

PILLAR 1 OF THE TALENT BOOSTER MECHANISM

Technical Assistance

Helping regions facing a 'talent development trap' to harness talent

ALENTEJO, PORTUGAL — ALENTEJO TALENT OBSERVATORY
IMPLEMENTATION REPORT



**HARNESSING
TALENT
PLATFORM**

A new boost for EU Regions

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Executive Summary



Pillar 1 of the [Talent Booster Mechanism \(TBM\)](#) supported 11 EU regions in a 'talent development trap'¹ to more effectively address the consequences of demographic change and brain drain. This [Technical Assistance \(TA\) pilot project](#) provided targeted expertise to help elaborate and implement actionable frameworks to attract, develop and retain talent. Phase I of the TA pursued a [diagnostic review](#) of the region's current capacity to harness talent using a 'needs & gap' assessment. Upon the basis of this Diagnostic Phase, Phase II of the TA – the Implementation Phase – sought to provide tailored expert support on the ground to undertake actionable measures to more effectively harness talent.

In **Alentejo, Portugal**, the Implementation Phase focused on two key areas:

1. **Development of a Talent Observatory**, designed to collect and visualise data on demographic shifts, workforce needs, and existing talent resources, while enhancing stakeholder coordination.
2. **Targeted assessment of the regional healthcare sector**, which identified key challenges in attracting and retaining medical professionals and provided a set of policy recommendations.

The **Talent Observatory** was developed to **synthesise labour market data, improve coordination among stakeholders and enhance communication** around talent policies. The Observatory will be integrated into the PlaQuaR² IT platform (See

Box 1), allowing users to explore regional training opportunities and their alignment with labour market needs. Its management will be transferred to the University of Évora, which coordinates PlaQuaR, ensuring continuity and integration with wider regional workforce planning initiatives. The TA Team will continue working with the University of Évora to provide technical support, training for personnel, and a dedicated workshop to introduce the Observatory to end-users such as regional policymakers and representatives of educational institutions.

The **healthcare sector analysis** brought attention to **critical workforce shortages**, particularly in rural areas, and provided recommendations to address **staffing gaps, ageing workforce challenges, and disparities in access to healthcare services**. These findings are particularly relevant given the opening of the new Central Hospital in Évora and the planned expansion of the University of Évora's medical department. The findings from this research suggest the need for a **dedicated strategy** to attract and retain healthcare talent in Alentejo.

The following **Implementation Report** provides a comprehensive summary of the targeted actions of the TA in Alentejo, describing what was implemented and, crucially, what insights were gained.³ Moreover, it discusses the added value of this pilot project and distils key takeaways for other regions facing similar challenges.

¹ As defined by the [Communication on Harnessing talent in Europe's Regions](#).

² Platform for Promoting the Qualification of Regional Human Resources

³ The Implementation Report provides an overview of the various outputs developed for the region and distills key insights gained throughout the process. The individual outputs have been delivered to the region and, if relevant to a broader audience, may be published on this platform at a later date.

I. Main Challenges & Needs

Phase I of the Technical Assistance (TA) provided via Pillar 1 of the Talent Booster Mechanism pursued a diagnostic review of the main challenges and needs of Alentejo in its effort to more effectively harness talent. The full Diagnostic Report, including a more comprehensive analysis of key challenges, is published and [available online](#). In what follows, we describe selected challenges that were of particular focus during Phase II of the TA – the Implementation Phase.

Demographic change

Alentejo is facing a significant demographic challenge, with one of the fastest declining populations and highest ageing rates in the European Union. Between 2015 and 2020, the population shrank by an annual average of -1.4%.⁴ According to the Resident Population Projections 2020-2080 by the Portuguese National Statistics Institute (INE), the region's population is projected to decrease by nearly 30% from 2020 to 2080, falling from approximately 704,000 to 495,000 residents.⁵ This decline is accompanied by a significant shift in the population's age structure. While the number of young people (ages 0-14) is expected to decrease by 33%, the number of older adults (ages 65 and above) is projected to grow by 4.4%. **This demographic trajectory poses substantial challenges to Alentejo's socioeconomic fabric.** A shrinking and ageing population risks reducing the region's workforce, impeding economic growth and innovation. Retaining and attracting talent will be critical to offsetting these pressures and fostering sustainable development.

Need to Strengthen Skill Training to Support Value Chains

In recent years, Portugal has made notable progress in modernising its Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, supported by EU funds. Alentejo stands to benefit greatly from these reforms and investments, particularly those under the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). **Addressing structural skills shortages and aligning training offerings with labour market demands are central to the region's development.**

The agenda [Alentejo 2030](#) emphasises the importance of agility in educational providers' responses to regional needs. Education, both at the vocational and academic level, is viewed as a cornerstone of the innovation ecosystem, complementing the regional Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) and investment attraction efforts. **Consolidating, expanding, and improving the precision of skill development initiatives will be crucial to strengthening existing and emerging value chains,** ensuring that the local population is equipped to meet the demands of industrial and technological transitions.

⁴ Annex to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Harnessing talent in Europe's regions" COM(2023) 32 final. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023DC0032&qid=1716362066973>

⁵ Demographic Statistics 2020 (INSE). Available: https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_publicacoes&PUBLICACOESpub_boui=530368248&PUBLICACOEStema=5414321&PUBLICACOESmodo=2. Note that official projections by Eurostat mirror similar developments, forecasting a ≈20% decrease in the population by 2050.

Need to Improve Access to Services of General Interest, Especially Healthcare

Alentejo's predominantly rural landscape profoundly shapes the regional demographic and economic dynamics, presenting both opportunities and challenges. With a population density of only 22.9 inhabitants per square kilometre—far below the national average of 114.4—the region is defined by **small, scattered urban settlements interspersed with vast agricultural lands** dedicated to cork, wine grapes, olives, fresh vegetables, and livestock. While this rurality contributes to Alentejo's high quality of life, offering scenic landscapes, a rich cultural heritage, and a strong sense of community, it also exacerbates disparities in access to essential services. **The sparse population and physical distance between settlements hinder connectivity and constrain service delivery, undermining the region's attractiveness to residents and potential newcomers.** These challenges contribute to talent outmigration, as the difficulties associated with accessing healthcare, education, and other vital services often outweigh the region's inherent lifestyle advantages. Addressing these disparities is essential to transforming Alentejo's rural character from a barrier into a strength, enabling it to attract and retain talent while fostering sustainable development.

