



Europaforum Northern Sweden's views on skills supply

Europaforum Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a meeting place and a knowledge arena for discussion and analysis of the impacts of EU policy on northern Sweden. EFNS monitors European issues to influence EU legislation, the EU's strategies and action programmes and the EU's budget. The objective of EFNS is to safeguard the interests of northern Sweden both in the European arena and in relation to the national level in matters with a clear European perspective.

With a background in northern Sweden's large-scale green industrial transition, Europaforum Northern Sweden wishes to present views on the EU's efforts to supply skills linked to northern Sweden's leading initiative regarding the green transition. This is due to the European Year of Skills 2023¹, the Industrial Plan for the Green Deal², the European Skills Agenda³ and the Net Zero Industry Act⁴.

EFNS hereby wishes to put forward its perspective on skill supply and calls on the EU to:

- notice to the fact that Swedish regions have a significant role in regional development and skills provision through their work with smart specialisation (S3) and regional development strategies. The EU should therefore include regions in the EU's strategic discussions on Union-wide initiatives for education, skills and mobility on the labour market ahead of decisions on, for example, IPCEI, SRIA and financial support from the European Investment Bank (EIB).
- utilise northern Sweden's experiences of large-scale green industrial transition and establish a platform where European regions in large-scale green transition and growth can learn from each other. Northern Sweden can be a pilot to increase the pace, test and implement initiatives and efforts from the EU in skills supply and transition linked to NextGeneration EU, The Green Deal and RePower EU.
- take notice of the fact that the green transition creates demand for new skills in the private and public sector of both highly educated labour and labour with non-academic education. And that public efforts that support industrial investments, for example the EIB, should be combined with support for "soft" efforts in the form of skills provision and equipping society for upscaling and growth.
- draw attention to the universities' central role in the EU's skills supply as an educational provider and engine for regional development through their cooperation with industry and small and medium-sized enterprises.

¹ COM(2022) 526

² COM(2023) 62

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>

⁴ COM(2023)161



Strategic dialogues with local and regional level in the design of the EU's efforts for skills supply

European regions and municipalities have a significant responsibility for skills supply through strategies, cooperation and implementation of operational activities. In Sweden, in addition to Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), regions develop Regional Development Strategies (RUS) based on the Swedish regulation on regional development responsibility. Based on the regulation, the regions develop goals and priorities for regional skills supply, as well as assessments of the region's need of skills in the public and private sector in the short and long term. The regional development strategies include, for example, economic growth, innovation, enterprise, transport and culture. In addition, the Swedish municipalities have a significant role in skills supply through responsibility for primary school, adult education and integration of new arrivals. Northern Sweden is therefore urging for extended regional strategic dialogues with the EU's institutions in terms of skills supply.

Through these roles, regions and municipalities have the potential to contribute to the EU's ambitions regarding skills supply through their insight into regional labour markets and the tools that contribute to attracting and training labour for the region's companies and public activities. Europe's wide-ranging challenges can only be tackled through cooperation at all levels. EFNS therefore encourage the European Commission to include regions in the EU's strategic discussions on Union-wide initiatives for education, skills and mobility on the labour market. The regions should therefore be included in strategic dialogues with the EU's institutions before decisions on, for example, IPCEI, SRIA and financial support from the EIB.

The green transition in northern Sweden is realised, among other things, through large private investments and investment support via the EIB, Horizon Europe and the EU Innovation Fund. The transition means a great pressure on the whole society and an increased need to supplement these large-scale investments, which the capacity within today's European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) financing is not able to handle. The investments that received support from the EIB or Important Project of Common European Interest (IPCEI) need to be met with "soft" investments that equip society for growth and upscaling of public services, such as expanded efforts for up-skilling, re-skilling and recruitment to northern Sweden.

Workforce with different levels of education

The labour market is undergoing constant transformation and the green and digital transition of recent years has forced employers and employees to adapt quickly. The large-scale industrial transition is creating changes both in terms of the type of skills that are in demand, but also in terms of where in Europe the skills are needed. The large-scale investments of 100 billion euros in northern Sweden have created a need for the recruitment of 100,000 people to northern Sweden.

The major green industrial transition in northern Sweden means great needs of skills that can be met through efforts to up-skill and re-skill as well as recruiting new labour.



The needs in northern Sweden cover both highly skilled labour operating on a global labour market as well as groups in profession with lesser education in both the private and public sectors.

In addition to the EU initiatives targeting the academic actors, the European Commission should also adopt initiatives that respond to a greater extent to society's green transformation at various levels of education. By also including the regional perspective in the EU's efforts for skills provision and the green societal transformation, the chances increase that the joint efforts will be successful and that future efforts for skills supply are developed with local consideration in order to create synergies with existing efforts. In this efforts, Swedish regions can be a good partner due to their mission to facilitate cooperation within the territory and their work with S3.

Universities' central role for the EU's competence supply

The universities have a central role for the EU's competence supply as education providers, engines for regional development and through their cooperation with industry and small and medium-sized enterprises, they are an important partner in regional and national initiatives for education and competence provision. Through their role as producers of new knowledge and education providers they should be included in the EU's strategic work on education to a greater extent in order to more clearly contribute to the green transformation.

Pilot for skills supply based on northern Sweden's experiences large-scale green industrial transition

EFNS calls on the EU to note that the current challenges in northern Sweden in skills supply require innovative solutions that are closely linked to the regions' smart areas of specialisation. The green industries in the regions are pioneers, which means that the regions continuously discover new needs for skills and new recruitment models. It is therefore important that the EU continues to stimulate and reward exploratory and innovative solutions for skills supply such as the European Educational Area, the European Skills Agenda on both a smaller and larger scale.

Northern Sweden is at the start of taking a leading role in the large-scale societal transformation that adapts the regions and municipalities to a large-scale green industrial transition, which will constitute a significant contribution to Europe's green transition. This is a transformation that many European regions will have to go through before the ambitions of the green transition are realised. Northern Sweden is early in this process and implements several innovative projects with own resources, government support as well as with the support of the Just Transition Fund (FRO) and the ESF+. These projects give novel experiences of leading and implementing this change. However, it's clear that the funds available are not sufficient to meet the extraordinary efforts required for northern Sweden's disruptive green transition.

The EU should therefore finance an initiative where European regions in disruptive transformation can learn from each other, with northern Sweden as a pilot that develops adapted efforts around skills provision, regional planning and community



services that enable European regions to learn from each other. This initiative could be suitably funded as a pilot within, for example, the proposed Net-Zero Academy, the European Skills Academy or the existing European Educational Area. This is in accordance with Article 149 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to support Member States' actions, to encourage cooperation, advice, provide comparative analysis and to promote innovative approaches. This pilot can support efforts on the labour market, foster exchange of information, proven experiences, provide comparative analysis and advice, promote innovative approaches and evaluate experiences.

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