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Project information

Acronym	PARTNER-UP
Title	Partnerships and stakeholder engagement for Upskilling Pathways
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Executive Summary

The following national reports represent the outcome of the initial desk analysis carried out by the project partners in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Romania with the aim to deepen the actual state of the   art in the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative (UP) in each project Country and at EU level.

The desk analysis allowed the partners to investigate and share knowledge about several aspects related to the UP initiative: legislative context and measures, key measures in place, wide target groups addressed, main challenges in reaching out the target groups, main challenges in skills assessment, provision of tailored learning and validation and recognition of skills acquired, actors delivering Upskilling Pathways, cooperation mechanisms in place.

It was based on stakeholders' contributions, on recent literature review, and on the consultation of National/EU documents on both Adult Learning and Education policies and Upskilling Pathways, published by European Commission or elaborated by European networks/associations.

The outcomes of the Analysis put the basis for the policy and practice work of the project.

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1   Introduction

The following national reports represent the outcome of the initial Analysis carried out by the project partners in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Romania with the aim to deepen the actual state of art in the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative (UP) in each project Country and at EU level.

Specifically, the Analysis was meant at collecting quantitative and qualitative data and information about:

- existing and missing stakeholders,
- existing cooperation mechanisms and structures,
- gaps in cooperation,
- good practices with reference to the Upskilling Pathways implementation in the Partner UP Countries and at EU level,

in order to **provide the basis for the policy and practice work of the project**.
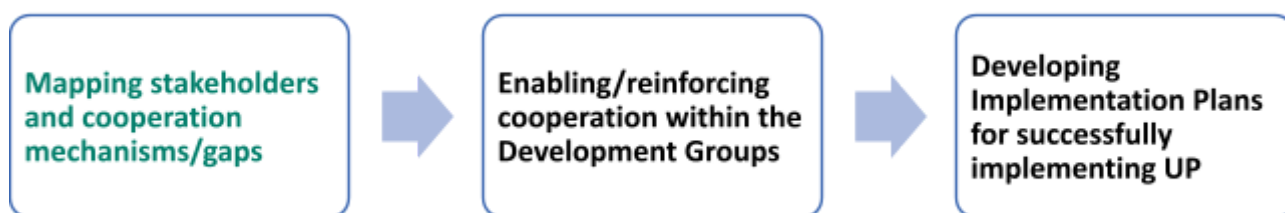
The Analysis process allowed the partners to investigate and share knowledge about several aspects related to the UP initiative, by:
- analysing the main challenges in the UP implementation, in view of defining strengths and weaknesses in cooperation, identifying existing coordination structures, missing stakeholders and how this has impacted on a regular process of implementation;
- mapping and analysing a list of possible/useful stakeholders to engage, so as to make clear their added value and expected contribution;
- defining how they can further enable the implementation of UP.

In order to collect highly qualitative data, the Analysis is carried out according to two different methodologies, both aimed at defining gaps in cooperation and identifying opportunities for reinforcing positive/meaningful relationships already in place and involving and engaging missing and/or new stakeholders: **Desk Analysis** and **Stakeholder Mapping**.

The **Desk analysis** was mainly intended at deepening the actual state of art in the implementation of the UP initiative in each project Country and at EU level, by investigating:

- legislative context and measures;
- key measures in place;
- wide target groups addressed;
- main challenges in reaching out the target groups;
- main challenges in skills assessment, provision of tailored learning and validation and recognition of skills acquired;
- actors delivering Upskilling Pathways;
- cooperation mechanism in place.

It was based on recent literature review and on the consultation of National/EU documents on both Adult Learning and Education policies and Upskilling Pathways, published by European Commission or elaborated by European networks/associations.

The mapping of Stakeholders was developed at country level through different activities:

- **internal reflection** in partner organisation and/or in national project team,

  developed by collectively brainstorming about specific key questions, so as to share a common view of the main needs and objectives for the development of cooperation with/among stakeholders;

- **focus groups / interviews** with national stakeholders according common Guidelines,

  with the main aim to guide them in self-assessing their role in Upskilling Pathways, their relevance and their main contribution.

As results of the methodologies applied, the partners/national team produced an **Analysis Country Report** and a **Stakeholder Mapping Table**, as follows.