Healthcare access, in particular, remains a critical issue. The region's hospital network is underdeveloped, creating “**medical deserts**” that leave many communities underserved. With an ageing population, the demand for healthcare services, for example in long-term care, is set to grow, compounding existing shortages of trained medical professionals. Indeed, as people live longer, they are more likely to develop chronic illnesses, disabilities, or conditions such as dementia, which require sustained care. Furthermore, with a growing share of elderly individuals relative to the working-age population, the number of people requiring assistance with daily activities (e.g., mobility, personal hygiene, medical needs) rises. Ageing also affects the healthcare workforce itself, with 21.8% of physicians approaching retirement age.⁶ This issue calls for concerted efforts to improve the region's capabilities for attraction and retention of medical talent. In this context, the construction of the Central Hospital in Évora and the establishment of a medical faculty at the University of Évora represent a significant opportunity both to enhance healthcare provision and quality of life in the region, as well as launching a local talent pipeline for the formation of doctors and nurses.

⁶ Nova School of Business and Economics. (2022). *Recursos Humanos em Saúde*. Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Available: https://www.novasbe.unl.pt/Portals/0/Files/Social%20Equity%20Initiative/Nova%20SBE_KC%20Health_Recursos%20Humanos_2022.pdf

II. Pillar 1 – Implementation Phase

1. Action I – Alentejo Talent Observatory

In view of the challenges described above, the Implementation Phase supported the region in its data intelligence and analytical capacities to more effectively harness Alentejo's talent. Specifically, this entailed direct assistance in developing a **novel Alentejo Talent Observatory**, which seeks to i) provide relevant and targeted data intelligence relating to the labour market, ii) enhance coordination between parties invested in talent attraction, development and retention, and iii) support the communication of relevant initiatives in the region. The Observatory is meant to act as a **one-stop-shop to monitor demographic developments and labour dynamics in the region at the NUTS-3 level**, as well as ongoing activities which have a bearing on these two domains.

I. Operational Review

Throughout the implementation of the Technical Assistance, **the TA Team collaborated closely with the Managing Authority – [CCDR-A](#) – and with the University of Évora in developing the Observatory**, as the latter is the coordinator of PlaQuaR⁷, a platform put in place to assist in the governance of the Smart Specialisation Strategy in Alentejo (more information available in **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**)⁸.

The creation of the Alentejo Talent Observatory unfolded in three phases:

1. *Conceptualisation of the Observatory*: The first step in establishing the **Alentejo Talent Observatory** was to define its structure and data needs. These were informed by EU best practices, notably [Skills Intelligence Emilia-Romagna](#) (Italy) and [Bizkaia Talent](#) (Spain). This conceptualisation exercise led to the conclusion that the Observatory should rest on three pillars. The Observatory's primary focus is on **intelligence gathering and visualising dynamics** through a centralised data hub on talent-related trends, supported by an automated data pipeline and *ad hoc* visualisation tool. Additionally, it will contribute to **coherence, coordination and communication** by providing tools like an interactive stakeholder map, updated contact repositories and a dedicated news page.
2. *Preparation of data pipeline, stakeholder mapping and collection of projects*: Having conceptualised the Observatory, the TA Team conducted a mapping of the data landscape. Three key sources were identified: **(i) public data** (Eurostat, JRC) for demographic and socio-economic insights, **(ii) restricted-access hiring records**, and **(iii) private online job vacancies and**

⁷ The University of Évora is actually one of two co-coordinators of PlaQuaR, the second one being Fundação Alentejo. Due to the nature of the activities that UoE wishes to implement however, it represents a better candidate for our collaboration. For more information, see: <https://www.ccdr-a.gov.pt/erei-2030-assina-protocolos-das-plataformas-de-inovacao/>. Furthermore, the following is an indicative list of the partnership members in PlaQuaR: IPPortalegre, IPBeja, IPSantarém, CIMs do Alentejo, IEFP, ADRAL, PACT, Sines Tecnopolo, LNEG, EBM, EDIA, ATEVA, Associação Cluster Portugal Mineral Resources, AED Cluster, Empowered Startups.

⁸ This platform has both a thematic focus on human resources and technical capabilities for the management of IT systems. It thus represents a natural candidate to take over the maintenance of the Observatory at the completion of the Technical Assistance.

career profiles, to be sourced via web scraping with Lightcast's support.⁹ The TA Team developed an automated system to collect, store and update data efficiently. A secondary objective of the Observatory is that of facilitating the coordination of initiatives and stakeholders related to harnessing talent in Alentejo. The TA Team **mapped key stakeholders and collected regional talent initiatives to support this goal**. This resulted in two **catalogues**: one listing **stakeholders** and another compiling **talent-related initiatives**.

3. *Development of the Observatory's dashboard*: At the core of the Observatory lies a visualisation exercise. After having established the underlying data infrastructure, the TA Team focused on creating an appealing and user-friendly dashboard which can be used to shed light on important dynamics in the region (See Figure 1 and Figure 2 below).

Box 1 – Platform for Promoting the Qualification of Regional Human Resources (PlaQuaR)

Platform for Promoting the Qualification of Regional Human Resources (PlaQuaR).

On the 15th September 2023, CCDR-A signed three protocols of collaboration to establish three governance platforms to assist in the implementation of its Regional Strategy for Smart Specialisation (EREI 2030). These are: the Platform for the promotion of Sustainability and Territorial Cohesion (PlaSuCT), the Platform for the reinforcement of Regional Production Chains (PlaCaPRe) and the Platform for the promotion of the Qualification of Regional Human Resources (PlaQuaR). Within the context of the regional cohesion policy programme Alentejo 2030, these Platforms have so far (November 2024) received support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for a total of EUR 606,053.

