive second-chance learning environment for early school leavers.
- Helping young people in rural areas and at risk of social exclusion with workshops that encourage participants to pursue further education, employment or training.
- Technical and personal support to help young professionals succeed in the digital economy.

Employability

- Easing the transition from school to work.
- Grants to help highly educated young people find full-time employment, boosting full-time employment in the private sector by subsidising positions in enterprises.
- Helping young individuals register at work centres by offering one-to-one coaching to determine their interests and skill levels, followed by training sessions.
- Opportunities for young people to work at universities in the field of R&D to gain new skills and valuable work experience.

Entrepreneurship

- Grants for graduates to turn knowledge into businesses.
- Helping young, unemployed individuals build their own businesses.
- Encouraging entrepreneurship and employment among young people.

Mobility

- Learning professional skills through mobility.

Social inclusion

- Helping women on the way to a professional future to support, advise and share skills and training with disadvantaged and marginalised young women.
- Support for young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in learning the language in order to obtain a job or apprenticeship.
- School programmes that aim to promote social inclusion and life changes among young people from vulnerable socio-economic groups.
- Support for young people with mental health issues by giving them access to more suitable employment training and promoting accessible work environments.



YEI

Examples of measures supported by the YEI include:

Educational and vocational training

- Traineeships and apprenticeships.
- High-quality VET provision to acquire a second vocational qualification within 1.5 years.
- Second chance programmes for early school leavers to encourage NEETs to return to education and training, facilitating the acquisition of professional qualifications.

Employability

- Counselling by dedicated mentors, offering NEETs supporting and mentoring activities including individual and group activities.
- First job experiences for labour market entry for younger people, including theoretical training, work experience practice, and guidance and counselling during placements.
- Comprehensive approaches to enhance the motivation, skills and professional experience for NEETs.



Training, skills, mobility and entrepreneurship are addressed in Interreg projects that take advantage of existing cooperation mechanisms.

Interreg

As we have seen, Interreg projects address the problems of young people's employability from different perspectives. This breadth, together with the territorial dimension, is what provides added value to this type of project. The territorial dimension can be observed in projects that, for example, promote the mobility of young people by facilitating cross-border internships or collaboration between educational institutions. Other examples include the development of international networks to help young entrepreneurs improve their skills, or efforts to improve language skills in border regions where the youth labour market belongs to two countries.

On the issue of youth and employment opportunities, Interreg projects are often focused on the specific needs of individuals and regions that are common within a wider regional perspective. Training, skills, mobility and entrepreneurship are addressed in Interreg projects that take advantage of existing cooperation mechanisms. Interreg's scope is broader than that of other European programmes in that it not only addresses specific problems, such as NEETs or less educated young people, but also activates young people's existing human capital to maximise their employability and the development of their environment.

Some of the projects involved address the following topics:

Educational and vocational training

- Facilitating the transition towards more efficient work-based learning schemes within VET to address youth unemployment.
- Identifying existing and emerging skills and professional needs through targeted training, coaching and mentoring, and involving VET institutions and enterprises in encouraging sector-skills alliances through apprenticeships, traineeships and on-the-job training.
- Creation of a Massive Open Online Courses platform available to interested learners to transmit IT knowledge to students of high and vocational schools.

Employability

- Reducing unemployment among young people with higher education by capitalising on the results of the Erasmus+ students.
- Creating employment opportunities for highly educated young graduates.
- Encouraging youngsters in rural areas to promote and enrich environmental resources and local competitiveness.
- Improving motivation toward green- and blue-related studies and jobs for pupils who are transitioning from school to tertiary or vocational training to reduce the mismatch between higher education graduates and the needs of the green and blue labour market.
- Preparing students in the last year of high school by creating a platform that provides information and details about the institutions/organisations organising traineeships and/or summer internships.

Entrepreneurship

- Building models of social innovation for young people to support social entrepreneurship, employment and education in the creative and cultural industries in order to lower youth unemployment rates and raise awareness of social enterprise as an option for business start-ups.
- Promoting and encouraging entrepreneurial culture among young people.
- Developing entrepreneurship and cross-border cooperation skills by supporting the creation and activities of student start-up companies.
- Upgrading existing cooperation mechanisms to stimulate young people to start businesses.
- Rural youth entrepreneurship: transnational ideas competition and processes to develop sustainable solutions for local communities.

Mobility

- Boosting mobility of work-based learning students (VET trainees) at a cross-border level.
- A skills portfolio platform and an e-learning platform to strengthen the skills of education and youth stakeholders in supporting young people's mobility.

Social inclusion

- Improving the employability-enhancing skills of youth, youth Roma, minorities and people with disabilities through a software entrepreneurship training tool.
- Promoting social inclusion by providing unskilled and underprivileged young people with marketable skills in the green and circular economy.
- Tackling youth unemployment by providing sustainable job prospects in market gardening for low-skilled NEETs.

