

Rethinking Regional Attractiveness in the Italian Region of Marche



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Rethinking Regional Attractiveness in the Italian Region of Marche

2023

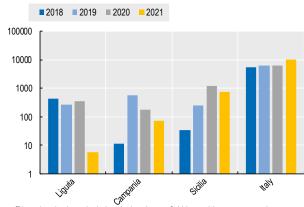


The impact of the COVID-19 crisis, compounded by the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and existing megatrends (e.g. climate change, globalisation, digitalisation and demographic change), continue to produce asymmetric effects within and between countries and regions, with the scope and scale depending on their unique characteristics.

The OECD's work on rethinking regional attractiveness policies in the new global environment, is undertaken with the support of the European Commission (DG REGIO) and is a priority activity of the Regional Development Policy Committee (RDPC). Working closely with 15 regions in 5 OECD member countries (Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Sweden). It aims to help regional and national policy-makers to better understand the position of regions in an evolving global context, including emerging challenges and opportunities, and identify the policy levers at their disposal to enhance the attractiveness of regions to the key international target groups of investors (including exporters), talent, and visitors. In doing so, it seeks to support regions transition towards new territorial development policies that promote inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development, while enhancing regional attractiveness.

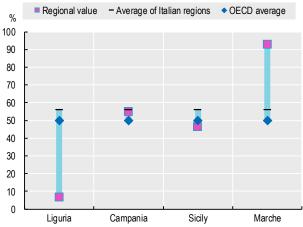
A snapshot of Marche in the world

Greenfield FDI Inwards by region, expenditure in US millions



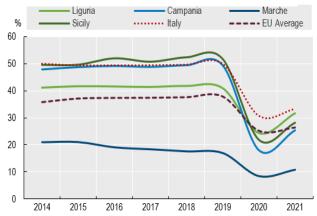
Note: fDI market database includes declared greenfield inward investments only. Source: OECD calculations based on fDI market database, 2022.

Share of renewables in electricity generation, 2019



Source: OECD Regional database (2022); OECD regions (TL2)

Share of nights spent by foreign tourists in accommodation establishments



Source: OECD calculations based on Lstat database (2021): Eurostat (2021)

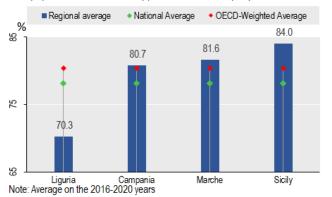
With 8 projects identified in the years 2014-19 (i.e. only 0.7% of the total for Italy), Marche has been a modest destination for foreign investments - in an Italian scenario largely dominated by Lombardy (which attracted around 45% of the projects destined for Italy). Marche was ranked 14th out of 21 Italian regions (TL2) for international investment in Italy in terms of the number of projects.1 According to the available data from fDi Markets, very few greenfield investment projects have been identified in the last 15 years, and in particular, none in the area of R&D. Yet a small number of recent examples of greenfield FDI inwards projects can be identified, such as two recent investments in the textile manufacturing sector (2022 Q2), which total up to USD 103 million in capital expenditure. (N.B. there is currently no data available for Marche in the fDi Markets database for the target and the Secretariate is pursuing alternatives sources)

On the clean electricity production front Marche's share of renewables in electricity generation (92.9%) stands out when compared to OECD (50.2 %) and national (55.9%) averages. In 2020 it produced 1892 GWh of green power, which is equivalent to 1.6% of the national production of renewables. Solar power represents most of the production (70%), followed by hydroelectric (19%) and biogas (7%). The region's strength in renewable energy production could be leveraged as a pull factor to attract international firms wanting to green their production, with positive spill over effects including job creation. In addition, it will help to mitigate climate change, reduce the emission of air pollutants and improve energy security, all of which further increase the value proposition for investments in renewable energy production, and highlight the 'green' credentials of the region for talent and visitors.

The tourism sector represented 10% of regional GDP in 2019, slightly below national average. ²The share of nights spent by foreign visitors in accommodation establishments prior to the COVID pandemic (17%) was significantly less than the national average (50%) and half of that for the EU (37.8%). While this figure dropped by nearly 9% in 2020, it was far less than for other regions in the EU (-12%) and Italy (-20%). When looking at the total number of nights spent by tourists, Marche's performance remained almost unchanged between 2019 and 2021 (ranking 11th and 12th in Italy). This in line with the wider impacts experienced in many other countries, where regions more dependent on international tourists were more heavily impacted. Marche, as for many other regions in Italy and Europe, is yet to reach pre-pandemic levels in terms of the amount of tourist arrivals and nights spent, despite the recovery in 2021.