PlaQuaR, under the direction of the University of Évora and of the Fundação Alentejo (acting as co-coordinators), will map, coordinate and promote initiatives in the field of human resource qualification in the Alentejo region. The platform aims to encourage professional qualifications and the development of skills suited to the needs of the regional labour market, contributing to the enhancement of human resources and the socio-economic development of the region. Within this mandate, **PlaQuaR will carry out the development and roll-out of an IT platform to facilitate interaction between partners and enable the mapping of the educational and training offering available in the region (an effort spearheaded by the University of Évora).** Furthermore, under the direction of Fundação Alentejo, dedicated working groups will be set up and animated to draw up a regional plan for qualified training, aligned with the needs of the local labour market. As a result of these activities, PlaQuaR coordinators also commit to the definition of a plan to publicise and promote the Qualification of Regional Human Resources, including workshops and awareness-raising activities throughout the region.

⁹ Lightcast (formerly known as Emsi Burning Glass) is a labour market analytics company that provides data and insights on workforce trends, skills demand, and employment patterns. It helps organisations, educational institutions, and policymakers understand the dynamics of the labour market by analysing job postings, CVs, and other labour market data sources. For more information, see: <https://lightcast.io/euro/why-lightcast/about>

II. Outputs

The Alentejo Talent Observatory is a **web-based tool** that allows users to explore and **monitor demographic developments and labour market dynamics** in the region. Figure 2 and Figure 4 showcase two pages of the Observatory. It reports screenshots of the graphs and summarises the main functionalities of each page. A beta version of the dashboard has also been published at this [link](#), to be integrated into the PlaQuaR platform once the University of Evora will be ready to launch it later in 2025.

Figure 1: Screenshot showcasing the "Map" sub-section of the "Demographics" section of the Observatory

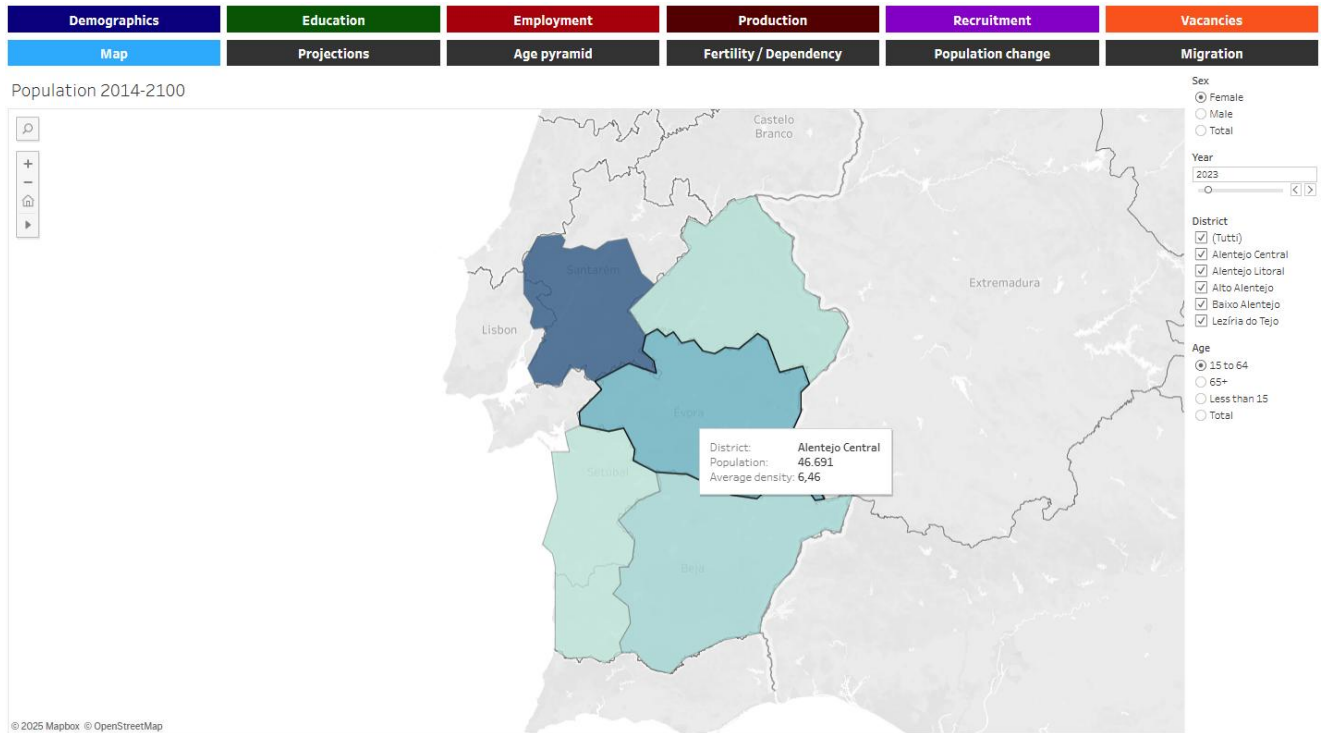
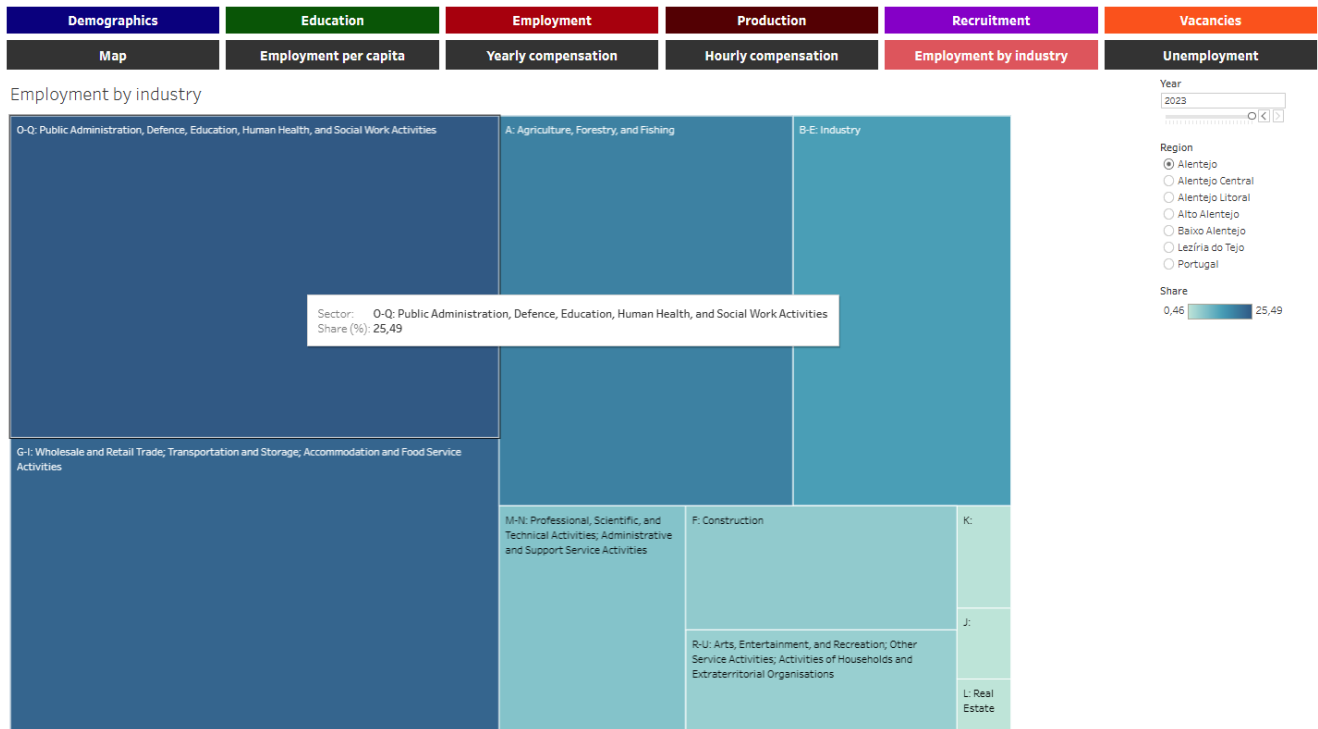