2 Analysis reports

Report of the analyses that have taken place at the respective national level
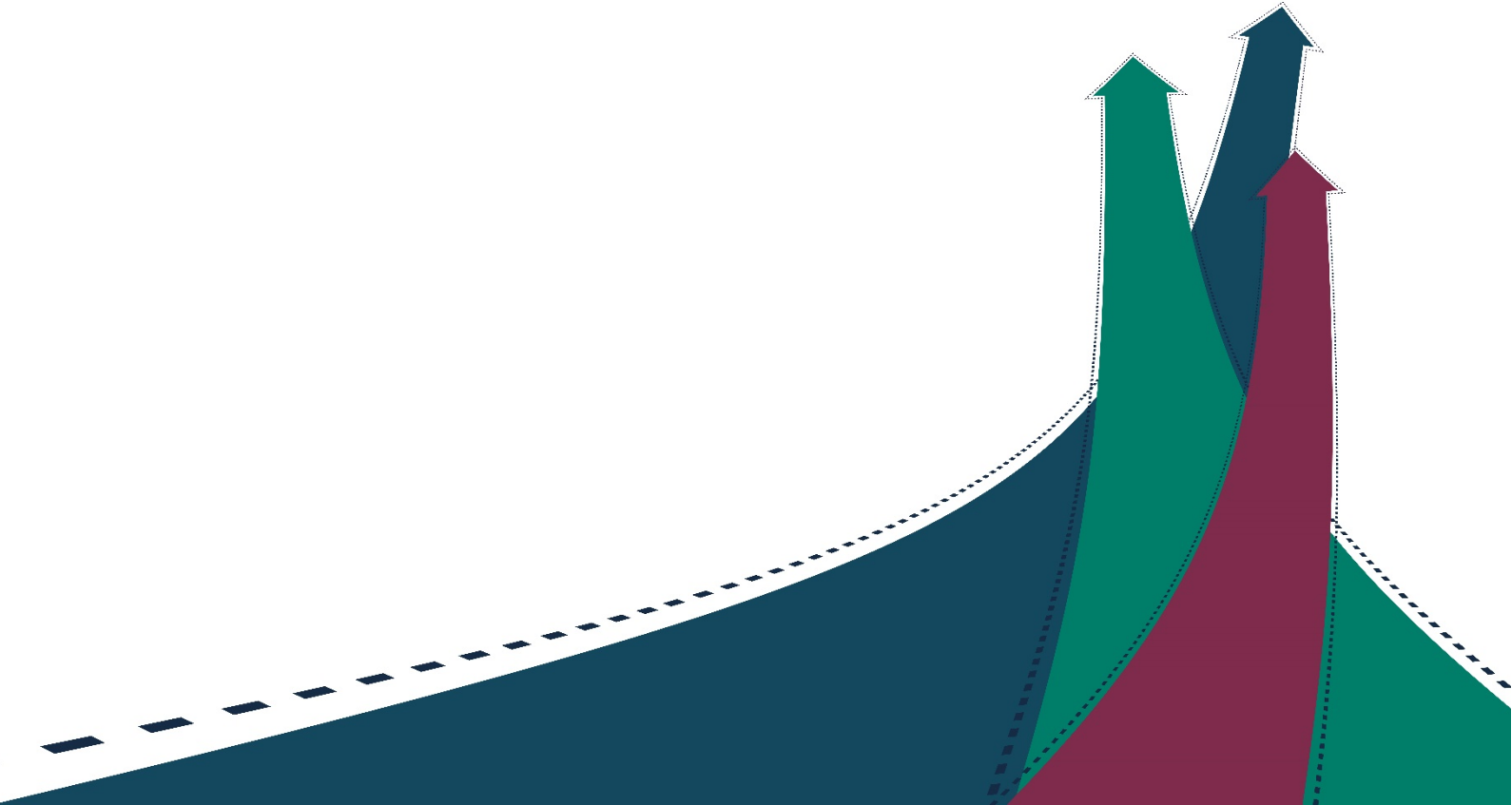
2.1 Country Analysis - Cyprus

Country	Cyprus
Responsible organisation/s	CARDET – Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology

Upskilling Pathways in each country: state of art in the implementation, main target groups, challenges

The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults was launched in 2016 ("the Recommendation") and revised in 2020 within the wider framework of the European Skills Agenda. The Recommendation is a policy initiative, calling EU member states to develop national strategies and policies to support upskilling and reskilling, particularly for vulnerable individuals and individuals with low qualifications. The goal of Upskilling Pathways is to empower individuals to navigate transitions in their careers, especially in the face of technological advancements and evolving job requirements, through a three-steps approach: skills assessment, tailored learning offer and validation and recognition. By investing in upskilling, individuals can improve their employability, increase their earning potential, and adapt to new roles or industries. Cyprus, as many other EU member states, may choose different ways of implementing the Recommendation, e.g. as part of existing lifelong learning strategies utilising existing adult education policy and legislation, as separate pilot projects or as part of

Country Analysis

CYPRUS

In 2012, the Council of Ministers established the Cyprus Qualifications Framework (CyQF) which adopted the 8 levels of the European Qualifications Framework. The CyQF includes the system of vocational qualifications developed by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA), enabling the validation and comparability of qualification of learners in a variety of lifelong learning activities (formal, non-formal and informal). This adoption of CyQF, therefore, facilitates the mobility of learners, while improving the quality assurance of training programs and activities (Cedefop, 2020a). The National Qualifications Authority has been established, leading the implementation of CyQF at operational level, whereas the CyQF council has been established at an advisory level, aiming to support the collaboration between stakeholders (Cedefop, 2020b). The CyQF council, focuses specifically in consulting stakeholders on developing and implementing the CyQF, promoting the dissemination of the CyQF and advising the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture and Youth.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Youth (MoESY) established pathways for adults to complete secondary education, or basic education. Evening Gymnasia, Evening Technical Schools, and New Modern Apprenticeship (for younger ages) are illustrative examples of these programs. Programs for non-formal education are also run by the MoESY Adult Education Centres offering various courses without, though, providing official certification. State Institutes of Further Education also provide courses such as ICT, bookkeeping, language. The latter act as preparatory lessons for the assessments of external stakeholders (for example IELTS or IGCSE of Cambridge, ECDL or ICT Europe for PCs and so on.). The Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) has had the greatest impact over the years, running several programs that help people who are unemployed to get back into the workforce and provide them with opportunities for lifelong learning and development. Subsidies for businesses and employers to provide training for new and existing employees enable the implementation of those programs. More than 45,000 trainees participated in lifelong learning activities by spending €15.7 million in 2018. However, trainees and funding are significantly lower for those with greater needs (unemployed and inactive).

Still, despite the development of various initiatives in adult education, Cyprus still lags in comparison with other EU-member states. As described in the most recent report of Cedefop for Cyprus (2021), Cyprus faces various challenges in relation to students' basic skills, adults' digital literacy and digital skills, adult participation in vocational education and training and in adult participation in lifelong learning activities, which all remain below the EU average level. Literature in the Cypriot context signifies the lack of an authority supervising all the activities on adult learning and an absence of a mechanism monitoring and evaluating activities on a national level for lifelong learning (Cedefop, 2020; CyLLIS, 2022). In addition, the adult education sector seems to be fragmented, considering the absence of coherent assurance processes. Furthermore, it is reported a lack of collaboration between academia, research, and industry to support the skills and employability of new graduates, while there are few career guidance and counselling services to support youth and adults with low qualifications.