Interregional comparison on social life opportunities

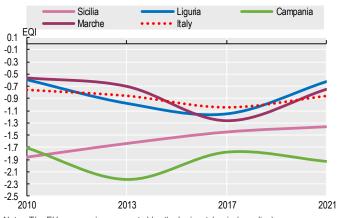
% of population satisfied with opportunities to meet people and make friends



Indicators that capture participation in social activities can help to measure regional social capital and can illustrate an important relationship between higher levels of social well-being and regional economic growth. Social cohesion is a strong point for the region of Marche, with the share of the population satisfied with opportunities to connect with others and make friends (81.6%) above both the OECD (80.4%) and national (78.1%) averages. This result indicates that there is an opportunity for the region to leverage this strength in order to boost regional attractiveness as a place to invest, live and visit.

European Quality of Government Index

Source: Gallup World Poll



Note: The EU average is represented by the horizontal axis (zero line).

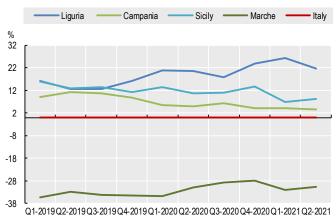
Negative values mean that the Government Quality Index is below the EU average.

Source: University of Gothenburg

Perceived quality of government can have serious implications for the attractiveness of territories, and in particular influence the decisions of potential investors and talent when choosing a preferred destination to set up a business or raise a family. European Quality of Government Index (EQI) captures, at the regional level, citizens' perceptions, and experiences in relation to corruption, quality, and impartiality of three essential public services health, education, and policing. After a steady decline to -1.3 in 2017, Marche's score improved to -0.7 in 2021. While below the EU average value (0), and well below what the index categorises as a 'topperforming region (score greater than 1.1), this is slightly better than Italian average (-0.8), which remains among the lowest in Europe.

Download speed at the regional level

Download speed as a percentage deviation from national average



Source: OECD calculations based on Ookla database; 2021; OECD TL2 regions

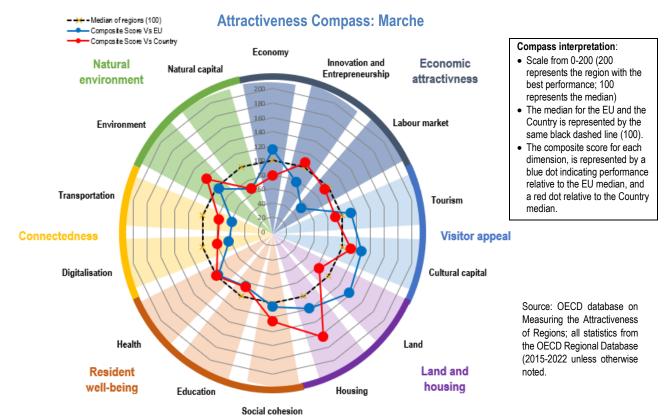
In relation to broadband download speeds, Marche has performed well below the national average in recent years, with only marginal improvement between 2019 (- 35%) and 2021 (- 30). The region is implementing its broadband strategy (Agenda per la Trasformazione Digitale 2021-2027) to extend connection to the whole territory, as it considers digitalisation as a lever to ensure a territorial rebalancing between the coast and the inland areas, as well as between metropolitan areas and small towns.³ Improving download speeds also provides opportunities for regions to redefine towns and villages in rural areas through remote coworking strategies.

Attractiveness profile: Marche

Marche has significant, but unlocked potential to become highly attractive region for foreign investors, talent, and visitors. Limited transport connections and a decentralised geographical position (with respect to the main axes Turin-Milan-Venice and Milan-Bologna-Florence-Rome) are among the main factors that hinder regional attractiveness and international connections in the region. Even in terms of tourism, the region attracts less foreign visitors than its neighbouring regions despite its great potential as a touristic destination. Most of enterprises in the Marche region, 94 percent, have less than 10 employees. With reference to economic sectors, trade accounts for the largest share of total businesses (23.3%) followed by agriculture (17%), services to enterprises (14%) building (13.5%), and manufacturing (13%). The detail of the manufacturing sector shows that footwear and leather goods enterprises are the most prevalent in the region (18%). This is followed by metal and metal production (14%), furniture and wood products enterprises, textile and textiles and clothing each account for 12%.

