EUROPEAN ECONOMIES ARE NOT MAKING THE MOST OF THE GEOSPATIAL DATA AVAILABLE. **MONICA MIGUEL-LAGO** REPORTS ON A TRAINING INITIATIVE TO ENSURE THAT WORKERS HAVE THE COMPETENCES THEY NEED

The earth observation and geographic information sector (EO/GI) is of strategic importance, with great potential to support many European, national and sub-national policy domains. However, due to the large amount of data made available and accessible through data and information infrastructures at various levels, the uptake of existing data and services is not being fully exploited and their integration in added value services for governments, businesses and citizens could be improved.

Studies from the OECD and the European Parliament have revealed that the lack of specialised technical and scientific skills, knowledge and competences, hinders this uptake by private companies and other actors. Furthermore, there is a gap between the offerings of academic and vocational education and training (VET) at universities and private institutions, and the specifics needed to make this uptake happen seamlessly.

The needs of the industry are constantly evolving. Helping the sector to find workers with the right skills and ensuring that they acquire the competences they need to find jobs is key to its economic innovation, growth and competitiveness.

To that end, the Erasmus+ project EO4GEO (www.eo4geo.eu) is proposing skills development recommendations, preparing and taking actions for education and training that will unleash students' and workers' potential to be the innovators of tomorrow and adopters in other sectors.

The latter benefit is particularly important to create the conditions for integrating EO/GI data management into other sectors and enabling the EO/GI sector to make a step-change in mass-market uptake of these services.

EO4GEO builds on the New Skills Agenda for Europe, which is designed to improve the quality and relevance of skills to meet the needs of a rapidly changing society and increase the mutual understanding of skills and qualifications in the European labour market.

Moreover, the EO4GEO project objectives align with the spirit of the Copernicus programme for the establishment of a European capacity development for EO, including geospatial data, tools and services, putting the users in the driver's seat.

A concrete vision

The space-geospatial sector skills strategy proposes a concrete vision, mission and goals that will be used in the definition of an action plan to address short- and medium-term skills needs. A first version of the strategy has been outlined, aiming to reduce the gap and eliminate the mismatch between the supply of and the demand for education/training in the sector, taking into account wider technological, societal and policy developments.

The plan will then be updated to take account of lessons learnt throughout the

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EO4GEO project, open discussions with stakeholders, and future technological, societal and policy developments.
The aim of the strategy is to ensure the strategic cooperation among stakeholders on skills development in the sector. This will support growth, diversity and flexibility by providing harmonised and improved educational offers at a range of different learning levels, including VET and academic training, and the development of new occupational profiles for the sector.

Goals

By adopting a forward-looking perspective, the following goals have been identified for the successful implementation of the sector skills strategy and are recommended to be followed up as part of the action plan:

- A strategic collaboration between the skills alliance, private sector, government and end user sectors.
- A political commitment at EU level to stimulate innovative skills development policies.
- A coordinated effort to improve competitiveness and penetrate other sectors through market intelligence across stakeholders.
- Improved awareness of and engagement with other sectors, leading to increased uptake of Copernicus data and information services.
- Improved and new harmonised curricula and training offers across Europe and internationally.
- A standard for describing key qualifications.
- The use of EO/GI services as an inspiring and innovative context for learning across all age groups and value chains.

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Several actions are being taken to realise these goals. An ontology-based body of knowledge for the sector is being developed and maintained. A dynamic collaborative platform with associated tools is being set up. A series of curricula and a portfolio of training modules directly usable in the context of Copernicus are being designed and developed. A series of training actions are being organised for a selected set of scenarios in three sub-sectors: integrated applications, smart cities and climate change to test and validate the approach. Finally, the action plan will be developed and endorsed by the sector, as well as the Copernicus programme. The sustainability plan will also be developed, in order to sustain the proposed solutions beyond the duration of the project, indicating possible sources of funding.

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