The introduction of the Cyprus Lifelong Learning Strategy (2021-2027) (CyLLIS, 2022) aimed to address these gaps, aspiring

'to provide a long-term strategic framework towards the development of a knowledge-based society, where all citizens are provided with learning opportunities, to develop the knowledge,

skills, and attitudes that will facilitate their personal and social growth, professional advancement, social inclusion, resilience, and well-being.' (CyLLIS, 2022: 6)

The CyLLIS 2021-2027 (p. 6) report sets four strategic priorities and objectives to achieve until 2027: a) establish the governance, monitoring, and evaluation framework, involving the development of action plans with clearly delineated stakeholders 'roles and responsibilities; b) decrease youth unemployment and upskill/reskill youth and the workforce, providing learning opportunities associated with market needs, while putting emphasis on enhancing the skills of adults with low qualifications; c) increase the participation of adults in lifelong learning , by providing incentives, eliminating barriers and strengthening communication; d) enhance the professional practice of adult educators and trainers, while providing support to educators of all education levels to enhance lifelong learning skills. Overall, the CyLLIS aims to create the necessary synergies amongst various stakeholders involved in adult learning to assist the implementation of strategic objectives. An Action Plan accompanies the CyLLIS, providing indicative actions and timelines for the authorities involved, as well as a common framework for implementing the strategy. These advances are still in progress.

Stakeholder cooperation in UP: successful cooperation mechanisms, missing stakeholders and gaps in cooperation

Stakeholders participating in interviews and focus group discussions identified some successful cooperation mechanisms, but also several gaps and challenges in implementing the Upskilling Pathways as well as in adult learning in the Republic of Cyprus. These are discussed in detail in the below subcategories.

1. Progresses in adult learning and successful cooperation mechanisms

Some participants referred to the progresses made in adult learning so far as similarly described in the Literature Review above. Some stakeholders also referred to the successful cooperation mechanisms between different organisations. For example, the HRDA runs various programs (including programs for adults with low qualifications) in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance, the Centre of Productivity of Cyprus, various departments of the MoESY, and some of these lead to the employment of people in private and public organisations. Likewise, the representatives of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth highlighted the collaboration efforts between different stakeholders during the process of developing the Cyprus Lifelong Learning Strategy 2021 – 2027.

2. Challenges and gaps

Stakeholders provided a plethora of challenges and gaps in the implementation of UP, as well as in adult learning generally.

2.1. Gaps and challenges in adult learning provision

2.1.1. Definitions and conceptual confusions in adult learning

a. Defining adult education

Stakeholders noted a conceptual confusion of what adult education involves. Adult education in Cyprus, as well as across the globe, encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Adult education may also include acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills, vocational training, language learning, personal development courses, and continuing education for professional advancement. All these different directions and different formats of adult education, lead to unclarity on what can be considered as adult education or not. For example, universities (e.g., the University of Cyprus) offer academic education to adults – students. However, they may also recognize as accreditation, non-formal training received outside the universities (e.g., participation in conferences, and training). However, this is not something that they disseminate to students, as they prefer to provide themselves with educational training. Some stakeholders noted that the conceptual unclarity of what adult education entails, also relates to the absence of collaboration between stakeholders (see relevant subsection below), leading some participants to characterise this as 'a systemic issue'.

Another conceptual confusion involves the different philosophical strands of adult education. Adult education may encompass a competency-based education in adult learning (e.g., see Chappell et al., 2020), which is rooted in the philosophy of developing practical, job-related skills and knowledge that are directly applicable in the workplace. It may also involve a philosophy of learning that emphasises the importance of learning throughout an individual's life, aiming to provide to adults a wider set of skills that enable their active participation in the civil society (e.g., see Aspin and Chapman, (2011) and Degener, 2001).

As participants noted, the plethora of different directions and theories about adult education contribute to some extent to a confusion of what adult education involves in the Cypriot context.

b. Defining adults with low qualifications and promoting relevant programs

Some stakeholders- especially those involved in preparing training material, organising training, and running relevant EU-funded projects, raised a difficulty in how to present and broadcast these training/projects as the term 'low skilled adults' is derogative. They also mentioned a challenge in how to invite trainers to participate in master's training programs specifically designed for 'low skilled adults'. Apart from the derogative elements of these terms, these stakeholders also mentioned an unclarity of what the term 'low skilled adults' encompasses: does it refer to people who have completed up to secondary education? Or it may also refer to people who, despite being in the process of completion of tertiary education or having just completed it, may still lack basic numeric, digital and literacy skills.

c. Defining digital skills:

Some stakeholders noted a misunderstanding of what digital skills involve. Do they refer to basic digital skills, like researching information online, communicating via email, using video calls, online calendars, or it also include technical digital skills (like, learning how to use a specific software, using online banking systems)?

d. Defining 'skills' and 'competences':

Some stakeholders also mentioned a confusion on using the terms 'skills' or 'competences'. Despite the differences in these terms, e.g., skills are more specific and relate to specific abilities, job requirements, whereas competences have a broader focus and may involve a variety of skills, stakeholders noted that these terms in Europe may be used interchangeably. Also, some EU countries show a preference either to 'skills' or 'competences' but assigning them with the same meaning.

2.1.2. Validation of non-formal and informal learning in adult education

All participating stakeholders considered that the validation of non-formal and informal learning in adult education is one of the most daunting and challenging tasks in adult education in Cyprus and abroad. As they noted, in Cyprus there is a lack of a coherent system to assess and recognise training received in adult learning, resulting in each organisation providing its own qualification. This has implications in the employability of people receiving adult education from different organisation bodies, since particular organisations do not recognise a certification by another organisation on the same focus of expertise in Cyprus. There is also a lack of recognition of various certificates issued in Cyprus abroad. For example, a certified HRDA adult educator in Cyprus, cannot use this certification to work as an adult educator abroad. Overall, in the Cypriot context stakeholders reported that only the System of Professional Qualifications that offers qualifications in the fields of retail, tourism, manufacturing, construction, hair saloon and other industries is nationally recognized. Stakeholders reported that despite some workshops and meetings being organised in the Cypriot context to address this issue (e.g., during the stage of conceptualising the Lifelong Learning Strategy), there were no actual results. Stakeholders noted that even though most authorities involved in adult learning are governmental authorities, they act competitively, trying 'to reinvent the wheel.'

2.2. Challenges in the governance of adult education

2.2.1. Collaboration challenges

Another great obstacle in adult education is the fragmentation of the sector, as similarly reported in the literature review of the Cyprus context. Almost all participating stakeholders considered that there is no organised, coherent system for adult learning in Cyprus; most activities organised are scattered; training may take place but without providing validation and accreditation widely accepted by the stakeholders. A stakeholder characterised this phenomenon as if organisations involved in adult learning 'belong to different worlds', each being interested in promoting their own interests. The absence of a framework that defines the range of activities that a stakeholder organisation may undertake, results in many overlaps, as well as disagreements/ conflicts between the stakeholders, on e.g., who will receive the greatest funding, who will be the policy strategic leader, both for the public and the private sectors. Stakeholders noted that currently there is an absence of a common platform of communication and public consultation between the stakeholders involved (ministries, semi-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations) to facilitate collaboration and exchange of information. The lack of a coherent system on adult learning has also an impact in the transparency of activities, strategies, and implementations, inhibiting the dissemination and management of resources. Also, it does not facilitate the harmonisation of the activities provided by various authorities, including the harmonisation of HRDA with the European and National agencies and stakeholders in collecting, analysing and presenting data for Cyprus (e.g., gathering data per adult age, sex, level of education).

2.2.2. Funding challenges

Many stakeholders also raised funding challenges. As they noted, currently there is a lack of centralised funding and resources to support the development and quality of adult education

programs. Various EU-funded projects and initiatives contribute to the development of this sector, however, there is no sustainability in their outcomes after funding ends.

2.2.3. Challenges in recruiting and educating adult educators

Stakeholders noted a lack of interest of adult educators in participating in training/sessions to promote the learning of adults with low qualifications, due to the lack of incentives (financial, credits/recognition for their career progression). Many adult educators, despite providing various training to adult learners, do not proceed with the HRDA accreditation, as they will have to pay the cost (€800) using their own resources.

2.3. Access and participation barriers

Most participating stakeholders noted several barriers hindering the participation of adults with low qualifications in education and training. These included: 2.3.1.) barriers to accessing adults with low qualifications; 2.3.2.) identifying skills' needs.

2.3.1. Barriers to accessing adults with low qualifications

All stakeholders mentioned a persistent gap in the education for adults with low qualifications, that is the difficulty in outreaching to and recruiting this population. As some stakeholders noted, considering that adults with low qualifications do not possess a basic set of skills- including digital ones- it is even more difficult to be informed of available training opportunities, as, for example, online and social media campaigns cannot be fully utilised.

Apart from the lack of awareness for the available opportunities for training, these adults also face financial and time constraints. In many cases, adults with low qualifications are employed in industry sectors (e.g., retail) where employers do not offer the possibility for their employees to receive training during work hours. Therefore, in most cases, most of these adults, even if they are aware of available training, do not attend them in their personal time. Stakeholders also identified a difficulty in recruiting unemployed people with low qualifications, as many of them do not see usefulness for receiving training, especially when this takes place in mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, time constraints were mostly a barrier for women, who usually are responsible for the household.

Finally, there seems to be a societal issue regarding the facilitating of the employment of unemployed adults with low qualifications in the labour market. As stakeholders noted, despite having adults with low qualifications receiving training, they had difficulty in finding businesses that would employ them. In addition, there were many cases of adults with low qualifications, who after receiving training that would lead to employment, they selected not to proceed, preferring to receive benefits from the state.

2.3.2. Identifying skills needs

Stakeholders observed a mismatch between the skills demanded by the labour market and those assumed by adults with low qualifications. For example, a study conducted by an NGO (Institute of Development) as reported by its representative during the interview, found that across four European countries, people reported a different set of skills needed to be employed than the set of skills reported by employers. Particularly, the study indicated that employees paid more attention to digital and literacy skills, whereas employers gave more emphasis to soft skills, along with some basic literacy and digital skills.

2.4. Evaluation and monitoring challenges

According to MoESY representatives, there is absence of evaluation and monitoring of the various activities run by the different organisations on adult learning. This, bears consequences: a) on the quality of programs offered as there is no systematic way to assess whether the programs are meeting their intended goals and objectives; b) on measuring the effectiveness of the learning programs and whether the desired educational outcomes are met; c) on misallocating resources on programs that do not meet the desired outcomes; d) on adapting the offered programs based on the feedback received by learners and the emerging best practices in adult education.

2.5. Challenges in implementing the EU policy on Upskilling Pathways

2.5.1. Awareness challenges

Some stakeholders were not aware of the existence of this EU policy, nor were they aware of the three steps approach embedded in the policy. Most stakeholders mentioned that the EU policy recommendation, in a similar vein reported in the literature (see previous section) is not implemented as a separate action/activity in adult learning, but it is included – to some extent – in many programs targeting adults with low qualifications.

For example, the representatives of the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) of Cyprus described various programs (of single-business entities, of multiple-business entities), as well as other programs offered through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Cyprus that focus on educating adults on digital skills, green skills, blue skills, and business skills. [1] These programs, though not directly related to UP, involve actions/initiatives that support the education of adults with low qualifications. HRDA stakeholders also reported how they run various courses designed for the needs of specific job sectors, e.g., for cooks, salespeople, and adult caregivers.

2.5.2. Challenges in adopting the three-steps approach

Participants of all participating organisations mentioned the challenges faced in adopting the three steps approach entailed in UP, i.e.:

a. **Skills assessment**: stakeholders considered a difficulty in identifying the existing skills and upskilling needs for adults with low qualifications. Available training/programs are usually designed the vice versa, i.e., they are designed either for specific employment sectors, or generally for adults with low qualifications.

b. **Learning offer:** as described in the relevant EU policy, this step refers to the provision of a learning offer tailored to the diverse needs and circumstances of adult learners. This step, according to most stakeholders, is again a challenge for Cyprus, noting a lack of customization and flexibility in current programs in ways that support the personalised needs of adults with low qualifications.

c. **Validation and recognition**: this step strongly relates to the challenges described previously in the validation and recognition of adult learning. Apart from the System of

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[1] For more see the relevant page in the website of HRDA here.