Before considering the policy levers available to enhance the attractiveness of a region to international target groups (investors, talent, visitors), it is important to first understand the region's position in the world. To do so, the OECD considers four families of international connections: business, human, knowledge, and infrastructure. In the case of Marche, on the **Business** front, the region shows a trade openness rate - a measure of the region's imports and exports as a share of regional GDP- of 44.4 % which is above the national (38%) but below the EU average (47.4%). Concerning **Infrastructure**, the region shows relatively low air transport performance; on average, people in the region can access around 40 passenger flights per day within 90 minutes by car, far below the national (287) and EU average (321). When it comes to **Human** connections, nights spent by tourists in the region per sq. km (815) are more than national average (784) but less than other EU regions (1125). Finally, in terms of **Knowledge** connections, the number of international scientific co-publications (1187) in 2021, while slightly lower than the EU (1531) and national average (1328), is up 87% in the last five years, in what is an important measure of a region's participation in the global research ecosystem.

The OECD's innovative and multidimensional approach to assessing regional attractiveness considers global engagement beyond international connections and purely economic factors. In total, the methodology considers more than 50 indicators to develop regional attractiveness profiles, covering 14 dimensions of attractiveness, across six domains (Economic attraction, Connectedness, Visitor appeal, Natural environment, Resident well-being, Land-use and housing).



Economic Attractiveness: In terms of Marche's regional GDP per capita (USD 33 861) and GVA per worker (USD 33 861) the region performs below EU and national average. When considering the innovation and entrepreneurship dimension, the share of staff employed in R&D (2.1%) is slightly above EU and national average (1.9% and 2% respectively), and while the region performs better than most others in both Italy and the EU, the number of patent application per 1m inhabitants (54.5) remains lower than that for the EU (75.3) and the rest of the country (56). Moreover, the region ranks 5th in Italy for the number of start-ups per capita (23.5 start-ups per 100 000 inhabitants), hosting 356 start-ups (registered between 2012 and 2021) in total. Looking at the analysis of the Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) in 2021, Marche ranks 11th Italy and 130th in Europe. On the employment dimension, Marche's overall employment rate of 48.8% (15yrs and over) and 79.4% for youth (15-24 yrs) are below (58.2%) and in line with (80%) EU averages respectively.

Visitor Appeal: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Marche's share of foreign tourists (16.6%) was markedly low when compared to the rest of Italy and the EU (50% and 37.6% respectively). Nonetheless, Marche was suggested by Lonely Planet, a well-known travel guidebook publisher, as the world's second region for tourism to be explored in 2020, which will likely increase regional attractiveness as touristic destination around the world. The number of beds in hosting structures per 1000 inhabitants (118,2) is higher than national and EU average, even though regional representative claimed that the supply of tourist beds is easily exhausted during peak seasons. Concerning cultural capital, the region reports a higher share of employment in cultural and creative industries (1.9%) than national (1.3%) and EU average (1.1%), while it has only one UNESCO heritage site. The city of Pesaro has been selected as the "Italian capital of the culture" for 2024 by the Italian Ministry of Culture. Moreover, (UNWTO) World Tourism Organization named San Ginesio in its 2021 list of best touristic villages.

Connectedness: In terms of connectedness, despite reporting a share of population with access to broadband (89%) higher than the national and EU average (86% and 85% respectively), fibre optic coverage and average broadband download speeds are significantly lower than the majority of EU and other Italian regions. In addition, the index of access to internet of businesses with more than 10 employees (99%.) is slightly above national average (98.7%). In general terms, Marche performs below the majority of EU and Italian regions on transport connectivity. As outlined above, the relatively small number of passenger flights per day accessible to residents within a 90-minute drive (40), trails the OECD and EU averages by some margin. On rail performance, a measure of rail accessibility and proximity, the region scores somewhat better, although still below the EU average and far below what the Commission considers a well-functioning system5. The same can be said on the road performance measure6. As such it is perhaps not surprising that residents tend not to be satisfied with public transport (42.3%), which is below the EU average by about 20%, but is in line with other Italian regions (41.1%).

In addition, the Port of Ancona is one of the most active in the Mediterranean and is classified as port of international importance by the European Union. It plays a primary role in commercial exchange, serving predominantly Italian and European markets, with more than a million passengers transiting through the port on ferries and cruise ships towards the shores of the Eastern Adriatic each year. The Port is also a growing hub for container traffic, serving the Scandinavian-Mediterranean and Baltic-Adriatic corridors of the TEN-T network.

