

The EU Pact for Skills – Regional Skills Partnerships for an Iberian-Based Ecosystem towards Upskilling /Reskilling in ASD (Aerospace and Defence) – RISE-ASD

The challenge

RISE-ASD aims to enhance skills development in the Iberian Peninsula for the Aerospace and Defence sector by involving all partners of this sector. QSR Consulting as the coordinator has joined forces with the Portuguese (AED), Andalucian (Andalucia Aerospace), Aragonian (AERA) and Basque (HEGAN) Aerospace Clusters to create an approach to the Iberian skills shortages. This RSP aims to help reach the objectives established by other LSPs, namely ASD and Space4Geo, helping reach the objective of 6% of workers in the ASD sector being upskilled and workers of other sectors being reskilled to this sector.

The Iberian Peninsula and Europe as a whole face major societal challenges. The “demographic winter” means fewer people enter the labour market and more people retire, putting pressure on the governmental structures and the labour market. Portugal and Spain are some of the countries with the highest average age in the European Union, according to Eurostat (2023). Indeed, Portugal scored the highest median age increase of the whole EU (rising 4.4 years in 2023), followed by Greece, Italy and Spain, all with an increase of 4.0 years. This ageing population not only strains public resources but also exacerbates the competition for a shrinking workforce. Companies across various sectors are increasingly struggling to find qualified personnel, leading to heightened competition for talent. As a result, the competition for skilled workers is intensifying across various industries.

This means that companies are competing for a smaller pool of talent, reconstructing the behaviour of employees towards the labour market. The Aerospace and Defence (ASD) sector is facing great challenges in recruiting and retaining workers. **Even though the ASD sector is gaining momentum economically and politically, attracting talent for this sector is difficult, considering that it is competing with sectors with more resources (i.e. automotive and IT).** Qualified profiles linked to Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning, Cybersecurity, Cloud Computing, and Telecommunications and technical profiles connected to Mechanics and Electricians, among others, are being disputed by various sectors and the pool of talent is not sufficient for the demand.

Both countries are **above the unemployment rate average** (6%) for the EU27: Spain is the country with the highest unemployment rate in the EU (12%) and Portugal is above average (6,7%) (Eurostat, 2024). The same applies to the **youth unemployment** rate average (13,8%): Spain is the country with the highest youth unemployment rate in the EU (27,9%) and Portugal is above average (18,1%) (Eurostat, 2024). Another challenge is the disproportion between women of working age, which is around 50% of the population, and having just around 20% in most ASD occupations in Europe, according to the most recent report from ASD/Eurostat. This **gender gap** is mirrored in both Portugal and Spain, with efforts to increase female representation such as initiatives by Women in Aerospace Europe (WIA-E) being implemented, but slow progress. This is especially visible in Portugal, where no regional network is yet implemented at all, and in regions in Spain besides Madrid and Catalonia, which are the only ones with a WIA-E network in place.

These pressing statistics further highlight the mismatches between a supply of workers and a huge demand of necessary profiles and backgrounds for the ASD sector.

Also, the ASD sector lost value with its employees in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, with long-lasting effects still noticeable. Faced with the pandemic, the ASD sector issued massive layoffs, and many people were left without a job, as 60% of the global in-service fleet of commercial airlines was stalled (Avionics International (2020)), due to travel restrictions. **The people who were left without a job moved on to other sectors and did not return to ASD.** As the ASD sector comes to normal, it is important to reskill current and prospective to fill in the gap left by the ones who left.

The ASD sector continues to bounce back economically from the COVID-19 pandemic – in the last ASD Annual Report (2023), it is recorded the maximum number of workers in the ASD sector (921k) and joint record for the turnover (over 260€bn). **The partners from Portugal (AED and QSR) can account for 18.5k workers in the ASD sector and a turnover of 1.72€bn and those from Spain (AERA, Andalucia Aerospace and HEGAN) can account for 51k workers and 12.34€bn of turnover.** Partners are Start-ups, SMEs, Midcaps, Big Companies, R&D centres, VET and Higher Education Institutions, Public Entities, amongst others. Although Spain is the 5th European country with a higher number of sales and workers, both countries are not main players in these sectors. Moreover, a large number of foreign companies are looking to relocate/open branches in both countries, exhausting the number of existing resources and limiting the opportunities for SMEs and other entities to thrive in the Iberian market. Finally, RISE-ASD aims to expand to other regions and clusters and work directly with the clusters' associates. Partners that are not members of any cluster can also be integrated in the RSP.