Figure 2: Screenshot of the "Employment by industry" sub-section of the "Employment" section of the Observatory



III. Key Insights

One of the overarching insights that emerged from the exercise in Alentejo concerns **the importance of establishing skills intelligence tools to monitor regional labour market dynamics**. By skills intelligence tools, one means diagnostic dashboards which allow to synthesise data on the status of the labour market and on its unfolding dynamics, thereby ensuring informed decision-making in workforce development. These sorts of solutions are crucial for enhancing regional competitiveness by aligning local workforce skills with evolving industry needs. As such, the Alentejo Talent Observatory will respond directly to the need – expressed by stakeholders – for reinforcing the educational system in the region and make it more agile and adaptable to the demands of the market. By identifying sector-specific skill gaps, regions can tailor their strategies to support innovation and economic growth, especially within the framework of smart specialisation.

Key insight: The Alentejo Talent Observatory will synthesise and visualise labour market data to improve decision-making in the region. It will play a fundamental role in informing workforce development and alignment of skills with labour market needs.

The following are some of the types of insights that each section of the Observatory will offer:

1. **Monitoring demographic developments:** A first section of the Observatory visualises population data retrieved from Eurostat in a variety of ways. Through a map of the region's districts, it is possible to observe how the population is projected to thin and spread over the

territory over the next 80 years. It is also possible to visualise population projections via a line plot, which changes dynamically as the user decides to focus on different districts, different age groups or on the total, male or female population. This section also includes a dynamic age pyramid, line plots to showcase the evolution of fertility and of the old-age dependency ratio, and bar plots to showcase the evolution of population in the different districts. A quick observation of the latter reveals, for example, that demographic decline appears to be more concentrated in the districts of Alentejo Central, Alto Alentejo and Baixo Alentejo, albeit the rate of depopulation seems to have slowed down since 2020. The sub-districts of Alentejo Litoral and Lezíria do Tejo have instead recorded mild population growth since 2019.

2. **Education:** A second section of the Observatory offers a glance into the educational composition of the population in the region, highlighting how, in 2023, 46.1% of the population has achieved only low education (ED0-2 according to the ISCED11 classification¹⁰, namely “*Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education*”), 31.3% had a medium educational level (ED3-4, namely “*Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education*”) and 22.7% had a tertiary degree (ED5-8). It is also possible to filter the visualisation according to gender, which reveals how females in the region tend to have slightly better educational outcomes. Another series of line plots displays some positive trends in the region with respect to the number of people participating in training initiatives, the number of early leavers from education and the number of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET).
3. **Employment:** A third section of the Observatory offers insights into employment dynamics in the region by leveraging data from the [ARDECO](#) database. By navigating this part of the Observatory, one can observe the distribution and evolution of employment per capita, the average yearly and hourly compensation offered in each district (as well as nationally and at the EU level for comparison purposes), the major industries by number of employed people and indicators of unemployment over the years.
4. **Production:** A fourth section of the Observatory showcases regional GDP figures (with the possibility to compare against national and EU level statistics) and the major industries in terms of Gross Value Added.
5. **Recruitment:** A fifth section leverages information from hiring records and can offer a reflection on the employment landscape of the region. Specifically, it allows to visualise the number of hires that occurred in a given district in a given industry (e.g. How many people were hired in 2024 in sector A: Agriculture, forestry and fishing in Alentejo Central?). **Analysing hiring records is crucial for understanding the region's employment landscape and offering real-time insights into labour market dynamics.** By visualising hiring patterns across districts and industries, policymakers can identify sectors with high demand for talent, guiding targeted investments and workforce development strategies.

