

Interreg



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Northern Periphery and Arctic

# 25 years of cooperation

...CONNECTING THE DOTS

30<sup>th</sup> September  
to 2<sup>nd</sup> October  
Bodø, Norway

Celebrating 25 years of transnational cooperation in the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic

The Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a conference in Bodø, Norway. This event will showcase the programme's achievements and the impact of NPA projects on northern and peripheral communities in the Arctic and near-Arctic regions, before exchanging ideas and exploring what the future Interreg NPA could look like.

## Delivering change, one step at a time

The conference will highlight how the NPA has evolved over 25 years, and how transnational cooperation has contributed to regional development, resilience, and sustainability in Northern Periphery and Arctic communities.

By bringing together participants from across the programme area, as well as Scotland and Northern Ireland, the event will showcase how Interreg NPA delivered change through projects that connect people and communities across vast distances.

## The building blocks

On the first day, the conference will primarily highlight Interreg NPA projects' impacts, where transnational cooperation marks the starting point in a longer journey of learning, growth, and lasting change.

## Dialogue about the future

On the second day, Interreg NPA invites various actors supporting cooperation in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions to join a dialogue with the programme and its projects, exploring how we can do even more together in the future.



## Conference Agenda

*Some changes to the content and speakers may be possible*

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## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF INTERREG NPA

TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2025

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*Unconfirmed speakers and content are marked (tbc)*

#### *9:00-16:00 Project meetings*

Interreg NPA projects partnership meetings.

#### WELCOME RECEPTION

18:00 – 19:30, Stormen Library

Storgata 1A, Bodø, Norway

Join us for a special evening to start the celebration together! It will be a moment to *start connecting the dots* between people, places, and the stories that have shaped 25 years of Interreg NPA.

- Mr **Stig Olsen**, Head of International office, Nordland County Council, Norway
- Mr **Eirik Fiva**, Former Interreg Monitoring Committee member, Nordland County Council, Norway
- Ms **Annika Blomster**, Interreg NPA Programme Director, Västerbotten County Administrative Board, Sweden

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

NORD University Campus

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On the first day, the conference will primarily highlight Interreg NPA projects' impacts, where transnational cooperation marks the starting point in a longer journey of learning, growth, and lasting change. The new call for projects will be launched at this occasion!

**8:00 – 8:30** Transport from Radisson Blu Hotel to NORD University campus  
Venue: Universitetsalléen 11, 8026 Bodø, Norway

**8:30 – 9:00** Registration

**9:00 – 9:30** [Opening remarks](#)  
Welcome address from Mr. **Ketil Eiane**, NORD University Pro-Rector for Research and development.

Opening remarks from Norwegian National representatives. (tbc)

Message from Mr. **Slawomir Tokarski**, Director European Territorial Cooperation, Macro-regions, Interreg and Programme Implementation, DG Regio, European Commission

**9:30 – 10:30** [How it all started](#)  
This session looks back at the origins and evolution of the Interreg NPA. Key people involved in shaping the programme will share insights and reflections through interviews and discussion.

Facilitated by Christopher Parker, Interreg NPA, and Maxi Nachtigall (former Interreg NPP JS and MC Swedish representative).

Contributions from:

- Mr **Moray Gilland**, Former NPP Desk Officer, European Commission
- Ms **Iiris Mäntyranta**, Former Interreg Aurora programme director, Interreg Arctic Cooperation
- Mr **Jan Edøy**, Former MC member, Norway



## Northern Periphery and Arctic

- Mr **Jim Millard**, Former MC member, Scotland
- Mr **Gerry Finn**, Former MC member, Ireland

**10:30 – 11:00** Coffee break

**11:00 – 12:00** [Insights on the impact of transnational cooperation](#)

This session will present findings from recent analyses and research, highlighting how transnational cooperation and Interreg NPA benefits rural regions and examine what the legacy of Interreg NPA means for the future of territorial cooperation.

[Integrating rural and economically weaker regions into European cooperation: lessons from Interreg B Programmes \(2000–2020\)](#)

Mr **Jens Kurnol** (online), Federal institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and spatial development (Germany)

[From impact to insight: Evaluating Interreg NPA's legacy and future directions](#)

Ms **Irene Mc Master**, European Policies Research Centre (EPRC) Scotland

**12:00 – 13:30** Lunch

**13:30 – 16:30** [Parallel sessions – The building blocks](#)

Over the years, Interreg NPA projects have laid important foundations for future initiatives, the building blocks. In many cases, projects acted as testbeds for new ideas, which were later scaled up and integrated into regional and national policies and implementation frameworks which continue to shape ongoing efforts.