The European ASD sector is mainly composed of micro-SMEs (87,5%) and SMEs as a whole represent 99,3%, according to the Annual report on European SMEs 2023/2024, and the Iberian Peninsula shares similar figures. However, the common challenges of SMEs in terms of economic resilience, capacity to attract and retain talent, and offer training are even more pressing in countries that experience generalized economic hardships, as is the case of the Iberian Peninsula. Portuguese and Spanish SMEs are hiring more in comparison with big enterprises, signaling that, even with the low attractiveness in terms of salaries and other conditions, the ASD sector can attract people from the own sector and other sectors. Nevertheless, it is necessary that more people join, or the current workers take on new roles to ensure the continuation of the growth inherent to the post-COVID phase. Cooperative initiatives can have a positive impact for these SMEs to reach levels impossible to attain on their own.

Building on the Pact for Skills collaboration and commitment towards reskilling/upskilling, this Regional-Scale Skills Partnership (RSP) aims to help face these challenges by providing information, recommended actions and an open forum for dissemination/dialogue to meet common objectives. Given that a Large-Scale Partnership (LSP) in ASD already operates under the Pact for Skills with the aim to tackle the particular challenges faced by the sector, this RSP will not replicate the LSP but will rather work in synergy with it. The ASD LSP seeks to mobilise a wide range of public and private stakeholders to drive ambitious up- and reskilling for the sector. The LSP focuses on the interplay between various actors, including large companies, SMEs and the integration of skills intelligence and training commitments. The RSP will be modelled after the LSP's best practices and will fine-tune its approaches to the specificities of the Iberian Peninsula.

The ambition

RISE-ASD aims to provide a bigger talent pool to an up-and-coming Iberian Aerospace and Defence sector and thus to support the economic growth and consolidation of the industry. Considering the abovementioned statistics, the Iberian ecosystem is still lagging in terms of workers and turnover, having talent of excellence is imperative to guarantee the absorption of technological advancements and the continuity of growth.

Ensuring workers' upskilling and reskilling during the transition to new jobs and addressing the replacement needs due to an aging population and a sector of past-paced technological intensity is crucial. Therefore, the training system for employment must be designed to anticipate the skills required not only for current jobs but also for future ones. This "skills intelligence" necessitates a matching education and training system equipped with all the necessary tools, resources, and quality to effectively support lifelong learning and skill development. Consequently, the rising importance of vocational education and training (VET) as a catalyst for change is being highlighted in various strategic initiatives in ASD. Some are transversal to the sector; others require more

regional fine-tuning (e.g. mitigating the disinvestment in VET in Portugal and some regions in Spain over the past decades).

To guarantee that RISE-ASD enlarges the pool of talent for the ASD sector qualitatively and quantitatively, it is important to disseminate the opportunities of the ASD sector. The ASD sector is often associated to being a pilot, an astronaut or to join the army. Apart from those occupations, there is a broad range of profiles that are important and lucrative but are not commonly associated/known by society at large. Thus, it is important to disseminate the opportunities near the students, guaranteeing that they can visualise and understand what they can do directly with the entities that can employ them. It is also important to involve multiple stakeholders as in a shared ecosystem (a quintuple helix encompassing industry, education/training, research, governance, and society).

Finally, RISE-ASD aims to create synergies with the ongoing Large-Scale Skills Partnerships (LSPs) established in the ASD industrial ecosystem: ASD and SPACE4GEO. In the same vein, RISE-ASD can build on the knowledge and results from previous (e.g. Eo4Geo, ASSETS+) or contribute to ongoing (SpaceSUITE) Erasmus+ blueprint alliances under the Pact. Some of the original members of RISE-ASD are members of one or two of these LSPs, either directly or indirectly (i.e. representing their entity or through the European Aerospace Cluster Partnership (EACP)), and some are/were partners in the mentioned alliances. In harmony with this, taking into consideration the presence of public entities and the role that Clusters play in the public space, RISE-ASD aims to help establish public policies partnering with governmental bodies. Portugal and Spain share many cultural, political and economic bonds and this partnership ensures that the Iberian clusters can produce fine-tuned and coordinated actions and positions, safeguarding that transnational answers are given to transnational problems.