- ❖ Granular insights from the “Focus” sub-section – such as prevalent professions – **enable educational institutions to align curricula with market needs, ensuring**

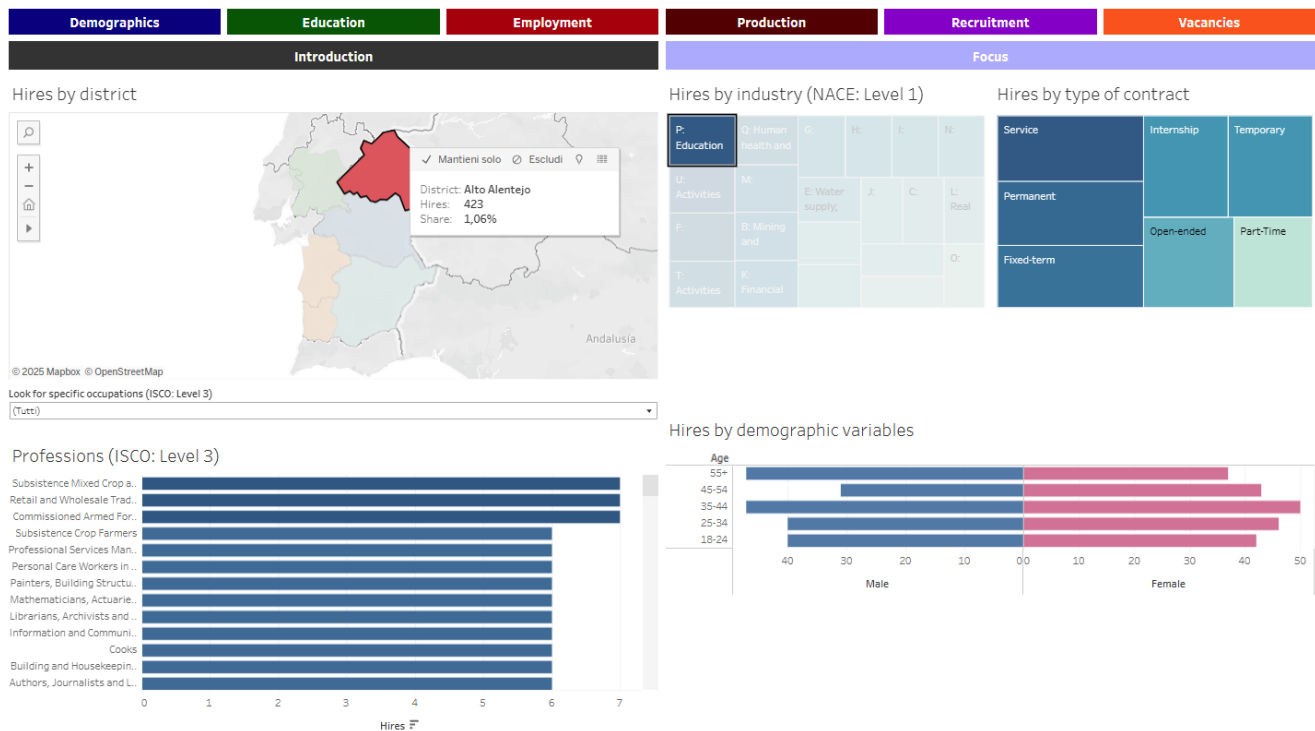
¹⁰ See: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_\(ISCED\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED))

graduates possess relevant skills. For example, by strengthening the capacities of individual institutes to train more students in given disciplines, by establishing new courses or tailoring the curricula of existing ones, or by directing investments to relevant didactic equipment.

- ❖ Information on the **demographic profiles of workers or on the most prevalent contracts can also be used to design policies for labour market inclusion and for the improvement of job security.** For example, if one notices an over-reliance on the part of companies to hire workers with uncertain, short-term contracts, the regional authority could implement schemes to encourage the use of permanent ones.
- ❖ The information contained in this section of the Observatory could also be used to design **communication strategies to reach and inform various target groups.** For example, if the data shows a noticeable growth in the number of “Hotel and Restaurant Managers” being hired, the regional authority in collaboration with schools could promote training programmes for this profession in the region.
- ❖ Additionally, this information supports industrial policies by identifying growth sectors, thereby enabling the formulation of targeted incentives for strategic industries. By **recognising which sectors are expanding and require additional workforce, policymakers can allocate resources more effectively,** stimulate investment, and promote innovation within these industries.

This strategic approach not only enhances the region's economic competitiveness but also ensures that industrial development aligns with the broader goals of sustainable growth and employment generation. In conclusion, the potential of leveraging hiring records to shape policies and initiatives is far-reaching.

Figure 3: Screenshot showcasing the "Focus" sub-section of the "Recruitment" section of the Observatory