In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Three blocks of parallel sessions will take place, with participants invited to attend one session per block.

Descriptions of each project session are available at the end of the agenda.

**16:30 – 17:00** [Launch of the 6th call for projects](#)

The terms of the last call for main project applications will be presented at this event and the call officially launched.

**18:00**

Arranged transfer from NORD Campus to Wood Hotel  
Venue: Wood Hotel, Fjellveien 187, Bodø, Norway

**18:30 – 22:00**

Conference dinner and entertainment

All guests are invited to a conference dinner in the impressive settings of the Wood hotel. Expect some entertainment and surprises...

**22:00**

Arranged transfer to Radisson Blue Hotel

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### DAY 2: DIALOGUE ABOUT THE FUTURE

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025

Radisson Blu Hotel

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On the second day, Interreg NPA invites various actors supporting cooperation in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions to join a dialogue with the programme and its projects, exploring how we can do even more together in the future.

**9:00 – 9:30**

Opening remarks

Ms **Claude Véron-Réville**, Special Envoy for Arctic matters,  
European Union External Action Services (tbc)

**9:30 – 11:00**

The future of cooperation in the Northern Periphery and Arctic

EU Arctic Policy, achievements and outlook

Mr **Miguel Roncero**, International Relations Officer (EU Arctic  
policy), DG MARE, European Commission (Online)

Interreg post 2027 – What to expect in the next programme period

Mr **Petri Koistinen**, European Commission DG Regio

Interreg NPA consultation, beneficiaries' expectations

Ms **Kirsti Mijnhijmer**, Head of Secretariat, Interreg Northern  
Periphery and Arctic

**11:00 – 12:00**

Coffee and lunch boxes

**12:00 – 14:00**

Parallel sessions: Emerging topics

Theme-focused session prepared by NPA projects and other key  
NPA organisations to present topics that have recently gained  
attention in response to evolving challenges and needs in NPA  
regions.

Two blocks of parallel sessions will take place, with participants  
invited to attend one session per block.

Descriptions of each project session are available at the end of the  
agenda.



14:00 – 14:30

Coffee Break

14:30 – 15:30

Closing Panel: How does cooperation in the Arctic and Northern Periphery moves on from here?

This panel explores how transnational cooperation can best respond to the diverse, place-based needs of the Arctic and Northern Periphery communities. Panellists will reflect on how cooperation structures already existing across the region can build on synergies and collaboration to achieve meaningful long-term impacts.

Mr **Nils Kristian Sørheim Nilsen**, Director of Northern Norway European Office, NSPA (Northern Sparsely Populated Areas Network), Norway

Ms **Halla Nolsøe Poulsen**, Director NORA, (Nordic Atlantic Cooperation), Faroe Islands

(Others tbc)

15:30

Closing remarks

17:30 – 20:00

Thank you and goodbye party

Bådin brewery, Tolder Holmers vei 6, 8003 Bodø, Norway

One more opportunity for having a good time together and share good vibes before leaving Bodø!

Interreg NPA will provide light refreshments and entertainment. An optional beer tasting is also available for purchase.

## EXPERIMENTAL EXHIBITION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

From 13:30 to 16:30

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Landscape, knowledge and traditions from Gaskelaante

Led by Kevin Denham,

Use XR glasses to experience over 1000 years of Gaskelaante, as the landscape is changed over time – both by humans and by nature. Enter the virtual landscape and ‘touch’ the objects! Perhaps you will see a South Sámi hunter skiing by!

Welcome to an extraordinary exhibition that combines cutting-edge digital technology with the cultural landscape of Gaskelaante – ‘the land in-between’ in the South Sámi language – a vast area that stretches from Trøndelag in Norway to Jämtland in Sweden. People have visited and lived in this area for over a thousand years. Its history includes the Sámi, Vikings, Caroleans, kings, farmers, traders, hunters and tourists.

The green transition’s search for renewable energy sources is also bringing increased global conflict, including here in Gaskelaante. This exhibition aims to raise awareness of its importance and fragility, in a world that is affected by both climate change and the consequences of the green transition.

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 1: From 13:30 to 14:30

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In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### From Awareness to Action: Ten Years of Tackling Marine Plastic Pollution in the NPA Region,

Led by Niko Hänninen, University of Oulu, Finland – Project CIRCNETS

Marine plastic pollution hit the headlines roughly a decade ago with pictures of marine animals tangled in fishing gear. The NPA was quick to pick up this topic and to support a project called Circular Ocean, which aimed to look at this problem closely, and develop solutions and opportunities to support reuse of end-of-life fishing gear.