Land and Housing: The share of land converted to artificial surfaces between 2004-2019 (0.83%) is in line with national average and higher than EU one (0.64%) suggesting the region may have focused more on greenfield sites for projects and investments than on redeveloping brownfield sites. When considering housing conditions, the share of residents satisfied with housing affordability (54.5%) is above EU and national average (50%), while housing expenses as a share of household income (30%) is below the rest of the country (34%) but higher than for other EU regions (25%).

Resident Well-being: Marche 's performance is quite positive concerning well-being indicators, being generally on par or slightly above the median for EU and Italian regions. In first instance, the poverty rate after tax and transfers (13.6%) is lower than EU (17.3%) and national (18.3%) average. Moreover, life satisfaction and social life opportunities are slightly higher than in other EU regions and the rest of the country. Concerning the health dimension, in 2022 Marche ranks 10th in Italy, and above the national average in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of healthcare provision⁷. In 2019 the number of doctors per 1000 inhabitants (3.8) was in line with EU average and Italian average (3.9 and 4 respectively). Concerning education, the share of people enrolled in tertiary education (14.8%) is lower than EU (32.1%) and national average (19.8%), while the share of foreign students in higher education (6.6%) is also lower than EU (7.3%), but above other Italian regions (5.2%).

Natural Environment: When looking at the natural environment, the region stands out for its share of renewables in energy production (92.8%), much higher than other EU and Italian regions, and for its share of recycled waste (72%) which is above other EU (64%) and Italian regions (62.9%). However, in terms of natural capital, the region's tree coverage rate (19.5%) is below EU and Italian average (34%), while regional share of protected areas (18.8%) is also lower than EU (28.1%) and Italy (23.2%).

From recovery to resilience

Marche's economic system has a strong industrial and manufacturing component, which represents 30.5% of the regional added value against an Italian average of 23.9% (2018). However, the greatest contribution to value in Marche comes from the services sector (67.6%), while agriculture represents just 1.8%.8 Marche ranked sixth in Italy for export share of GDP in 2019 (28%), while the weight of regional exports on the national total was 2.4%, due to the small size of the region.

Marche has had to overcome many natural and economic adversities since the 2007 global financial crisis, which forced many large manufacturing firms to close, and led the main local credit institute, the Bank of Marche, to declare bankruptcy. In 2016 an earthquake devastated about 40% of the region's land surface, and in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine, struck subsequent blows to the local economy, including a sizeable drop in exports to Russia, a key market for Marche⁹. For the 2021-27 EU structural funds programming, the region can count on unprecedented financial resources to cope with the structural challenges that hinder its development, such as inadequate international connections. Indeed, after shifting from "most developed" to a "transition region" according to the EU criteria, Marche became eligible for a larger part of structural funds for the current period than previously. While attesting to the difficulties faced by the region in recent years, this change was also perceived by local decision-makers as an outstanding opportunity to address structural challenges to growth. Additionally, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the National Plan for investments complementary to the PNRR (PNC), approved in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, allocated EUR 1.7 billion, or EUR 1,104 per capita, to the authorities of the Marche region. ¹¹

The status of "transition region" gives Marche the right to create Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for the first time, as a tool to attract investments in logistic and industrial areas, through the provision of tax benefits and in the main industrial crisis zones in the region 12. Since 2010, the Ministry of Enterprises and 'Made in Italy' has been providing tax benefits for entrepreneurial initiatives aimed at strengthening and upgrading the local productive fabric, attracting new investments, and relocating the workers of failed companies. Marche is currently mapping all the industrial crisis zones with the aim of developing a strategy for brownfield investment attraction.

Box 1. Redevelopment and valorisation of villages and historic centres to support sustainable tourism

The regional government approved a financial endowment of EUR 7.8 million of regional resources, in addition to European funds for sectoral interventions ¹³, to revitalise historic centres and develop sustainable tourism. Foreseen interventions, include improving healthcare supply, as well as digital infrastructure and services in rural and remote areas. A call was open for initiatives to enhance underutilised buildings of historical and artistic value to create places for shared and remote work, but also accommodation structures, including through innovative models, such as the "Spread hotels". The latter consist of several buildings, which are located within the perimeter of the same historic centre. This measure will tackle an important challenge for Marche, which is to redistribute tourists more evenly throughout its territory. Indeed, Inner areas, although endowed with important and impressive natural landscapes and cultural attractions, welcome only 2.6% of total arrivals in the region.