Professional Qualifications in Cyprus recognized only in Cyprus, there is a lack of coherent systems and frameworks across Europe to assess and recognize these skills. After receiving training, an individual may seek validation in HRDA, by requesting from the authority to examine whether this training is in accordance with the criteria/standards of the Professional Qualifications in Cyprus. However, it is upon the individual's responsibility to seek further validation, meaning that this is not provided in advance by participating in the training. Also, the authority provides subsidies for training, i.e., the HRDA, it does not provide subsidies for the exams of other standards (CISCO, ISO). In addition, stakeholders noted that even though the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy created an online platform which seems to follow the first two steps of Up, it does not include the latter step, i.e., the validation and recognition.

Overall, the lack of assigning programs as 'upskilling', contributes to the non-direct implementation of the EU policy through the three steps approach.

3. Suggestions

To address these challenges, stakeholders provided various suggestions discussed below.

3.1. Suggestions on the collaborations between stakeholders:

Some stakeholders suggested the development of a *common interactive platform for stakeholders*, in which stakeholders will have the opportunity to upload/ describe the learning opportunities offered by their organisation. In this way, other organisations will be aware of the kind of activities that are offered on a national level, therefore enabling a better alignment of stakeholders involved in adult learning. A similar process has been initiated by the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy.

3.2. Suggestions on the implementation of Upskilling Pathways

Many stakeholders provided suggestions on how to address the challenges in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways.

First, stakeholders suggested the importance of designing and delivering training that directly refers to the relevant EU policy recommendation. This, on the one hand, will increase awareness of this EU policy amongst stakeholders and adult learners, and on the other hand, will enable its implementation by adopting the three- steps approach.

Concerning the three-steps approach, stakeholders provided specific suggestions:

Step 1: Skills assessment: Stakeholders suggested the importance of conducting a comprehensive labour market analysis to identify current and future skills needs.

Step 2: Learning Offer: Stakeholders noted the importance of providing training to adult learners tailored to their needs. Personal guidance and support, flexible and alternative methods of teaching (see section on Good Practices) and collaboration with the businesses to ensure that the skills taught are in alignment with industry needs, were all considered as leading to the successful implementation of this step.

Step 3: Validation and recognition: Stakeholders noted the importance of creating a common validation and recognition framework that can be shared and recognized amongst the stakeholders involved. In this way, learners will be provided with opportunities to have their skills and competences assessed and accredited.

3.3. Suggestions on the professionalisation of adult educators

Stakeholders suggested further promoting the professionalisation of adult educators, by establishing consistent standards, qualifications, and professional development opportunities to ensure high-quality teaching and learning experiences in adult education programs.

3.4. Suggestions on outreaching activities

Stakeholders considered that outreaching activities are essential for ensuring access to information of adults with low qualifications. The purpose of these activities is to raise public awareness for the available learning opportunities, as well as for the benefits of upskilling to the individual and the society (social, economic, emotional). As one HRDA stakeholder noted, it is important to have plenty and easily accessible information about available training opportunities that will attract people, instead of providing some information about which people will have to seek for more details. Stakeholders noted the importance of organising e.g., national campaigns and info days by all stakeholders involved in adult learning.

3.5. Suggestions on Funding

Some stakeholders- mostly the representatives of HRDA – suggested the provision of *central* funding, incentives, or subsidies to support learners in accessing upskilling pathways. Considering that currently the funding is provided to specific organisations, which often work competitively to others, these stakeholders highlighted the importance of having central funding that will be allocated to different organisations according to the activities they run. In this way, it will also avoid the double funding of the same activities run by different organisations.

3.6. Suggestions on evaluation and monitoring

Representatives of MoESY emphasised the importance of establishing robust evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of their adult learning program.

For further information, see **Stakeholder mapping table** here

Qualitative information about the analysis process

Most Stakeholders during the interviews/focus group discussions showed a pessimism for adult learning in Cyprus, as well as for the implementation of Upskilling Pathways, due to the challenges listed above. Despite that most – if not all- were willing to take actions to contribute to the implementation of Upskilling Pathways, they noted the several obstacles/challenges of adult learning in Cyprus listed above, highlighting mostly the lack of collaboration mechanisms amongst stakeholders involved. Also, the fact that the Lifelong Learning Strategy has been recently implemented in Cyprus, without, though, leading to actual changes and results so far, it further contributed to the stakeholders' pessimism that no significant changes in adult learning will occur in due course.

The stakeholders' analysis had an impact in the relationship with stakeholders, since the focus group discussions and the interviews provided a common framework to discuss and elaborate issues on adult learning. Some stakeholders show to be willing to address some challenges. However, this positive attitude was mostly expressed on a personal rather than institutional

level, due to the lack of a collaboration mechanism amongst stakeholders and the different strategies/practices for the validation and recognition, which were considered as the main barriers for adult learning in Cyprus.

Good practices

N.B. 'Good practices' are defined, in this context, as strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and/or evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result in supporting identification, engagement, commitment of stakeholders as well as cooperation among them, with specific reference to the UP initiative. The Good practices can be local, regional, national or international ones.

Stakeholders during the data collection, provided some good practices/suggestions that have been shown to be effective, sustainable and/or transferrable.

1. **Engaging adult learners with low qualifications in the learning process**

Many stakeholders (mostly those involved in adult training) noted as a good practice the engagement of adult learners with low qualifications in the learning process using alternative methods of learning. These included:
   - lessons conducted outside the boundaries of conventional learning (e.g., in a classroom),
   - lessons conducted in learners' workspace,
   - lessons engaging learners in practical activities,
   - organising study visits,
   - lessons adopting the approaches of 'learning by doing' and 'participatory learning'.

All these were highly valued by the stakeholders, while noting that this is the preferred way of learning followed by the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority[2] as well. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of adopting the approach of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the learning process of adults with low qualifications, since this approach offers a flexibility and provides greater opportunities to learners to be engaged with the learning material.

2. **Validation and recognition**

As supported by the European Commission[3] stakeholders suggested the offering of micro - credentials for the validation of shorter courses; establishment of a common validation and recognition framework that is recognized both at a national and a European level.

3. **Skills needed for adult learning**

Some stakeholders drew on previous research and practices adopted by multinational companies like Google on the most important skills needed in the labour market. As some stakeholders noted, these companies pay more attention to soft than academic skills, as they are considered essential for people to work within a team. Also, a stakeholder noted the results of a recent survey across four European countries conducted for the purposes of Erasmus+ projects. This study indicated that employers need skills such as Communication skills, digital skills and English.