Programme	Project typology	Interreg complementarity level (1 to3)	Description
Erasmus +	Mobility in the field of education, training and youth: offering possibilities for students, trainees, recent graduates, young volunteers, professors, teachers, trainers, young workers, staff of educational institutions and civil society groups to learn and/or work in another country.	1	There is a good degree of complementarity with part of the Erasmus+ Key Action 1 projects. There is also a certain degree of complementarity with Key Action 2.
ESF	Training, information courses, digital skills, specifically created websites, apps, information tools, encouraging entrepreneurship.	3	There is a high degree of complementarity between the activities carried out by both programmes.
YEI	Traineeships and apprenticeships, second chance programmes, mentoring, work experience practice.	3	There is a high degree of complementarity between the activities carried out by both programmes.

To conclude this section, we can say that **there is a high degree of complementarity between the activities carried out by Interreg and the projects developed by the ESF and YEI.** Complementarity with Erasmus+ is minor and is limited to some of its Key Actions.

This complementarity does not necessarily mean duplication, because although the themes and objectives of the projects may be the same, the way of approaching them and especially the geographical scope is different in each of the programmes, which allows responses to specific problems where the territorial aspect is a very important element.





TRENDS FOR 2021-2027, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMEN- DATIONS

- 3.1 TRENDS FOR THE FUTURE
- 3.2. CONCLUSIONS
- 3.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Trends for the future

Overall labour market perspective in Europe in the next years

From a broad perspective, the European labour market will be subject to significant changes in the coming years due to technological (digitalisation), demographic (ageing population) and social issues (migration, abandonment of rural areas, etc.). These foreseeable changes are forcing politicians, institutions and citizens in general to take a long view of areas such as training and employment, where adjustments have long maturation periods.

From a broad perspective, the European labour market will be subject to significant changes in the coming years due to technological, demographic and social issues.

According to a McKinsey report,²⁵ the employment trends in Europe over the next decade will be marked by the following elements:

²⁵ <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/future%20of%20organizations/the%20future%20of%20work%20in%20europe/mgi-the-future-of-work-in-europe-discussion-paper.pdf>

- The **reduction of the European labour force** due to the ageing of the population.
- The **automation of many work activities**. Machines will take over routine and repetitive tasks, while workers will reallocate their time to higher productivity tasks that machines cannot perform.
- Workers with **less education, young people and men are more likely to be displaced** by automation.
- The appearance of new jobs due to technological advances, and the disappearance of current jobs.
- The jobs with the greatest projected increase will be in professional, scientific and technical services, as well as in human health and social work, while the greatest decrease could occur in manufacturing.
- Increased geographic concentration of employment. Employment could be further concentrated in the big cities and the west of the continent.

On the one hand, in the coming years, the actions of the European Union over the coming years will be largely marked by the NextGenerationEU recovery plan, which offers a unique opportunity to emerge stronger from the pandemic, transform our economies and societies, and design a Europe that works for all citizens. NextGenerationEU is based on five axes: greener, more digital, healthier, stronger and more equal.

In view of these future trends and objectives, and trying to answer the question of **what Interreg should do in the following period 2021-2027**, we could summarize it in two dimensions of action: thematic and geographical.

In the **thematic field**, Interreg should focus its objectives on promoting the employability of young people in aspects such as: technology and digitization, green economy, transversal skills that allow them to adapt to a changing world, innovation and creativity, and social inclusion.

In the **territorial sphere**, Interreg should play a relevant role in those problems where the regional and especially the cross-border sphere is a key aspect of the problem. For this, it must continue to deepen the coordination between the different strands, especially the Transnationals and CBC.

Conclusions

- During the 2014–2020 period, **Interreg developed 160 projects dedicated exclusively to improving the employability of young people**, which represents almost 2% of all projects carried out in the period. Together, these projects received European funding in the sum of 116 million euros.
- **These projects tackled the major employability problems of young Europeans**, including unemployment, early school leaving, the low quality of many jobs, the social exclusion of young people, the growing digitalisation of the economy and the need for new skills.
- These problems were addressed through five large groups of projects:
 - Educational and vocational training.** Projects to improve young people's knowledge and skills with the aim of increasing job qualifications.
 - Employability.** This group refers to projects that offer actions, tools, information, etc. to help young people enter the labour market.
 - Entrepreneurship.** These are projects aimed at fostering young people's entrepreneurial spirit and helping them develop skills to create their own businesses.
 - Mobility.** This cluster focuses on projects aimed at promoting young people's mobility, eliminating barriers and encouraging the exchange of ideas.
 - Social inclusion.** These projects aim to improve the employability of young people who are disadvantaged due to different circumstances, creating opportunities that allow them to improve their social situation.