This proposal derives from the work already established in Skills Working Groups (SWG) by these entities at national and European level. QSR coordinates SWG in three different clusters: in the Portuguese Aerospace Cluster (AED), the Portuguese Renewable Energy Cluster (APREN) and, in representation of AED, in the European Aerospace Cluster Partnership (EACP). QSR, AED, AERA, Andalucía Aerospace and HEGAN have created a bond in the SWG of the EACP working towards reskilling and creating synergies in European projects/initiatives. Also, the partnership derives from the work done in the LSPs of the ASD ecosystem (ASD and Space4GEO) and it aims to involve all the above-mentioned partners for the activities and objectives. RISE-ASD will have a regional focus, creating and consolidating an Iberian network around skills and opportunities for the ASD ecosystem, and providing credible information to substantiate decisions by the members of the RSP.

Through a holistic approach, the RSP commits to:

- Create a diversified **community around skills and reskilling/upskilling for the ASD ecosystem**.
- **Disseminate the ecosystem and the opportunities** within it with society, especially with the age gap including high school graduates and university students.
- Disseminate and prepare joint **reskilling/upskilling training**, which includes in-house opportunities as well as European projects to finance these courses.
- Create an **HR Barometer** to contribute to skills intelligence and harmonise job profiles at an Iberian level, sharing good practices and revising periodically, in the face of the fast-paced technological disruption inherent to the sector. The barometer will also work as an observatory for transferable skills to-and-from neighbouring sectors (e.g. energy, manufacturing, transportation, electronics, metallurgy) to increase competitiveness.
- Create **common events/missions about skills and reskilling/upskilling** to deepen the knowledge of the members and foster partnerships/commercial opportunities.

In terms of specific objectives towards the reskilling/upskilling processes, RISE-ASD commits to:

- Involve a large and heterogeneous network of relevant Iberian stakeholders towards creating reskilling/upskilling concepts and processes in order to develop common solutions.
- Provide useful information to help inform reskilling/upskilling processes, i.e. HR Barometer or the publications in name of the RSP.
- Facilitate the contact between current/future workers and entities, helping the uptake of talent by the ASD sector. Not only this will be useful for students, but also to people that are working in other complementary sectors.
- In line with the overall ambition of the ASD ecosystem in the Pact for skills, RISE-ASD envisions contributing to the objective of up/reskilling 6% of the total ASD workforce and 30% by 2030, applying this in the Iberian Peninsula. This percentage can include actions with current employees, employees in transferrable sectors, employees from sectors in decline, or unemployed, etc

Activities

Work package	Description of the activity	Observations
WP1: Skills' Gap Assessment	Dissemination of the results of academic works on the needs of Skills and Profiles required by the market/Reskilling and Upskilling advancements.	Create a collaborative library with the members of RISE-ASD. If possible, have the authors presenting their academic work.

	Share good practices between both countries and produce reports on the situation in terms of skills.	Conduct meetings with different topics within the ASD HR framework to share the best practices. Within the most structural and debated topics, produce reports and papers to share with ASD ecosystem.
	HR Barometer on the ASD ecosystem , which is a report on the necessities of skills and profiles and harmonisation of profiles at an Iberian level	Biannual Survey of Members and Follow-up meetings and analysis of the answers. European projects (existing or new ones) will also provide information for this Barometer.
WP2: Communication and Dissemination	Organization of events/missions between the members of RISE-ASD	These events/missions will aim at discussing strategic points of action of RISE-ASD and provide opportunities of b2b meetings.
	Writing position papers about the intervention policies and development of competencies.	These positions will focus on public policies and will be directed to the policy bodies. Their aim will be to show the position of the Iberian ASD ecosystem in terms of good/bad practices of said policy and to disseminate good practices between borders.
	Organisation of European projects to address and bring awareness to the competencies issues and other matters related to skills.	The main of line of financing adequate for these projects is Erasmus+, but other lines of financing won't be excluded, if the objective is the abovementioned.
WP3: Fostering the Technical and Behavioural Training	Dissemination of the training opportunities of the members of RISE-ASD.	This aims to open the forum for entities that train specific positions that are found to be lacking in the market.
	Coordinated actions of reskilling of workers of complementary/transferrable sectors and upskilling of those in the ASD ecosystem	Still for the specific positions that are found to be lacking in the market, this activity aims to take the best of every partner to create integrated approaches to the shortages, contingent and adapted to the financial capacity and other resources of the partnership members
WP4: Labour Market Integration	Create a link between VET/high schools/universities and public and private entities , bridging the gap between them.	This link will be created through activities of the public and private entities in the high schools/universities - i.e. a lecture conducted by a company in a university showing the practicality of what the students are studying – and vice versa – i.e. school trips to companies.
	Facilitating contact between students and other workers with entities that interest them	This contact can be done contacting the coordinators of RISE-ASD and a bridge will be

		connected between the entity and the student/worker.
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Tracking your impact