Priorities for Development Groups

[2] For more see http://www.moec.gov.cy/dmteek/en/index.html
[3] For more see https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials

In light of the discussion above, it seems that the following dimensions should be set as priorities for the Development Groups:

1. **Focus on strengthening the collaboration mechanisms between the stakeholders:** we could discuss with the stakeholders, ways of collaboration for the successful implementation of UP, setting up advisory boards/working groups responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of strategies, and focus specifically on ways of collaboration for adopting the three-steps approach of UP.

2. **Discuss the development of more coherent policies:** Stakeholders may discuss how to contribute to the development of a more coherent governance system in adult learning, that ensures the successful implementation of UP.

3. **Discuss ways of increasing participation:** the development groups may discuss ways of increasing participation, particularly focusing on the participation of vulnerable groups and those who lack basic digital skills. Specific issues that can be discussed may involve the development of a dissemination plan, organising info days and national campaigns and overall finding ways of increasing access to information.

4. **Discuss the validation and recognition dimension:** stakeholders may draw on good practices from other countries and discuss whether these cases may be applicable to the current context and how. Also, stakeholders may communicate the validation and recognition system used amongst their organisation and discuss whether/how their organisation may also recognise training and accreditation received by another local or international organisation. Furthermore, stakeholders may discuss ways of developing a mechanism for the recognition and accreditation of qualifications, similar to the one used in Higher Education.

5. **Discuss the financial support:** stakeholders may discuss the provision of financial incentives or subsidies to support learners in accessing upskilling pathways, e.g., scholarships, grants, or employer - funded programs.

6. **Discuss the importance of non-formal educational practices for adult education:** stakeholders may discuss the role of non-formal educational practices in adult education and their positive influence in learning (e.g., offering flexibility, targeted and relevant learning, contributing to lifelong learning, enabling social integration).

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Country Analysis

LATVIA

2.2 **Country Analysis** - Latvia

Country	Latvia
Responsible organisation/s	Latvian Adult Education Association (LAEA); Valsts Izglitibas Attistibas Agentura (VIAA)

Upskilling pathways in each country/EU level: state of art in the implementation, main target groups, challenges
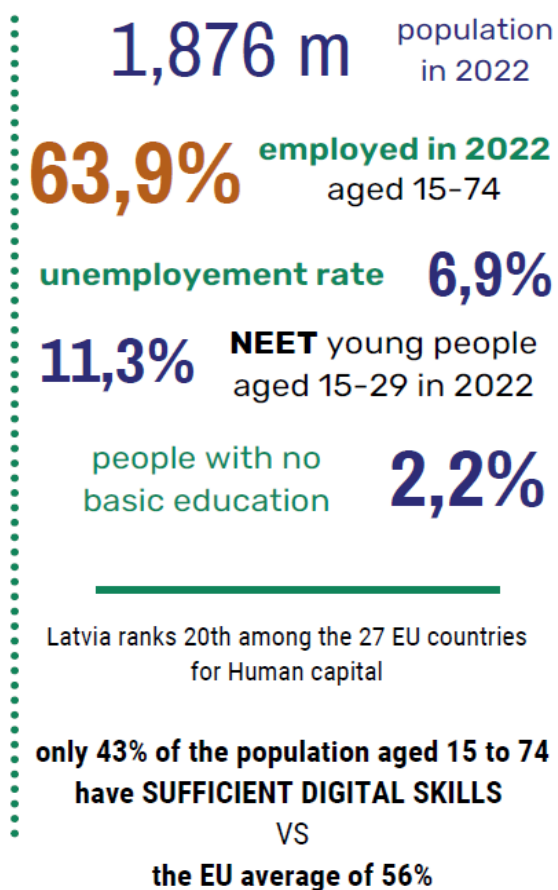
1.1. Key Statistics

This section presents key statistics as a snapshot of the current situation (year 2022 and 2023) in adult education on overall in Latvia. (fig. 1 e 2).

MAIN CHALLENGE stated in the OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Latvia" - the skills needed in the labour market continue to evolve due to globalisation, digitalisation and demographic change, reducing skills imbalances remains a pressing policy priority. Most employers report that skills shortages are a major obstacle to long-term investment decisions. Shortages appear particularly acute in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and health fields."

LABOUR FORCE IS EXPECTED TO DECLINE

The "2020 Skills Forecast Latvia" by CEDEFOP highlights, that between 2000 and 2030, the size of the labour force is expected to decline for all age groups except those aged 55 or more. **In 2030 about 30% of the labour force is expected to be above 55 years old**, compared to 13% in 2000. Thereby lifelong learning opportunities may be considered as a crucial pre-condition aimed to meet current challenges for transition and development.

1,876 m population in 2022

63,9% employed in 2022 aged 15-74

unemployement rate **6,9%**

11,3% **NEET** young people aged 15-29 in 2022

people with no basic education **2,2%**

Latvia ranks 20th among the 27 EU countries for Human capital

only 43% of the population aged 15 to 74 have **SUFFICIENT DIGITAL SKILLS**
VS
the EU average of 56%

PARTICIPATION OF ADULTS IN EDUCATION HAS GROWN

In 2022, the participation of adults in education has grown significantly in Latvia - according to the data released by the Central Statistics Office. The proportion of the population aged 25 to 64 has increased from 6.6% in 2020 to **9.7% in 2022**, reaching the historically **highest level of participation in Adult Education**. Thereby already in 2022, the indicator stated in the Action Plan of the Education Development Guidelines "Future Skills for the Future Society" in 2024, to reach 10% of adults aged 25-64 involved in adult education has been practically achieved.

40,6%   **25,4%**

in tertiary education

200,000
out of 951 300 economically active citizens
=
LOW-SKILLED PROFESSIONALS

1.2.   National Policy Framework on adult education

This section summarizes the legal framework and key national policy planning documents related to adult education in Latvia.

