

CASE STUDY

COIMBRA (PT) – VALLE DEL CAUCA (COL)

IURC - LA



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Thematic Network(s): Innovative, Sustainable & Carbon Neutral Ecosystems & Strategic Sectors

Thematic Cluster(s): Education, Jobs & Skills / Tourism & Culture

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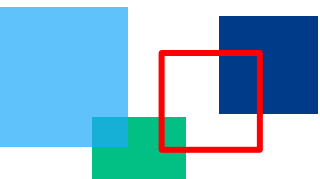
The regions of Coimbra (Portugal) and Valle del Cauca (Colombia) have exchanged knowledge and good practices to boost their economic reactivation. In this regard, the hospitality sector of Coimbra is facing a shortage of qualified personnel, thus hindering the economic potential of its tourism sector. The case study presents the process that resulted in an economic development agreement for the temporary exchange of professionals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Intermunicipal Community of Coimbra Region is the largest in Portugal, with around 436,949 inhabitants, integrating 19 municipalities from three different districts (Coimbra, Aveiro and Viseu), with an area of 4,336 Km². The region's key economic sectors are linked to health, biotechnology, ICT, logistics, forestry, and tourism. Gastronomy is also an important activity that has stimulated innovation and linkages with culture, tourism, and economic development. The potential of these sectors is currently hindered by a severe shortage of qualified labor.

Valle del Cauca is located in the southwest of Colombia. Cali, the capital city, is the third largest city in the country in terms of population, and a leading city in Pacific region due to its level of development and infrastructure. For example, the port of Buenaventura accounted for 45% of Colombia's foreign trade in 2020. Despite its strategic location and development, unemployment affects 18% of the population, along with inequality, territorial fragmentation and internal migration resulting from Colombia's domestic conflicts.

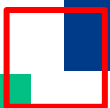
Coimbra and Valle del Cauca have cooperated to promote sustainable agriculture with a special approach on agri-food chains and food security, and tourist routes linked to gastronomy, cultural and natural heritage. Both regions signed an economic agreement to address Coimbra's shortage of qualified labor with Valle del Cauca's surplus of highly qualified professionals in the engineering and hospitality sectors.



MAIN CHALLENGE AND SOLUTION

The region of Valle del Cauca possesses a strong business environment, highly skilled workers, solid infrastructure, connectivity, seven free zones, competitive costs, and a high quality of life. This allows to attract multinational companies to establish their operations and invest in the region. The export capacity of the Port of Buenaventura also plays an important role as a gateway of the Pacific region of Colombia. Nonetheless, Valle del Cauca's potential is currently facing important challenges, including migration dynamics due to Colombia's domestic conflict and foreign migration, which results in a surplus of skilled labour in the region under long-term unemployment.

Coimbra has an innovation ecosystem linked to key sectors such as health, biotechnology, ICT logistics, forestry, and tourism, among others. The close connection with educational and research entities in the region has been a differentiating and decisive factor for the success of the companies as it has allowed the creation of strategic synergies with successful research and technology transfer processes.



However, in Portugal there is a severe shortage of skilled labour in the areas of technology, health, engineering, tourism, and construction, with more than 60 thousand job vacancies available in these areas according to recent data published by the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP). As a result of this shortage and Valle del Cauca's surplus of professionals, the regions identified an opportunity for promoting the relocation of temporary workers from Colombia to Portugal.



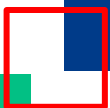
Study visit with 13 delegates from Coimbra in Valle del Cauca

IURC Latin America supported the work of the pairing with study visits in Valle del Cauca and Coimbra. The visit to Colombia (March 28-30, 2022) was comprised of 13 municipal authorities and mayors from Coimbra, while a delegation of 3 members from Valle del Cauca regional government and ProPacífico carried out their study visit in Coimbra in July of 2022. The study visits helped key authorities to gain a deep understanding of each other strengths, identify sectors and specific activities of cooperation, and most importantly, gain political capital for future agreements or activities.

As a result, the regions began discussing the framework of an agreement to allow temporary workers to travel from Valle del Cauca to Coimbra. This activity required the involvement of local embassies, economic development agencies, business and professional associations, among other key actors.

“Knowing the reality of other ecosystems with similar problems is essential in order to establish bonds of trust and stable collaboration agreements”.

- Diana Londoño, Director of International Cooperation, Valle del Cauca



RESULTS AND IMPACT

The first step was a cooperation agreement signed on **April 20th, 2023**, between the Portuguese College of Engineers and the Professional National Council of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering and Related Professions of Colombia (COPNIA). The goal of the agreement was the **Mutual Recognition** of professional degrees to certify engineers from Colombia and Portugal.



Signing of agreement between engineering associations of Colombia and Portugal. Source: COPNIA

The regions continued their cooperation by designing a pilot project for temporary mobility of workers from Valle del Cauca to Coimbra. The pilot will take place from June to September 2023 in the tourism sector, allowing workers to obtain a certificate of training issued by the Coimbra School of Hotel

Management and Tourism. The initiative was supported by several Portuguese entities. The Coimbra School of Hotel Management agreed to cover the costs of accommodation, food and provide onboard training for workers. On the other hand, workers must purchase their flight tickets with financing from the banking sector, which has been arranged by Valle del Cauca's regional government. The negotiation process between the regions and key stakeholders in the tourism sector was a long process that required defining the roles, responsibilities and required funding for each activity, such as the support for visa applications, flights, accommodation, local expenses, and training.

As a result of the pilot, there will be a positive impact on the generation of jobs at all levels in the Coimbra Region (temporary, permanent, highly skilled, high/ low income), as well as on the employability for Valle del Cauca workers. In some way, it will enable to cover the labour needs, maintaining jobs and assets in tourism, fostering the economic reactivation of the region of Coimbra post-covid.

KEY FIGURES

120

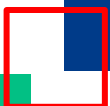
professionals from Valle del Cauca will receive Certificate of training

Nº1

Agreement for mutual recognition of engineering titles

Nº1

Pilot project for temporary workers in tourism industry



LESSONS LEARNED

Study visits contributed to understand the reality of the Regions and to make well-informed decisions, reach preliminary agreements, and get to know the decision-makers and key political actors.

Promoting a pilot of temporary workers required involving and receiving support from embassies, consulates, trade representatives and foreign affairs departments. Most importantly, it needed a direct involvement of the favoured industry, through a well-established association.

One of the main challenges in achieving worker mobility was securing funds for the different activities, defining the role of the partners during implementation and who pays for the different expenses in a temporary exchange of professionals, and selecting the criteria for participants or beneficiaries.

The will of governments and common challenges fostered a common agenda. Successful cooperation between the two regions will be extended to the national level, to provide solutions to common problems faced by other regions in Portugal and Colombia.

THE IURC PROGRAMME

The International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) programme enables cities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, as well as representatives of research and innovation, community groups and citizens. Through engaging in IURC, cities will have the chance to share and exchange knowledge with their international counterparts, building a greener, more prosperous future.

The IURC programme is an opportunity for local governments to learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their city's international profile. Its activities will support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement.

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Links to related outputs:

News of agreement: <https://www.copnia.gov.co/noticias/trabajando-en-mejorar-la-movilidad-de-los-servicios-profesionales-de-los-ingenieros>

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