

## North Sea Port Talent: bridging borders between Terneuzen, Vlissingen and Ghent

### Netherlands

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Name of the organisation	UWV
Type of organisation	Labour Office
Address	Piet Heinstraat 77 Goes
Web page	<a href="https://www.uwv.nl">https://www.uwv.nl</a>
Contact person	<p>Name and surname: Susanne Besselink</p> <p>Job position: Coordinator of werkgeversdiensten &amp; Eures</p> <p>E-mail: <a href="mailto:susanne.besseling@uwv.nl">susanne.besseling@uwv.nl</a></p>
Topic of the good practice	Labour market policy and employment
Geographical focus	<p>Cross-country (please specify)</p> <p>The North Sea Port area is a cross-border port merger stretching 60 kilometers from Vlissingen and Terneuzen in the Netherlands to Ghent in Belgium. It is an important European hub for logistics, industry and shipping, characterised by its location on the Western Scheldt and direct access to the North Sea for seagoing vessels. The area is located on the border between the Netherlands and Belgium, along the Western Scheldt. It stretches from the coast at Vlissingen to 32 kilometers inland in Ghent.</p> <p>North Sea Port is an important European port, focusing on a wide range of goods and hosting a large number of companies.</p> <p>The area is the result of cross-border cooperation between Dutch and Belgian authorities, including the provinces of Zeeland and East Flanders, and the municipalities of Borsele, Terneuzen, Vlissingen, Ghent, Evergem and Zelzate.</p>
Duration	5/1/2024 – 4/30/2027

<p><b>Summary of the good practice</b></p>	<p>The North Sea Port Talent project aims to strengthen the labour market in the North Sea Port region through closer cooperation between employers and other stakeholders. The project supports employers in finding qualified personnel through improved cooperation between the City of Ghent, Voka Oost-Vlaanderen, VDAB, North Sea Port, North Sea Port Talent, UWV and Portiz.</p>
<p><b>OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES</b></p>	
<p><b>Background/context</b></p> <p>What challenge, need or gap were you trying to solve or respond to?</p> <p>Why was this issue relevant or urgent in your context (sector, region, country)?</p>	<p>► The core of the North Sea Port Talent project is to address the mismatch between labor supply and demand in the port area of Ghent, Terneuzen, and Vlissingen.</p> <p>There are three specific gaps that the project identifies or addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage of qualified personnel</li> <li>• Limited cross-border labor mobility</li> <li>• Lack of cooperation between education, businesses, and government</li> </ul> <p>► Why is this relevant or urgent in this region?</p> <p><b>a. Economic engine of the border region</b> The North Sea Port region (Ghent–Terneuzen–Vlissingen) is one of the most important industrial clusters in Western Europe. Sectors such as chemicals, energy, steel, logistics, and food generate thousands of jobs and billions in added value. Without sufficient and well-trained personnel, the competitiveness of these companies will be directly compromised.</p> <p><b>b. Structural shortage and aging population</b> In both Flanders and Zeeland, the average age of employees is rising. Many experienced technicians and dockworkers will be retiring in the coming years, while the influx of young people is not increasing. There is therefore a risk of knowledge loss and a decline in productivity if succession is not ensured in time.</p> <p><b>c. Insufficient utilization of cross-border potential</b></p>

	<p>Every day, people drive across the border for work, but the potential is much greater. According to studies (VDAB, UWV, Interreg), a better-integrated cross-border labor market could fill thousands of vacancies and reduce unemployment on both sides of the border. Cooperation can also improve the alignment of education and training structures.</p> <p><b>d. Transitions in industry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► The port region faces major challenges such as energy transition, digitization, and sustainability (e.g., hydrogen, circular industry, CO<sub>2</sub> reduction). These transitions require new skills, so education and the labor market must grow accordingly. Without a coordinated approach, the region risks losing its competitive position to other ports (Rotterdam, Antwerp).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <p>What were the main goals of this practice (e.g. better compliance, faster processing, improved worker protection)? (Please limit to three)</p> <p>Who or what were these goals intended to help or change? (Please limit to three)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► The North Sea Port Talent project aims to strengthen the labor market in the cross-border port region of Ghent–Terneuzen–Vlissingen. It focuses on reducing the gap between labor supply and demand and promoting cooperation between companies, educational institutions, and labor market organizations. Specifically, the project aims to support employers in finding and retaining qualified personnel, guide young people and job seekers toward training and jobs with a future, and facilitate cross-border employment by removing barriers between the Netherlands and Belgium.</li> <li>► In addition, the project encourages lifelong learning, further training, and knowledge exchange, so that employees are better prepared for industrial and technological transitions. By building sustainable partnerships and positioning the region as a single labor market, North Sea Port Talent aims to increase the economic strength and attractiveness of the port region — now and in the future.</li> </ul>

## Main activities

What were the main steps or actions you carried out to put the practice into effect?

Were any tools, materials, partnerships, or processes created?

### ► **Establishing a cross-border partnership:**

The first step was to form a strong partnership between Dutch and Belgian labor market organizations, governments, and educational institutions. This partnership includes VDAB East Flanders, UWV Zeeland, the City of Ghent, Voka East Flanders, Portiz (the Netherlands), and North Sea Port itself. Together, they submitted an Interreg Flanders-Netherlands project proposal, securing funding and structural cooperation for 2024–2027.

### ► **Analysis of labor market needs in the region**

A regional labor market study was conducted to identify: Which sectors are facing the greatest shortages; Which skills and training programs are lacking; Where cross-border barriers exist. The results form the basis for all actions (training, matching, communication)

### ► **Development of a digital platform –** [vacatures.northseaporttalent.eu](https://vacatures.northseaporttalent.eu)

► A joint digital platform was launched that brings together job vacancies, training courses, and collaboration opportunities for the entire port region.

► The platform serves as a communication channel and networking tool for employers, educational institutions, and job seekers.

► Goal: a single central gateway to the cross-border labor market.

### ► **Communication and promotion of the region as a labor market**

Campaigns and events showcase career opportunities in the port region to young people and job seekers. Efforts are being made to strengthen the region's image: profiling it as a single attractive place to work, across national borders.

► Goal: to make the port region visible as a single, cohesive, future-oriented labor mark

<b>Funding/organisational resources</b>	<p>The North Sea Port Talent project is funded through the Interreg Flanders–Netherlands program, which uses European funds to stimulate cross-border cooperation. The total project budget amounts to approximately €2.86 million for the period 2024–2027. In addition to European support, regional authorities such as the Province of East Flanders and the City of Ghent, and partners such as VDAB, UWV, Voka, Portiz, and North Sea Port are also contributing financially and substantively. The funds will be used for personnel costs, training development, the digital job platform, communication campaigns, and cooperation events. This mix of European and regional funding ensures that the project will not only have a temporary effect but will also contribute to a sustainable strengthening of the cross-border labor market in the port region.</p>
<b>PARTICIPATION</b>	
<b>Stakeholders involved</b>  Organisations or entities actively contributing to the design, implementation, monitoring, or support of the good practice (e.g. labour inspectorates, social security institutions, trade unions, employers' associations, or other).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>North Sea Port</b> (port authority): represents the port business community and acts as a hub between businesses, education and government. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>VDAB East Flanders:</b> Flemish public employment service; responsible for matching, training and guiding job seekers in Flanders.</li> <li>• <b>UWV:</b> Dutch public employment service; supports employers and job seekers, and coordinates cross-border labour mobility.</li> <li>• <b>City of Ghent:</b> Involved in local labour market initiatives and educational projects; supports communication and connections with schools and citizens.</li> <li>• <b>Voka East Flanders:</b> Represents Flemish companies; identifies the needs of employers and promotes cooperation with education.</li> <li>• <b>Portiz (Netherlands):</b> Zeeland network of port and industrial companies; translates the needs of employers into concrete actions.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ <b>Educational institutions:</b> (such as colleges, technical schools) Contributes to training development, dual learning and continuing education programmes.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Target groups</b></p> <p>Main groups or categories that the practice is directly aimed at, who should receive its services or who engage with it (e.g. employers, mobile or posted workers, labour inspectors and social security officers, or other).</p>	<p>The main target groups of North Sea Port Talent are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employers in the port and industrial zone</li> <li>2. Job seekers and employees (in Flanders and Zeeland)</li> <li>3. Young people and students</li> <li>4. Education and training institutions</li> <li>5. Government and labor market organizations</li> </ol>
<p><b>Final beneficiaries</b></p> <p>Individuals or groups that ultimately benefit from the outcomes of the practice, even if they are not the direct target or user (e.g. mobile or posted workers, vulnerable workers at risk of exploitation, employers benefiting from clearer rules or reduced admin burdens, or other).</p>	<p>The project will ultimately benefit:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The wider regional economy</li> <li>2. Local communities and residents</li> <li>3. Governments and policymakers</li> <li>4. The education sector in the long term</li> <li>5. The European Union (and the Interreg program)</li> </ol> <p>The results of North Sea Port Talent extend beyond the direct participants. Ultimately, the wider port region of Ghent–Terneuzen–Vlissingen will benefit from a stronger, better functioning labor market. Companies will have more opportunities for growth, leading to additional employment and economic stability. Local communities will also benefit from lower unemployment, greater purchasing power, and a more attractive living and working environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► In addition, governments gain efficiency thanks to better cooperation and policy coordination, while educational institutions become structurally stronger through closer ties with the business community. Even at the European level, the project contributes to the objectives of Interreg: cross-border cooperation, knowledge sharing, and cohesion.</li> <li>► In short, North Sea Port Talent has a multiplier effect: the direct target group is growing, but the entire region is reaping the benefits.</li> </ul>
<p><b>GOOD PRACTICE CRITERIA</b></p>	
<p><b>Achievements and outcomes</b></p> <p>What specific results did the practice achieve? (e.g. How many workers or employers were reached, number of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► The first year of the project was devoted to setting out the guidelines and establishing cooperation. Therefore, no concrete results are available at this time. It is expected that a clear picture of the results will emerge in the course of 2026.</li> </ul>