> "Today's changing socio-economic environment and labour market encourage us to acquire new knowledge and skills on a regular basis, and to improve our existing ones. New products and services, created through technological development, automation and competitive pressures, require investment not only in research, but also in skilled workforce, which is open to new knowledge. This means continuous personal development for all, as well as the ability to maintain and continuously improve one's own competitiveness in the labour market."
>
> National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027, section "Adult Education"

Latvia's future vision is clearly linked with skills development and ensuring opportunities for Lifelong Learning. This future perspective goes hand in hand with the **1st principle of the European pillar of social rights** – every person has the right to quality and inclusive education, lifelong learning, to acquire and improve the skills necessary to fully integrate into society and the labor market.

The Section 112 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia[4] stipulates that **"Everyone has the right to education."** The Education Law of Latvia[5] is aimed to ensure that every resident of Latvia could develop his or her mental and physical potential in order to become an independent and a fully developed individual, a member of the democratic State and society of Latvia.

In the Section 17 the Education Law of Latvia stipulates that "local government implements a policy in adult education". According to the Law on Local Governments[6] , Article.4, as one of tasks of local governments is "**to ensure the education of the population, including ….. adult education**", In addition to tasks of local governments, directly dealing with implementation of adult education policy, according to the Regional Development Law[7] , five planning regions[8] have been established in Latvia - Kurzeme planning region, Latgale planning region, Riga planning region, Vidzeme planning region and Zemgale planning region. The territories of the planning region are determined by the Cabinet of Ministers' regulations of June 22, 2021 No. 418 "Rules on the territories of the planning region"[9]. The competence of the planning region is to ensure regional development planning, coordination, cooperation between municipalities and other state administrative institutions, thereby indirectly addressing Lifelong Learning and upskilling issues.

The adult education and skills development policy in Latvia is a significant component within the main policy planning implementation documents - the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia "Latvia 2030"[10] , the National Development Plan of Latvia 2021-2027[11] and the Education and Skills Development Guidelines 2021-2027[12] and their Implementation plan 2021-23[13]. The national policy planning and implementation documents are developed via broad involvement of national stakeholders and taking into consideration EU policy documents and recommendations of the EU, UNESCO, OECD and CEDEFOP.

"The priority of the National Development Plan is the development of "a knowledgeable, inclusive and creative society in an efficient, innovative and productive economy" is stated be achieved with the help of "**promoting demand for lifelong learning through high-quality and flexible adult education opportunities and accessibility by: effectively using educational institutions and adult education centres; building skills funds,**

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[4] https://www.saeima.lv/en/legislative-process/constitution
[5] https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/50759-education-law
[6] https://likumi.lv/ta/id/336956-pasvaldibu-likums
[7] https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=61002
[8] https://www.varam.gov.lv/lv/planosanas-regioni?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F
[9] https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/324290
[10] https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/LIAS_2030_en_1.pdf
[11] https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NAP2027__ENG.pdf
[12]
https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/national-initiatives/national-strategies/latvian-education-development-guidelines-2021-2027
[13]
https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/attachments/legal_acts/document_versions/3933422d-6b86-4bd2-a5c6-e92ce237e0d6/download

promoting employer and sectoral investment and employee motivation; ensuring "second chance" education in accordance".

The main goal of the Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027 is to set Latvia's priorities in providing a high-quality and inclusive education and training system for all its citizens, and to support sustainable national growth.

National Reform Programme of Latvia and Stability Programme of Latvia 2020[14] implementation strategies are aimed to contribute to achieving the goals of the "Europe 2020" strategy via implementation of the lifelong learning principles, structural changes in the vocational education, modernization of tertiary education, development of the research potential, modernizing of the material and technical infrastructure of tertiary education and raising of the efficiency of resource use, provision for equal availability of tertiary education, improvement of the study and research quality, provision for the availability of the basic and secondary education and introduction of modern study methodology. Delivering the opinion of the Council of the European Union on the 2020 Stability Programme of Latvia[15] (2020/C 282/14):

> *"Effective and easily accessible adult learning, reskilling and upskilling measures, together with the provision of social services and mobility support, could provide more people with the skills necessary for the labour market."* (2020/C 282/14)

The "Digital Transformation Guidelines for 2021-2027"[16] represents an overarching strategy for the digital transformation of Latvia and covers, among others, ICT education and digital skills development for all groups of society.

1.3.   Ongoing Measures in Adult Education

This section summarizes ongoing priorities across all adult education, which are described in the Implementation plan 2021-23[17] of the Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027[18] (EDG). The main goal of the (EDG) is to set Latvia's priorities in providing a high-quality and inclusive education and training system for all its citizens, and to support sustainable national growth. The main focus on the adult education is related to the access to opportunities for the development of strong proficiency in a broad set of skills including cognitive skills, social and emotional skills, job and occupation-specific skills, and digital skills (see below).

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[14] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020H0826(14)&from=EN
[15] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0514
[16]
https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/national-initiatives/national-strategies/latvia-digital-transformation-guidelines-2021-2027
[17]
https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/attachments/legal_acts/document_versions/3933422d-6b86-4bd2-a5c6-e92ce237e0d6/download
[18]
https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/actions/national-initiatives/national-strategies/latvian-education-development-guidelines-2021-2027

Image 1: *Definition of skills by OECD (2019)[19]*

Cognitive skills involve the understanding, interpretation, analysis and communication of complex information and the ability to apply this information in situations of everyday life. These skills are general in nature and relevant for all kinds of occupations. They are considered necessary to provide a foundation for effective and successful participation in the social and economic life of advanced economies.

Social and emotional skills, also known as non-cognitive skills, soft skills or character skills, these are the skills involved in working with others (friendliness, respect, caring), in achieving goals (perseverance, self-control, passion for goals) and in managing emotions (calmness, optimism, confidence). They are based on recognised taxonomies in personality psychology, particularly the "big five" factors (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness).

Job and occupation-specific skills refer to technical skills that are demanded in the context of workplaces. Unlike cognitive and social and emotional skills, they are not relevant for or portable between all occupations, but are specific to one occupation. They are typically reflected in the qualification a person holds and are valued by employers.

Digital skills are considered technical skills, although they entail cognitive ability to enable the understanding, interpretation, analysis and communication of digital content. They are applied in a variety of different occupations and are increasingly pervading the social aspects of everyone's life.