This brought the problem into limelight, and within the Interreg sphere, winning the People's choice award at RegioStars 2016. The project was followed by Blue Circular Economy (also a RegioStars finalist) with a more systematic view on the business potential of end-of-life fishing gear. Parallel to these projects, circular economy has gained importance, the SUP directive has been passed and then a new CIRCNETS project has emerged. Like threads in a net, each NPA-funded project has built on the last—strengthening a network of innovation and policy that advances circular solutions and extended producer responsibility in tackling marine plastic pollution

#### Empowered NPA Communities: Driving Resilience Through Digital Innovation

Led by Jose Manuel San Emeterio, ERNACT, Ireland – Project INNOCAP

Public sector organizations in the NPA area recognize the need for innovation to provide high-quality, sustainable services. With growing challenges such as an aging population, high service costs for small, dispersed communities, and digital skills gaps, adopting transformative solutions is vital. The COVID pandemic reinforced the crucial role digital technologies play in community resilience.

This session explores the path taken by several NPA projects (IMPROVE, EMERGREEN, DISTINCT, ARCTIC PACER, INNOCAP, MINDSET) in harnessing digital innovation to enhance public services. It will showcase the impact of advanced technologies such as

AI, IoT, and VR/AR, demonstrating how they can drive meaningful change when integrated with inclusive approaches where communities are empowered and actively participate in shaping solutions.

By leveraging digital transformation, NPA regions can build resilience and secure a more sustainable future.

### [Tourism in the Making: Building Blocks from 25 Years of NPA Projects](#)

Led by Ari Laakso, University of Lapland, Finland – Project RETURN

This session traces how NPA-funded tourism projects have served as building blocks in the region's evolving approach to tourism, from early efforts to develop sustainable tourism as a new livelihood model to today's focus on protecting communities and nature amid rising visitor pressure in tourism hotspots.

Over 25 years, tourism priorities have shifted: digital tools were introduced to enhance visitor experiences and promote responsible travel, and more recently, attention has turned toward regenerative tourism that actively improves local conditions.

Participants will explore how NPA projects have addressed emerging challenges and opportunities, such as slow adventure and scientific tourism, while fostering ethical, culturally sensitive tourism in NPA communities. The take-home message: tourism in the NPA is constantly evolving, and through shared learning and collaboration, it has become a platform for innovation, resilience, and community-led change.

### [Visit to NordLab, Center for Crisis Management and Collaboration](#)

Center for Crisis management and collaboration – Nordlab focuses on practice-based research and education in preparedness, societal security and collaboration, and contributes to Nord University's thematic focus area in societal security.

In the autumn of 2024, Nordlab was expanded to 500 square meters and consists of modern facilities with advanced technology that enables the implementation of various types of exercises, research activities, teaching, as well as networking and user dialogues with emergency response actors and industry

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 2: From 14:30 to 15:30

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In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### [Responsible and Regenerative Tourism Approaches in Northern Periphery and Arctic](#)

Led by Timo Rui, Karelia University of Applied Science, Finland – Project GLOW 2.0

Excessive and misdirected artificial lighting at night, light pollution, is increasing across the globe at a rate of about 10% annually (Kyba et al. 2023), making it the greatest threat to natural darkness, darkness of nature.

Over 80% of the world and almost 90% residents of Europe can no longer experience natural darkness (Falchi et. al 2016); a rapidly diminishing natural resource even in a sparsely populated countries, cities and towns. Without darkness, ecological, cultural, scientific, aesthetic, economic, health, and wellness values from darkness and dark skies are lost (Stone 2017). Energy costs are also significant (Eklöf 2023).

The session will engage participants on ways Interreg NPA GLOW2.0 partnership assisted enterprises and organisations across participating NPA regions enhance sustainable growth and competitiveness for dark months of the year, using darkness of nature and Dark Sky as additional elements for diversifying the tourism package, and means of safeguarding natural assets.

#### [Empowering Social Care and Healthcare: Technology for Workforce Wellbeing](#)

Led by Susanna Leskinen, Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Finland and Nick Timmons, Atlantic Technological University, Ireland - Projects Tech2Heal and RemoTED

The Tech2Heal and RemoTED projects explore how technology and digital solutions can improve the wellbeing and performance of social and healthcare professionals, especially in rural and remote areas. By integrating digital tools into healthcare settings, these projects aim to enhance professional wellbeing, quality of care, and service accessibility.