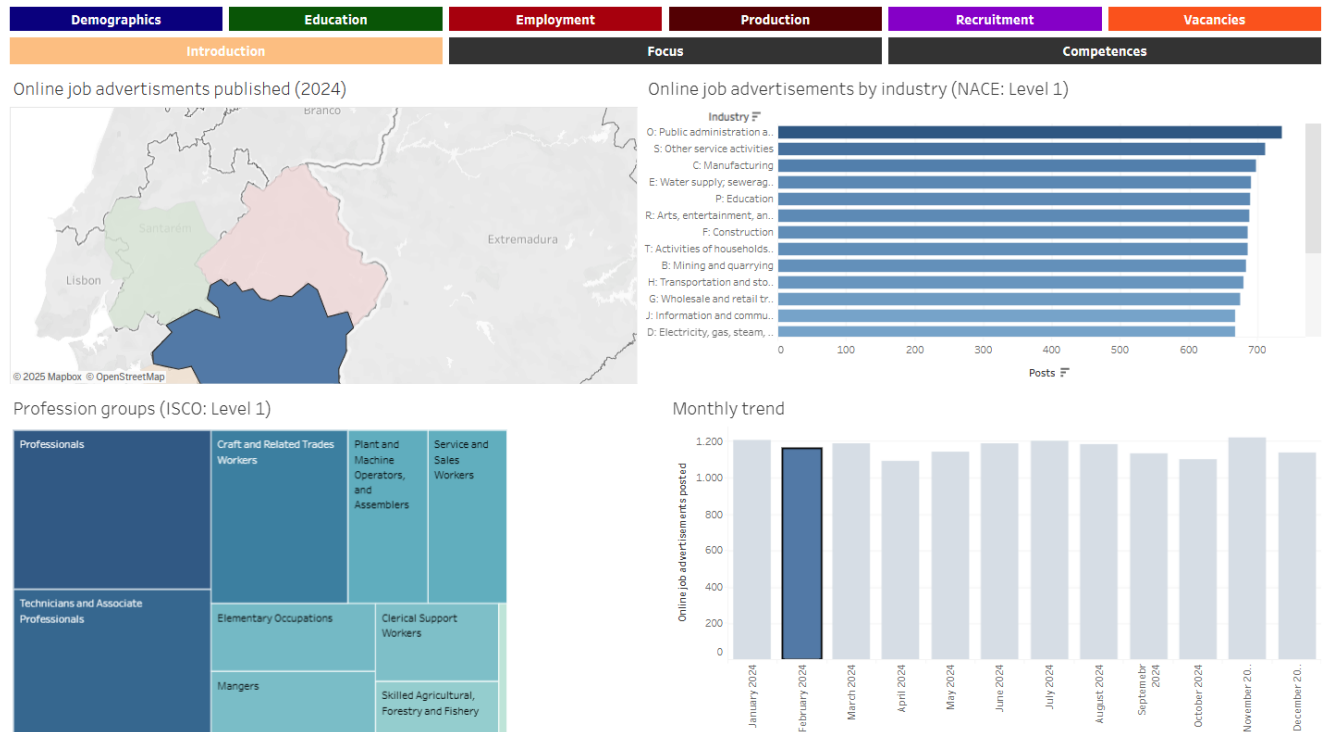
6. **Vacancies:** A sixth and final section adopts a similar structure to the “Recruitment” section but leverages **online job vacancies** data aggregated via web-scraping. Navigating this section, it is possible to **observe what industries publish the most vacancies, for which professions and in which district**. The data underpinning the “Recruitment” and the “Vacancies” sections are thus complementary: the former reflects *realised* labour demand – namely matches that did occur between employers and jobseekers – whereas the latter reflects *unrealised* labour demand – which can be considered to be more telling about the profiles that employers are *looking* for. This sort of information can then be used in a similar fashion to the one arising from hiring records:

- ❖ It can foster alignment of educational curricula and labour market needs, it can inform students and jobseekers about profitable career opportunities, and it can be used to track the status of existing and emerging industries.
- ❖ Furthermore, **online job vacancies data tend to be very rich and granular**, which allows to investigate which are the most sought-after *specialised occupations* (namely, narrowly defined occupations; or ISCO level 4¹¹) and even which are the most sought-after individual *skills*, i.e. the individual competences that are used by an individual to discharge their activities. Skills can pertain to a variety of tasks, such as technical skills (e.g., coding, data analysis), soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork), and vocational skills (e.g., carpentry, plumbing).

¹¹ See: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/classification-occupation/>

An accurate, granular depiction of professions and skills can play a pivotal role in shaping both educational and industrial policy.

Figure 4: Screenshot showcasing the “Introduction” sub-section of the “Vacancies” section of the Observatory



In Alentejo, the value of the Observatory will be further augmented by its complementarity with the PlaQuaR search engine which is to be developed by the University of Évora. This latter IT solution will allow every educational provider in the region – be it general, academic or vocational – to record its educational offering on a dedicated platform. Such platform will be hosted on the web domain of the University of Évora and will be freely available. Users will then be able to browse through educational opportunities in the region and filter them according to their needs and desires (e.g. discipline, length of course, geography, etc.). The Observatory and the PlaQuaR search engine will then form a convenient and pragmatic tool to scope the regional labour market and educational landscape – leading to actionable insights and evidence-based policies. Indeed, as the two tools will be showcased in proximity to one another in the same web domain, a user will obtain insights on the most in-demand professions and competences via the Observatory and, through the search engine, they will be able to explore the training opportunities that reflect those needs in their immediate surroundings. The combination of these two tools into a single solution will represent a highly valuable contribution.

Key insight: The Observatory and PlaQuaR search engine will create a cohesive and valuable solution. Leveraging these tools will allow to link labour market insights with information on training opportunities. As they will be hosted on the same web domain, users will be able to

identify in-demand professions via the Observatory and explore tailored educational offerings through the search engine, facilitating workforce development.

2. Action II – Alentejo Medical Talent

In addition to the Observatory, in an applied analytical exercise, the Implementation Phase also assisted in **assessing Alentejo’s healthcare landscape**, whose findings led to the identification of five areas of action for more effective attraction and retention of medical talent.

I. Operational Review

The analytical support of the TA Team centred on the drafting of a report which examines the medical sector in Alentejo, focusing on the region’s healthcare workforce and infrastructure in light of the opening of the new Central Hospital in Évora. To arrive at its findings, the TA team conducted **independent desk research and reviewed a wide array of literature and strategic documents** relevant to the medical sector in Alentejo. This included analysing policy frameworks, regional development strategies, and documentation on the anticipated operation of the Évora Central Hospital and its labour demands. Additionally, the TA Team engaged in **secondary data collection**, sourcing key statistics and regional indicators to contextualise the healthcare challenges and opportunities in the region. Finally, **the TA Team carried out research to identify suitable recommendations to address workforce shortages, improve healthcare outcomes, and ensure equitable access to medical services in the region.**

II. Outputs

A succinct **analytical report** has been drafted that provides an analysis of the medical sector in Alentejo, focusing on healthcare workforce supply, infrastructure, and regional challenges. Prepared in the context of the upcoming Central Hospital in Évora, it examines demographic trends, workforce shortages, and healthcare accessibility issues. **The report outlines key obstacles to recruitment and retention of medical professionals and presents targeted policy recommendations.** Based on desk research, data analysis, and expert interviews, it offers actionable insights to support healthcare planning and workforce development. The findings aim to inform strategic decisions for enhancing healthcare delivery in Alentejo.