The territorial dimension of the Interreg programme has contributed to combating the aforementioned challenges, mainly in the cross-border areas.

- **The territorial dimension of the Interreg programme has contributed to combating the aforementioned challenges**, mainly in the cross-border areas.
- Most of Interreg projects implementing actions focusing on youth and employability are cross border rather than transnational or interregional. Therefore, a **closer relation with the regional or national ESF actions** are expected.
- **Topics from a geographical representativeness**, projects on educational and Vocational Training projects, as well as in the Employability are well represented in the whole Europe. While Entrepreneurship is the topic more tackled in Baltic, Benelux and Balkan areas. And Mobility but also Social inclusion are strongly financed by southern Europe, Belgium and the Netherlands. It is to be pointed out, that there are regions unattended in these issues where there could be a higher rate of Interreg actions based on their socioeconomic statistics.
- **There are no** straight contacts nor linkages, neither **clear relation between the operations financed by transnational and cross border projects in this field**. In most cases the transnational projects show a stronger methodological, analytical, and strategical dimension than the cross-border programmes which show an “applied basis” approach, focusing on the specific border challenges and its solutions. The complementarities and transferability between transnational and Cross borders should be reinforced for greater effectiveness and efficiency of resources.
- Although there is some overlap in the typology and activities of the projects carried out by Interreg with those of other European funds, **the territorial dimension of Interreg provides indisputable added value in many cross-border regions that would otherwise be difficult to address**. This is where Interreg must continue to focus its actions.

Recommendations

Finally, we include some recommendations for the period 2021–2027 that could improve the impact of Interreg's projects. These 11 recommendations arise both from the analysis of Interreg projects carried out in this report and from the trends to be taken into account in the coming years.

Interreg should:

- Take advantage of its differential element (great territorial deployment) so that **its projects address problems that are closely linked to the territory**. In other words, projects that consider the situation of a region in terms of indicators such as youth unemployment, school dropout levels, entrepreneurial level, risk of social exclusion, language training, connections between the educational system and companies, etc. In short, promote projects where the problems are to achieve a more complete territorial coverage.
- Work more among themselves and with other funds seeking for complementarities. Therefore, an extra effort is asked to them. Not to remain within the model business as usual but to integrate ways of **maximising the results achieved by the project beneficiaries**.
- **Reinforce the dialogue between DG Regio and DG Youth and DG Employment** when designing actions and funds implementation.
- Enhance the relation between Interreg and ESF. Interreg Managing Authorities should open a **constant dialogue** with their regional authorities leading ESF+, in order to design policies and operations that could be cross benefiting both ways.

- **Incorporate transversal dimensions more intensively** into all projects. These dimensions include digitalisation skills, new ways of working, new jobs, the green economy, knowledge of languages.
- **Be aware of the future employment trends in Europe** that we outlined at the beginning of this chapter (automation of tasks, new jobs, ageing population, etc.), in order to guide young people in the right direction and equip them with the tools and skills that will be needed in the next decade. Some aspects to take into account are the ageing population, digitalisation, the increase in jobs related to technology, health, care for the elderly, the green economy and sustainability, and the desirability of vocational training.
- **Increase investment in projects that seek to improve the balance between rural and urban areas** and offer opportunities to young people in rural areas through the diversification of economic activities. Beyond initiatives based on sustainable tourism or craft activities, the new economy can offer projects focused on activities such as the green economy, renewable energy, the circular economy, etc.
- **Strategic vision**. Interreg funds, together with other cohesion (ESF+) and direct management programmes (Erasmus Plus) are tools that allows to tackle youth challenges in Europe and with their neighbours. Each of them has a different target or scope of implementation but all of them applied under a common strategic framework would have a stronger impact. In this context, to delve deeper into the concept of "project chain" could be a solution.
- Reinforce the **involvement from the transnational programmes** into topics of youth and employability, focusing on the definition of theoretical models or serve as pilot tests that can later be adapted and implemented at a cross-border level. This will, however, require greater coordination between the different strands of Interreg.
- Expand and systematize **consultations with young people** about their vision of their problems, Interreg, their proposals, etc. The Manifesto for Young People²⁶ is a good exercise and starting point.
- As a general recommendation, which not only affects projects aimed at the employability of young people, projects should **include more partners with direct responsibility for the policy instruments addressed**, which would increase the chances of impacting on policy changes. It would also be advisable to improve the projects' impact evaluations to measure their effectiveness.

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/youth_manifesto_interreg_en.pdf

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBC	Cross-Border Cooperation
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and communications technology
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
KA	Key Action
LFS	Labour Force Survey
NEETs	Neither in Employment nor in Education and Training
VET	Educational and vocational training
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative