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Drawing on the experiences and knowledge from past Interreg NPA initiatives, these projects continue to build on the foundations of innovation, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing. The session will focus on the benefits of adopting technology in social and healthcare work environments and how it can transform the way professionals care for others.

Key questions addressed will include: How can technology enhance the way we work to improve people's lives? and How can technology be effectively adopted in the workplace to better care for others?

### [Creative journeys: Strengthening the cultural and creative economy in the NPA](#)

Led by Ian Brannigan, Western Development Commission, Ireland – Project N-LITE

This session explores the impact of Interreg NPA funding on the creative economy in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions. Through projects like Creative Edge, Creative momentum, Spot-lit, and N-LITE, the programme has connected creative entrepreneurs, expanded market reach, and advanced innovation in cultural and literary tourism.

Join us in an immersive experience to discover how these projects have stimulated economic growth, and promoted the cultural landscape of the Northern Periphery communities.

### [Visit NOATUN Labs at Nord University](#)

NOATUN is Norway's most modern laboratory building, newly opened at Nord University. During your visit, you will get a guided tour of the facilities supporting research and education in areas such as aquaculture, marine biodiversity, veterinary science, and biotechnology. *Walking distance within Nord University.*

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 1: THE BUILDING BLOCKS

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 3: From 15:30 to 16:30

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In these project-run theme-focused sessions we showcase the projects that acted as building blocks and delivered positive impacts in NPA areas.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### The ROADEX network – for better rural roads

Led by Per Otto Aursand, Norwegian Public Road Administration, Norway, ROADEX Network

ROADEX has been a series of technical co-operations between a range of roads organisations across Northern Europe on matters concerning the management of low volume rural roads.

The themes covered by ROADEX research is among others drainage, heavy trucks, road materials, maintenance and rehabilitation of roads. A series of demonstration projects on these themes have been conducted and reported. The main ROADEX solution is precise surveys to map the weak sections, focus in on them and design 'fit for purpose' structures and treatments.

Several findings with a high potential to increase productivity and savings have been made without compromising quality. Results have been published in a range of reports and e-learning lessons on [www.roadex.org](http://www.roadex.org). The results are not limited to northern peripheral areas and rural roads, but can also be implemented on high-capacity roads and on a global basis.

#### From pilot to practice: scaling innovation in energy efficiency

Led by Bjarne Lindeløv, Nordland Research Institute, Norway – Project HYBES

The session would explore how Interreg NPA funding empowers communities in the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions to test innovative solutions in real-world settings, manage associated risks, and scale successful initiatives.

Featuring projects like e-Lighthouse and HYBES, it would examine how these initiatives have enhanced energy efficiency and promoted sustainable practices through pilot implementations. Participants will learn how transnational collaboration and strategic

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support facilitate the transition from experimental projects to impactful, scalable, and concrete solutions.

**Social entrepreneurship - essential for regional development in the Northern Peripheral and Arctic**

Led by Yvonne von Friedrichs, Mid Sweden University, Sweden – Project MERSE

Social entrepreneurship is a rapidly emerging form of entrepreneurship that has gained ground in Europe. Cross-border cooperation within the MERSE project has made it possible to compare country-specific regional conditions for social entrepreneurship in rural areas.

The session explores the conditions for rural social enterprises in five regions of the Northern Periphery and Arctic regions and highlights the barriers and opportunities for social enterprises. Measuring results and impact is repeatedly highlighted as a central challenge in the field of social entrepreneurship. Lack of clarity about social impact and long-term savings in society limits social enterprises' opportunities for external financing and sustainable establishment in the market.

Although it is well known that social entrepreneurship usually results in good things and fills gaps in society, the conditions for this type of entrepreneurship vary despite the great growing interest in society

## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 2: EMERGING TRENDS

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 4: From 12:00 to 13:00

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Theme-focused session prepared by NPA projects and other key NPA organisations to present topics that have recently gained attention in response to evolving challenges and needs in NPA regions.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### Increasing youth engagement in biodiversity decisions: the importance of relations to water and landscapes

Led by Jenny Turton, Arctic Frontiers, Norway – Project CAP-SHARE

In this session we will present the first-year results of CAP-SHARE: Building Bridges of Shared Capacity Between Scientists, Policy Makers and Communities. We will specifically focus on the integration of youth, local and indigenous knowledge into decision making. From sharing stories, youth expressed the importance of water bodies (rivers, lakes, coasts and oceans), landscapes (tundra, forests and fells) and how they connect young people across boundaries and cultures.

Through videos of panel discussions and intergenerational knowledge sharing, the outcomes from the first year of the project will be shared. A representative from Norway, Iceland and Finland will share a first-look at the model for capacity sharing for youth in decision making. We would also welcome the input from other NPA projects on the results.

The goal is to share ideas for future collaboration and continued development of Arctic and Northern Periphery Areas, for sustainable biodiversities.

#### Challenge Drive Collaborations - Empowering Europe's Future through Youth

Led by Umair N. Mughal, Nord University, Norway – Project NORDIC BRIDGE

Challenge-Driven Collaborations apply multi-stakeholder, transdisciplinary approaches to co-create solutions for shared societal challenges. This session will highlight how digital platforms like the Nordic Bridge Project—a digital collaboration tool connecting Norway, Finland, Iceland, and Ireland—can facilitate engaging challenge drive collaboration by engaging youth and researchers in contributing to societal challenges. The aim is change the youth from being passive recipients of research funding or

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policy into active partners, tackling real-world issues through knowledge valorization. Participants will explore how cross-border platforms foster equitable access, regional resilience, and sustainable impact in remote and rural contexts.

### Sustainable SMEs: Supporting the transition to more sustainable businesses

Led by Kirsi Knuuttila, Jamk University of Applied Sciences, Finland (tbc) – Projects Sustainable SMEs and TARGET CIRCULAR

*(Title and content under development)* This session combines the expertise and learnings from Sustainable SMEs and TARGET CIRCULAR projects working with SMEs experiences, challenges, and good practices when transitioning to more sustainable business practices and sustainability reporting.

### Arctic Urban-Regional Cooperation

Led by Tricia Hackett, Arctic Urban-Regional Cooperation (tbc)

Launched by the European Union in January 2024, [AURC](#) supports 15 Arctic local authorities from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Greenland, Iceland, Canada and the USA to exchange knowledge and experiences on the issues most important to them.

### Visit Joint Rescue and Coordination Center, Bodø

Led by Mikel Dominguez Cainzos, Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Norway – Project NAMRO

Get an inside look at the JRCC, where real-time emergency responses are coordinated across land, sea, and air. Hear how critical operations are managed and lives are saved in the Arctic - now strengthened by the Interreg NPA funded NAMRO project, which supports more efficient and coordinated mass rescue operations. Walking distance from the Radisson Blu.



## PARALLEL SESSION

### DAY 2: EMERGING TRENDS

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER 2025

#### BLOCK 5: From 13:00 to 14:00

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Theme-focused session prepared by NPA projects and other key NPA organisations to present topics that have recently gained attention in response to evolving challenges and needs in NPA regions.

Participants are invited to attend one session per block.

#### Youth engagement: Youth Together for Arctic futures project

Led by the Arctic Youth Network

This European Union funded project aims to support Arctic and European youth with knowledge, skills and opportunities to work towards implementing good climate and nature policies for the Arctic. In their session, Arctic Youth Network a consortium partner, will share experience of youth engagement in the project.

#### The High North Center for Business and Governance

Led by Andreas Raspotnik, High North Centre, Norway (tbc)

At their session, the High North Center for Business and Governance at Nord University Business School will present their "Business Index North" project which increases awareness about opportunities as well as challenges for sustainable development in the Arctic and analyses the future development of industry and society in Northern Norway.

#### IoT Meets AI: Transforming Energy Data into Actionable Insights

Led by Elena Bezborodova, AIM Centre, Ireland – Project ARCTIC EDGE

This is a hands-on, high-impact workshop designed to show how to turn energy and weather data into powerful, real-world insights. The workshop will demonstrate how to use IoT sensors, cloud tools, and generative AI to create smart dashboards and reports. The session will showcase what can be done with energy data, and how to feed it into AI tools that generate instant summaries for reporting and compliance.

The goal is to demonstrate emerging trends empowering SMEs with the tools and know-how to turn raw data into stories that inspire action. The session provides a

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fresh perspective on how technology, particularly IoT and AI, can make sustainability insights, faster, and more impactful. Through real-life examples and smart dashboards there will be a showcase of how emerging tools can turn raw energy data into meaningful, automated insights.

[Using gamified digital tools and methods to co-create solutions to regional issues](#)

Led by Mariia Hämäläinen, Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Finland – Project InnoGS

The InnoGS project addresses regional and rural development by tackling common challenges like youth and underrepresented group integration, skill shortages, and talent retention. InnoGS focuses on digitalization and gamified approaches, which make activities for users engaging and motivating, usable to benefit public and private sectors. (tbc)