<p>publications created? What processes became faster?)</p> <p>What kind of broader benefits did it bring? (e.g. Did it improve understanding of rights and obligations, enhance cooperation between authorities, or reduce legal uncertainty and inconsistent application of rules?)</p>	
<p><b>Cost effectiveness</b></p> <p>How did you keep costs low while still achieving results? (e.g. Did you reuse existing tools, automate processes, or share resources across teams?)</p> <p>Can you show that the outcomes were worth the investment? (e.g. Did small changes lead to big improvements, or were expensive tools avoided?)</p>	<p>► The project is still ongoing, and the cost-effectiveness of the project is yet to be measured.</p>
<p><b>Transferability</b></p> <p>What are the key features that make this practice work well? (e.g. a digital platform, clear guidelines, a joint inspection process, or strong coordination)</p> <p>What would another country or organisation need to make this work for them? (e.g. certain laws, IT systems, or staff training)</p>	<p>► Constant coordination and cooperation between the various partners, with clear agreements in place ensure that the project functions properly and is effective. Setting up a similar project in another country requires a combination of necessity, partners, funding, structures, and tools.</p>
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <p>How is the practice sustainable from a social, financial or environmental perspective?</p> <p>What makes this practice able to continue over time? (e.g. It is now part of regular work or has been built into law or procedures?) and how are you making sure it lasts beyond the pilot or project phase?</p>	<p>► We are working towards a strong, fair and resilient labour market in which people benefit from equal opportunities and long-term employment is created.</p> <p>► The intention is that the project will be able to continue independently, i.e. without funding, after the funding period has ended. We will therefore have to prove the added value during the project period and retain the loyalty of employers and job seekers.</p>
<p><b>Innovativeness</b></p> <p>What makes this practice new or different in your field or country? (e.g. Is it the first of its kind, or does it combine actors who don't usually work together, or activities not performed before?)</p> <p>How does it improve older or less effective approaches? (e.g. By reaching more people, using data better, or simplifying complex procedures)</p>	<p>► Many labor market projects focus nationally or within a single region/province. This particular project has an explicit cross-border approach, which requires additional cooperation, coordination of rules, mobility, and a broader perspective. In addition, NSPT tackles a complex field (border region, port and technical bottlenecks), which requires enhanced cooperation and customization.</p>

### Digitalisation

What kind of digital tools or platforms were used in this practice? (e.g. online portals, automated case tracking, data sharing, digital databases or other)

How did these tools help in reaching your goals? (e.g. Did they save time, facilitate access to data in real time, reduce errors, help detect fraud, or improve coordination between authorities?)

- A matching platform was recently launched, where we supply and demand are brought together, by means of publication of job vacancies and internships from employers. In addition, we have also recently started making corporate films that we show alongside job vacancies to provide an accurate description of the work involved at specific employers. Job seekers can create their profile online and apply directly. It is still too early to assess whether this will help us achieve our results.