This regional law ¹⁴matches with the objectives of the national program for the requalification of villages funded with NRP funds, having two lines of action: one with EUR 420 million designated for pilot projects in each Region or Autonomous Province (the selected pilot project in Marche is the Montalto village), and one of EUR 580 million for at least 229 villages selected through public tender ¹⁵.

Source: Leggi e regolamenti regionali - Consiglio regionale delle Marche 16

Furthermore, through "Regional Agreements for Investments and Innovation" the region contributes to investment programs of companies creating local employment and skills, as well as increasing competitiveness of regional productive system.¹⁷ This is a critical issue in Marche, which struggles with brain drain and providing attractive jobs for qualified youth. The region is planning to support self-employment projects in the region conducted by returning talent and by offering incentives to businesses for hiring local-born workers living abroad. Attractiveness vis-à-vis talent will benefit from the emerging inter-regional innovation ecosystem "Vitality', which is financed by NRP, and brings together universities from Marche and the neighbouring regions of Umbria and Abruzzo. Though the offerings of the four universities in the Marche region are particularly interesting in the STEM landscape, difficulties persist in the absorption of young people within the regional production system, which highlights a still inadequate matching between the skills coming out of the university and the needs of business. ¹⁸Moreover, the region aims to attract "digital nomads" as a way to help tackle tourism seasonality and spread the benefits of the visitor economy (Box 1). On the side of attractiveness vis-à-vis visitors, the region promotes sustainable tourism through the Marche Outdoor project, which includes 24 cycling routes across inner areas and the coastline¹⁹.

Enhancing multi-level governance and coordination mechanisms

One of the main challenges shared across all Italian regions is the division of powers and the coordination between levels of government, along with often the limited capacity of subnational public administrations.²⁰ Considering EU funds management, the Italian Recovery Plan has been primarily managed by central administration, which has transferred significant amount of funds to municipalities, while regions play the most important operation role in the management of the EU Structural and Investments funds. To support public administration, the "Capacity Italy" programme has been implemented to provide specialised expertise and technical assistance to public entities at all stages of the implementation of NRP-related investments, including a recruitment plan, for helping public administrations to manage EU structural funds.

In the case of Marche, regional administrators are concerned about the possibility of duplication and/or overlapping between the many funds and programmes available for the region. In the current programming period, Marche will have to manage a higher amount of EU structural funds than previously, due to its new status as a "transition region", while also receiving resources from NRP, as well as specific aid for earthquake reconstruction and for industrial crisis zones coming both from EU and national funds. In addition, the region must define Special Economic Zones in its territory for the first time. This situation is particularly challenging for regional and local administrations that will need to improve coordination between all the levels of government, as well as between private sector and public administration (Box 2). In Marche a special regional office is responsible for the earthquake reconstruction, which is under the supervision of the National Commissioner for the reconstruction of the entire affected areas (*Aree del Cratere*) and works as a unified one-stop shop for productive activities (SUAP) for all municipalities involved ²¹.

Concerning tourism, Marche mentioned the lack of a national tourism policy to distribute tourism flows from existing high-profile destinations and attractions to lesser-known areas with rich but untapped natural and cultural heritage. In this area, Marche could learn from the 'high value guest' approach adopted in Canada, which prioritises visitors that are higher spending, value nature, engage with the locals, are less time sensitive, and are eager to explore lesser-known areas and engage in cultural exchanges. This approach is at the crux of Destination Canada's Tourism Renaissance - Strategy for Recovery, which looks at tourism through the lens of 'wealth and well-being'. With a higher propensity for return travel, this leads to greater return and higher contribution to GDP. Corsica is another example of collective efforts to rebalance attractiveness within the region and create a healthier tourism ecosystem. Out of season training for SMEs based in the region, and the development of sustainable tourism products are helping to promote environmentally friendly businesses and accelerate the digital transition in the sector. Another example is the Somme river valley cycle route in France, which was built with the help of the EU EAFRD, along a river in the eponymous French department. This new attraction highlights the natural, cultural and historical sites (First World War) of the territory as well as hotels and restaurants in towns and villages along the route.

