

Training unaccompanied minors to mountain jobs for a future in the Pyrenees

The Pyrenees are experiencing various socio-demographic trends in the mountains, including an ageing population, an exodus of young people and an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors. By offering training in traditional mountain sectors, the AVENIR project aims to provide these young people with a future and encourage them to contribute to local revitalisation.

Challenges and hopes for the integration of unaccompanied minors in the mountains

Like many mountain areas, the Pyrenees are dealing with an ageing of the population. To ensure the region's future dynamism, it is therefore essential to encourage young people to settle in the Pyrenees.

MORE INFO

The region is facing a double demographic challenge, with a constant increase in the number of unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors are young foreigners under the age of 18 who are separated from their legal representatives. Whatever their nationality, they are taken in charge by the child welfare system in order to follow training courses, learn the language if necessary and obtain a diploma. These young people are a hope for the revitalisation of the Pyrenean mountains if they decide to stay and work there.

Although the region has much to offer them, particularly in terms of access to employment and quality of life, the settlement of these unaccompanied minors in the mountains requires sustainable integration conditions and an understanding of the mountain environment. The lack of professional qualifications or language skills and the loss of socio-cultural references are obstacles to successful integration.

Training unaccompanied minors in traditional mountain occupations

Training and professional qualification are key elements when it comes to accessing employment for unaccompanied minors. The [AVENIR project](#) has enabled young people to discover a wide range of training and employment opportunities in the Pyrenees, in sectors that are constantly recruiting. In May 2022, 15 unaccompanied minors took part in training courses related to, among other sectors, high-altitude catering, maintenance and management of ski lifts, pastoralism, hospitality in tourist facilities and outdoor sports.



Credits: AVENIR project

Focusing on these traditional mountain sectors is a win-win strategy for the region; on the one hand, it allows these young people to find a job quickly and, on the other, it facilitates recruitment for companies constantly in need of new skills.

Facilitating social inclusion

In addition to vocational training, the AVENIR project worked to remove barriers to employment and social integration for these young people, first and foremost the language barrier. Language courses were provided to participants to increase their employability but also to facilitate their social contacts

in the region. The language courses were provided in the French Pyrenees by the Apprentice Training Centres.

In addition, in order to remove as many barriers to employment as possible for these unaccompanied minors, the AVENIR project also carried out intercultural management actions with regional companies. These measures, such as the provision of a [guide for the recruitment and management of a young foreigner](#), aim to overcome preconceived ideas and allay any fears that might arise from a lack of knowledge of the other's culture when hiring.

Finally, the 15 young people supported by the AVENIR project were able to discover the mountain environment through various activities, in particular outdoor sports. These recreational activities were coupled with a mentoring programme with local sport and cultural associations, which volunteered to provide additional social support to the young participants.



Credits: AVENIR project

Results

Thanks to the AVENIR project, [15 young people](#) under the protection of the child welfare system were trained to work in the mountains and received support for their socio-professional integration in the Pyrenees. Since the end of the project in May 2022, 8 of them found a job and the others are still in training. The majority of the young people decided to stay in the Pyrenees.

Resources and governance

The AVENIR project was carried out from 2019 to 2022 by the Regional Chamber of Trades and Crafts of Occitania, in partnership with various organisations from the social and employment sector, such as the School of Trades of the Hautes-Pyrénées, the Catalan Youth Agency and the Higher School of Trades of Haute-Garonne.

The project was funded by the Interreg POCTEFA programme. The total budget of the project amounts to 1,028,395 EUR, of which 668,457 EUR were financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

Cohesion Policy is an essential tool for development and social and territorial cohesion in mountain areas. Discover this example and other initiatives for youth and employment in [Montana174's](#) brochures.



Innovative aspect

The AVENIR project has developed a global approach to the integration of unaccompanied minors, focusing on vocational training but also on their social, cultural, and linguistic integration. By capitalizing on the traditional economic sectors of the Pyrenees, the approach paves the way for a more sustainable future for unaccompanied minors, local businesses, and the territory as a whole.