III. Key Insights

The report highlights several key challenges and structural as well as policy limitations that reduce the capacity of the region to offer quality and accessible healthcare to its residents.

One of the key challenges identified is the persistent shortage of healthcare professionals, particularly in underserved areas. This shortage is exacerbated by an ageing workforce, with over 20% of physicians in the region nearing retirement. Specialties such as general surgery, gynaecology,

and cardiology are particularly affected. Furthermore, the overall distribution of healthcare workers is skewed toward urban centres, leaving rural areas with inadequate services. Despite Portugal having one of the highest physician-per-capita ratios in the OECD, the nurse-to-doctor ratio remains critically low, placing additional strain on the healthcare system.

Key insight: The persistent shortage of healthcare professionals, exacerbated by an ageing workforce and uneven distribution of medical staff, poses a critical challenge to Alentejo's healthcare system, particularly in underserved areas.

Alentejo also exhibits concerning health outcomes, with a crude mortality rate that is higher than the national average. Chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and respiratory illnesses are prevalent, in part due to lifestyle factors, including high rates of tobacco and alcohol consumption. The region's ageing demographic further compounds these challenges, as it demands more long-term care services and specialised geriatric healthcare, which is currently in short supply.

To mitigate these issues, the report outlines several strategic interventions:

1. **Incentives for Rural Practice:** Financial and non-financial benefits, such as signing bonuses, subsidised housing, and childcare support, can encourage medical professionals to settle in Alentejo. Similar strategies in countries like Australia and the United States have successfully bolstered rural healthcare workforces.
2. **Decentralised Training Opportunities:** Establishing satellite campuses of medical and nursing schools in Alentejo and increasing rural clinical placements can help build a pipeline of locally trained professionals who are more likely to stay in the region. Scholarship programmes tied to service commitments in Alentejo could also ensure long-term retention of healthcare workers.
3. **Supportive Working Environments:** Investments in telemedicine infrastructure, flexible work arrangements, and leadership development initiatives can improve job satisfaction and reduce professional isolation. Creating more professional growth opportunities within the region will help prevent brain drain to urban centres.
4. **Leveraging the Ageing Workforce:** Introducing phased retirement schemes and reducing workloads for senior professionals while allowing them to mentor younger colleagues could ensure knowledge transfer and workforce stability. Exempting older healthcare workers from night shifts and emergency duties would also improve retention rates.
5. **Community Engagement and Local Recruitment:** Promoting healthcare careers among local youth through outreach programmes, job fairs, and mentorship initiatives can generate interest in the profession early on. Encouraging recruitment from within Alentejo's communities ensures stronger ties to the region and higher retention rates.

The upcoming Central Hospital in Évora represents a critical infrastructure investment and a critical opportunity for the region, with 457 inpatient beds, 11 operating rooms, and 43 recovery stations. It aims to serve approximately 150,000 inhabitants in the district of Évora and 440,000 across Alentejo. If accompanied by comprehensive workforce planning and investments in systemic reforms, the hospital could significantly improve health outcomes, reduce regional disparities, and enhance the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Key insight: The construction of the new Évora Central Hospital offers a valuable opportunity for the region to think strategically about the development of its healthcare workforce. In light of this, the region should implement targeted measures – outlined above – to foster the attraction and retention of healthcare professionals.

III. Impact of Pillar 1

1. Added Value

The TA support provided under the Talent Booster Mechanism (TBM) aimed to address key socio-economic challenges, notably the need to reinforce labour market monitoring and align skills development with identified needs. Another challenge addressed is access to healthcare professionals due to a shortage of medical staff. Specifically, the TA process has:

Increased coordination between stakeholders

The Alentejo Talent Observatory responds to the need of improving coordination between stakeholders, in particular between employers and educational providers. This initiative integrates data monitoring, stakeholder coordination, and user-centric communication. By synthesising labour market dynamics, the Observatory ensures informed decision-making while promoting coherence among fragmented initiatives. This structure will not only strengthen the local skills ecosystem but also enhance visibility and accessibility to training and career opportunities, addressing outmigration pressures and fostering talent retention.

Developed a user-centric and actionable Observatory

Furthermore, the integration of the Observatory on the IT platform that is being developed by PlaQuaR – which will be hosted on the web domain of the University of Évora – will give rise to a **powerful solution to foster skills alignment in the region**. Indeed, the University of Évora is developing a web portal that will allow, on the one hand, regional educational providers to register their entire educational offering in a single space, and on the other hand, it will allow final users to browse through such offerings, filtering on elements such as geographical proximity, discipline, and type of qualification offered. **By matching a diagnostic tool – the Observatory – with the PlaQuaR platform, the insights generated by the former will be directly actionable for different end-users**, as the following examples showcase:

- **User: Educational providers** – Rectors at the University of Évora or the polytechnics present in the region could consult the Observatory to shape their educational offerings. For example, the Observatory would give access to forecasts of skills needs based on the evolution of online job vacancies. For example, the Observatory may reveal how full-stack developers are becoming more sought after; or how foreign languages are increasingly being asked by employers to cater to the needs of incoming tourists. In their position, then, educational providers could use this information to establish new courses or tailor existing ones to better mirror the needs of the labour market.
- **User: Secondary school student** – a young prospective student that consults the Observatory could observe a high demand for a given trade in their own district – say, plumbers are highly sought after in the district of Alentejo Litoral. In response, they will then be able to review the PlaQuaR platform to find the most reputable and closest institution that offers vocational programs on plumbing.