KPI	Target	Timeframe for achievement	Key Milestones
1.1 - Documents in the Library	60	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 documents by 2025 – 20 documents by 2026 – 30 documents by 2027 – 40 documents by 2028 – 50 documents by 2029 – 60 documents by 2030
1.2 - Reports	12	By June 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2 reports by 2025 – 4 reports by 2026 – 6 reports by 2027 – 8 reports by 2028 – 10 reports by 2029 – 12 reports by 2030
1.3 - Positions/profiles parameterised in the HR Barometer	45	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 8 positions by 2025 – 15 positions by 2026 – 23 positions by 2027 – 30 positions by 2028 – 38 positions by 2029 – 45 positions by 2030
2.1 - Events/Missions organized	6	By June 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1 events/mission by 2025 – 2 events/missions by 2026 – 3 events/missions by 2027 – 4 events/missions by 2028 – 5 events/missions by 2029 – 6 events/missions by 2030
2.2 - Position papers	6	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1 position paper by 2025 – 2 position paper by 2026 – 3 position paper by 2027 – 4 position papers by 2028 – 5 position papers by 2029 – 6 position papers by 2030
3.1 - Training Opportunities disseminated	36	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 6 TO disseminated by 2025 – 12 TO disseminated by 2026 – 18 TO disseminated by 2027 – 24 TO disseminated by 2028 – 30 TO disseminated by 2029 – 36 TO disseminated by 2030
3.2 - Coordinated reskilling/upskilling action	2	By June 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – At least, 1 action by 2027 – At least, 2 actions by 2030

4.1 - Activities Developed with Universities	25	By June 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 5 Activities by school year 2025/2026 – 10 Activities by school year 2026/2027 – 15 Activities by school year 2027/2028 – 20 Activities by school year 2028/2029 – 25 Activities by school year 2029/2030
4.2 - Internship guaranteed within the partnership	15	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 7 internships by school year 2025/2026 – 15 internships by school year 2026/2027 – 22 internships by school year 2027/2028 – 30 internships by school year 2028/2029 – 37 internships by school year 2029/2030
5.1 - Number of partners	45	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 members by 2025 – 17 members by 2026 – 24 members by 2027 – 31 members by 2028 – 38 members by 2029 – 45 members by 2030
5.2 - Memorandums of Understanding with Universities	30	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 MoU by 2026 – 20 MoU by 2028 – 30 MoU by 2030
5.3 - Memorandums of Understanding with Public Entities	30	By December 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 MoU by 2026 – 20 MoU by 2028 – 25 MoU by 2030

Partnership arrangements

- **QSR Consulting as coordinator of RISE-ASD** will lead the partnership, bringing the expertise in coordinating SWG in Portugal and in the EACP.
- The **Steering Committee** ensures the overall quality of the partnership activities. It will be composed of the founding members of RISE-ASD (AERA, HEGAN, AED and Andalusia Aerospace) + entities that are to be selected from the members' pool.
- The **Advisory Board (AB)** will be composed of external experts specializing in relevant fields to RISE-ASD. The governance body will include extra-Iberian entities that can share good practices/help exploit the results.
- **Any Iberian entity working in the ecosystem of ASD** is welcome to join the RSP. RISE-ASD has a top-down approach, founding the partnership with the Clusters and now opening to the associates.
- **Entities that are not members of the clusters in the consortium can join RISE-ASD.**

- Also, **any type of entity can be included in RISE-ASD**. Entities can be Start-ups, SMEs, Midcaps, Big Companies, R&D centres, VET and Higher Education Institutions, and Public Entities, amongst others.
- As the sectors overlap in terms of necessities and concerns, RISE-ASD will work as a joint endeavour only splitting when a specific matter attends to only one of the sectors involved.
- The partnership will meet every two months with ad hoc meetings scheduled whenever needed.

Supported by:

Name	Type of entity / Country	Description of the entity	Point of Contact
QSR Consulting (Coordinator)	SME PT	Human Capital consultancy company specialized in the Aerospace&Defence sectors, amongst other high-intensity sectors.	João André Gonçalves (jagoncalves@qsr.consulting) and Miriam Rosa (mrosa@qsr.consulting)
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Hegan – Basque Aerospace Cluster (Founder)	Cluster ES	Basque Cluster for Aerospace	Ana Villate (avillate@hegan.com) and Javier Piñan (jpinan@hegan.com)