Box 2. Coordinating economic opportunities in the regions

Territorially balanced and inclusive economic development requires coordination among public and private sector actors to create opportunities beyond traditional growth centres. Canada and Spain provide innovative illustrations of place-based practices to better coordinate and balance economic opportunities at the regional level:

Global Innovation Superclusters (Canada):

In Canada, regional clusters are the result of businesses and investments that reach back decades, cementing roots in diverse sectors. While they cannot be forced, they can be nudged to operate more effectively together and to create a regional value proposition highlighting the ways firms, governments, universities and civil society work towards a common vision. Canada's Global Innovation Superclusters are the result of that ambition – bringing together actors around five broad topic areas (from Ocean to AI to Proteins), creating sector-based regional nodes of attraction. One of the benefits of these initiatives relate to the speed of industrial and technological evolution, which allows members of the 'cluster' or 'network' to absorb the innovations of other members, and vice versa (e.g. AI firms can help to revolutionise public healthcare) (Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2020[15]). They also tend to perform better when clusters are designed in geographical proximity benefitting from deeper collaboration – an area where Ireland has a distinct advantage. For the Marche region in Italy, capturing the spillovers of FDI in technology and innovation sectors may be difficult for many local actors or SMEs with lesser capacity, yet initiatives like those in Canada illustrate how knowledge networks can emerge to promote the absorption and diffusion of innovation between international and domestic firms, in addition to public actors.

Inter-territorial Council for Internationalisation (Spain):

This governance mechanism represents a formidable example of national-subnational coordination to attract FDI. While much of its purpose lies in overcoming the challenge of coordinating highly autonomous subnational regions they draw on a number of tools and instruments that foster transparency and trust among foreign and domestic actors such as shared customer relationship management software (CRM) to promote the appetite for international investment in the regions, allowing for local actors to tailor their investment promotion strategy accordingly. Analysis of the Spanish case suggests that international investors view national-subnational coordination as a sign of trust and coherence in an investment destination. In an uncertain global investment environment, countries and their regions will rely increasingly on investments that build on the existing FDI stock so improving coordination between public and private actors currently in place is even more important 2223.

Sources: World Bank (2021); UNCTAD (2022)

Policy considerations

The following policy considerations are intended to help policy makers to enhance the impact of attractiveness strategies of the Marche Region vis-à-vis investors, talent, and visitors, and provide guidance to improve multi-level governance frameworks and coordination mechanisms.

• Strengthen promotion of the "Made in Marche" brand around the world. Marche's regional brand is not sufficiently recognised abroad. Marche has world class competences in manufacturing, and the cultural (including gastronomy), and tourism services sectors, and as such Marche should strengthen its communication strategy, for instance by participating in international fairs to promote regional products and destinations.

- Better connect Marche to domestic and international markets. One of the greatest challenges for the region seems to be its geographical remoteness. This perception concerns the whole region, even the regional capital of Ancona, not only small villages in inner areas and "cratere" areas damaged by the earthquake. Roads and railways connections with Northern Italy and the capital need to be strengthened, as well as international flight connections, while continued redevelopment of the Port of Ancona in line with the Master Plan will create further opportunities to grow the Port as a hub for commercial and passenger traffic. To serve these needs, Marche needs to improve internal connections, especially coastal-hinterland links, and further develop public transport networks. Thanks to NRP and structural EU funds, Marche has a great opportunity to invest in infrastructure networks, such as railways, roads, and broadband.
- Create a unique regional one-stop-shop for investors. In Marche various tax benefits and aids are available for investors due to the presence of industrial crisis zones and of areas affected by the 2016 earthquake, and new ones will be introduced due to the forthcoming SEZs. The opportunity exists to create a single point of contact to promote such benefits and orient foreign investors thanks to simplified access to information and facilitating effective coordination with key regional stakeholders.
- Strengthen regional and local administrative capacities. As highlighted by the region itself, regional and local administrations lack of adequate human resources, while they will be required to spend unprecedent amount of funds (NRP and EU structural funds) respecting strict deadlines. In coordination with national and EU representatives, it would be necessary to recruit new staff and provide specific training to adapt to the new challenges of globalisation, in first instance digitalisation, and ensure that staff managing EU funds have the necessary skills to reflect the region's 'in transition' status.

Notes

The data on which these graphs are based comes from several different sources covering the period 2015-2022. Most of it is extracted from the OECD database and EUROSTAT ensuring the same source is used for as many countries and regions as possible. Where and when data is missing, it is extracted from databases available through national statistical offices. For some dimensions, the data comes from specific databases, such as the Ookla database for indicators linked to digitalisation. The data are selected using the most robust, available, and frequently collected data at the adequate geographic level (TL2 or TL3). With certain indicators, calculations are done in order to present the indicator at the most relevant and comparable unit of analysis.

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