Built capacity for skills intelligence

The TA Team will pass the technical infrastructure and the management of the Observatory to the University of Évora; such transfer will be accompanied by a dedicated workshop where members of the TA Team will be able to describe in some depth the structure and functionalities of the Observatory. The audience which should partake to this meeting will be identified in collaboration with the University of Évora and CCDR-A. Members of the Monitoring Committee of the regional cohesion programme will also be invited to participate. The TA Team envisages to have one part of the workshop more focused on the technical implementation of the Observatory (i.e. the prompting of the R scripts, the correct storage of data, the integration of the data on Tableau and relative visualisations). A second part of the workshop will focus on the capabilities that the Observatory offers to the final user. Here, the TA Team will showcase the main functionalities of the dashboard to a selected audience of stakeholders. **The goal of this exercise is to acquaint people in the region with the Observatory and demonstrate how it can be used in practice.** To better achieve this aim, the TA Team and the technical team at the University of Évora will collaborate on the drafting of workflows, namely structured approaches on how to use the Observatory and the PlaQuaR platform in conjunction, depending on the type of user (e.g. if the final user is an 18-year-old student, if the final user is the dean of an educational institution, if the final user is a public servant at the municipal level, etc.). These workflows will form a core element of the workshop.

Underscored the need for systematic planning of medical talent

The report on the medical sector drafted in the context of the Technical Assistance in Alentejo **highlights critical workforce and healthcare infrastructure challenges while identifying strategic opportunities for improvement.** Given Alentejo's rural character, ageing population, and persistent healthcare workforce shortages, the report provides a comprehensive analysis of the region's healthcare system in light of the upcoming Central Hospital in Évora. It presents targeted recommendations to enhance workforce attraction, development, and retention, ensuring that the new hospital operates at its full potential and meets the region's evolving healthcare needs. By proposing financial and non-financial incentives for healthcare professionals, decentralised training opportunities, and supportive working environments, **the report outlines actionable strategies to mitigate recruitment and retention issues.** Furthermore, it emphasises leveraging the expertise of the ageing workforce (for example, via schemes that can facilitate phased retirement, mentorship programmes where older staff can take on more training responsibilities as opposed to direct care for patients, flexible work arrangements, etc.) and fostering local recruitment through community engagement (for example, through rural internship programmes that encourage natives to pursue healthcare careers in their region of origin, or educational outreach and scholarships for residents). These interventions are crucial for ensuring equitable healthcare access across the region and reducing disparities in service provision.

Ultimately, the report provides a roadmap for strengthening Alentejo's healthcare system, aligning policy actions with the region's demographic and systemic realities. By implementing these recommendations, Alentejo can enhance healthcare delivery, improve patient outcomes, and build a resilient workforce capable of sustaining quality care in the long term.

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Anticipated impacts of this Technical Assistance include a more agile and responsive education system, improved labour market alignment, and improved focus on strategic workforce development for the healthcare sector.

2. Key Takeaways for Other Regions

While the TA process was designed specifically for the Alentejo region, many of the insights gained are highly transferable to other regions that face similar challenges with respect to talent retention, consolidation of existing and emerging value chains, and demographic change. The lessons learned from this initiative can help regions to better exploit data to monitor labour markets, ensuring that interventions are realistic, data-driven, and aligned with long-term policy frameworks.

The increased relevance of skills intelligence for regional competitiveness

Skills intelligence tools are increasingly being recognised as valuable for fostering regional and national competitiveness in a rapidly evolving global economy; and can benefit many regions at relatively low cost. These tools provide a structured approach to analysing labour market trends, identifying current and emerging skill gaps, and aligning educational and training systems with industry needs. By enabling data-driven policymaking, skills intelligence supports innovation and economic growth while addressing the challenges of demographic shifts, technological advancements, and the green transition.

At a macroeconomic level, skills intelligence is central to shifting the focus of competitiveness away from cost-cutting strategies towards innovation-driven models. Such models emphasise product leadership and customer-centric approaches, which require a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. Tools like the [Skills-Intelligence Emilia-Romagna](#) or [Bizkaia Talent](#) exemplify how skills intelligence can serve as a diagnostic and predictive mechanism, guiding regional strategies to cultivate and sustain competitive advantages.

Key to the effectiveness of skills intelligence is its ability to integrate diverse data sources, such as public statistics, hiring records, and online job postings. This integration allows for nuanced insights into regional specialisation and sectoral interdependencies. Skills anticipation methodologies, including forecasting and strategic foresight, further enhance the tool's utility, enabling stakeholders to prepare for future labour market demands.

By aligning workforce development with smart specialisation strategies, regions can build on their unique strengths, support high-value industries, and foster inclusive growth. This approach not only prepares workers for future challenges but also strengthens economic resilience, making it a cornerstone of sustainable development across Europe.

Existing challenges and areas of action to attract and retain medical talent

Infrastructure development projects for medical facilities across the EU are essential for expanding healthcare capacity, but they are insufficient on their own to ensure adequate healthcare services. Without strategic workforce planning, modern hospitals risk being understaffed or underutilised, limiting their impact. Effective healthcare requires not just physical infrastructure but also a well-trained, motivated workforce. Recruitment, retention, and professional development policies are critical to ensuring that medical facilities provide consistent, high-quality care to the population they serve.

Attracting and retaining medical talent requires a multifaceted approach, especially in regions facing acute shortages and uneven workforce distribution. Addressing these challenges involves understanding the distinct factors influencing recruitment and retention. Recruitment often hinges on proactive measures such as targeted incentives, educational opportunities, and exposure to underserved areas during training. For instance, scholarships tied to rural placements and decentralised training programmes are effective in fostering interest in remote healthcare provision.

Retention, however, demands comprehensive strategies that foster job satisfaction, professional fulfilment, and overall quality employment conditions. Evidence highlights the importance of supportive work environments, professional autonomy, and continuous access to career development opportunities. While competitive wages and financial incentives are undoubtedly essential, they alone are insufficient to retain talent in the long term. Effective retention policies must adopt an intersectional perspective, incorporating measures that address work-life balance, availability of affordable housing, family-friendly policies, flexible working arrangements, and organisational cultures that value diversity, inclusion, and employee well-being. Integrating these broader dimensions ensures that retention efforts respond meaningfully to the diverse needs of professionals, ultimately contributing to a stable and committed workforce.

Ultimately, effective attraction and retention strategies hinge on stakeholder collaboration, robust policy frameworks, and ongoing evaluation. By fostering environments that value healthcare professionals as essential assets, regions can build resilient systems that equitably serve their populations.

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