Strengthen the availability of adult education in secondary vocational and higher education institutions

Key activities – the development of modular training programmes for adult educators; updating of Latvian Qualifications Framework[20] (levels 5-7 and 2), including continuing vocational education and training for adults;

Ensure the implementation of individualized and flexible adult education offer, including support for reducing barriers to participation

Key activities – continued provision of public funding support for adult learning via ESF projects, including low skilled adults and activities in regions;

Improvement of the skills recognition system

Key activities – continued improvement of the system of skills recognition by amendments to respective governmental regulations;

Strengthen the governance of adult education

Key activities – amendments to the Law on Education have been developed in order to strengthen the operation of the body, Adult Education Governance Council, the conceptual model of individual learning accounts is under development, methodological support to municipalities for the implementation and management of adult education at the municipal level provided.

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[19] OECD (2019[2]), *OECD Skills Strategy 2019: Skills to Shape a Better Future,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264313835-en; OECD (2020[3]), *Strengthening the Governance of Skills Systems: Lessons from Six OECD Countries*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/3a4bb6ea-en

[20] https://www.nki-latvija.lv/en/lqf

Promote understanding of society and employers of adult education and contribution to increasing the motivation of adults
Key activities – numerous information and awareness rising events by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders were implemented, including targeted events for adults with low skills and activities of EPALE National support service[21], the content of National Lifelong learning portal www.muzizglitiba.lv is constantly upgraded.

Create a socially responsible and sustainable system for financing adult education
Key activities – a framework for the creation of a state support system has been developed to encourage employers to promote the development of their employees' skills, financing model for adult education appropriate to Latvia's situation (including the development of individual learning accounts) is under development and piloting, as well as additional public funding is provided for training of employees upon the request of the employer.

1.4.   Mid and Long-term Policy Priorities in Adult Education

The report "Mid- and long-term forecasts of the labour market of Latvia"[22] has been elaborated by the Ministry of Economics and have set the main goals to be achieved in adult education. The needs and initiatives outlined below aim at contributing to the development of lifelong learning and access to education for all, including the population with low basic skills for improved competitiveness in the labour market and integration in society with a higher quality of life.

Promote and increase the public awareness about the importance of adult education
In order to increase citizens' awareness about the education and skills development as a constant process throughout life and its significance in today's changing economy, the Ministry of Economics implemented a broad public information campaign *"Be competitive! Dare to be a lifelong learner!"[23]* in 2021. In order to reach low-qualified people or people with no basic education in a more targeted manner and offer them more appropriate training opportunities, an evaluation about the ways how to more effectively involve adults with low skills in training has been carried out.

Create a sustainable and socially responsible support system for adult education
In 2022 the amendments to the Law on Vocational Education[24] were adopted on modular vocational education programs in adult education (incl. the educational documents that are issued for learning the module of the program; a legal regulation determining the requirements and procedure for recognizing a person's competence for admission to the later stages of the vocational education programs). This legal framework will allow individuals to continue their studies after the assessment of the competences acquired in previous education or professional experience to obtain a professional qualification. Individuals are offered the opportunity to obtain a state-recognized qualification document by completing outside assessment and

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[21] https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/nss/national-support-services-latvia
[22] https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/darba-tirgus-zinojums?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F
[23] https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/muzizglitibas-informesanas-kampana
[24] https://likumi.lv/ta/id/20244-profesionalas-izglitibas-likums

recognition of competences acquired throughout formal education. During the EU Structural funds planning period from 2021-2027 significant investments are planned for the development of adult education in Latvia with a total funding of 56.17 million. euro planned for raising the personal and professional skills of employees and reducing learning barriers.

Promote the involvement of state vocational education institutions and higher education institutions in the implementation of adult education

All vocational education institutions, which are subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science, implement adult education activities. According to their development and investment strategies for the period 2021-2027, it is planned to increase the number of adults involved in training. Additionally, the offer of professional continuing education programs and assessment of professional competence acquired outside the formal education system in all professional qualifications is planned to be increased.

Improve professional training, retraining and skills improvement measures for the unemployed

In 2020 a total of 17.9 thousand people were involved in the training for the unemployed and job seekers carried out during the project implemented by the State Employment Agency[25] (ESF project Nr. 7.1.1.0/15/I/001 "Support for the education of the unemployed"), while in 2021 – 12.8 thousand persons only. In order to improve the number of the involved people, the target group was expanded to the employed people, which are at a risk of employment (incl. seniors age 50+, disabled people and people with low level of education/qualification).

Support the improvement of employee skills and qualifications

The ESF project "Improving the professional competence of employed persons"[26], implemented by the State Education Department Agency in a collaboration with municipalities, educational institutions and State Employment Agency, with a total budget of 46 million euros is aimed to improve skills and professional competences of employed persons in order to prevent the inadequacy of their qualifications with the labor market demands, to promote the competitiveness of employees and increase their work productivity. By the end of 2023, it is planned to involve more than 87 thousand people in training, including more than 19 thousand employees with a low level of education and skills. According to the survey implemented in 2022[27], 62% of the participants regularly apply the acquired skills in practice.

Provide the training and improvement opportunities for company employees

Within the framework of "Support for employee training", the Ministry of Economics in cooperation with sectoral employers' associations provides support to entrepreneurs to improve the skills of their employees in order to facilitate the productivity and innovations. By the beginning of 2022, the support was provided to 1,000 companies and 18 281 employed persons. The activity "Support for ICT and non-technological training, as well as training to facilitate the attraction of investors" is aimed to promote the productivity and work efficiency of self-employed persons, as well as SMEs and large companies. It is planned to be achieved by

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[25] https://www.nva.gov.lv/en
[26] https://www.macibaspieaugusajiem.lv/par-projektu?tab=collapse-78
[27] https://www.viaa.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/macibas-pieaugusajiem-gutas-zinasanas-ikdiena-lieto-62-dalibnieku

increasing the qualifications and skills of their employees in the field of ICT. This support (by the beginning of 2022) was provided to 566 enterprises and 6976 employed persons in total.

Participate in the OECD's International Adult Competence Assessment Program "PIAAC"[28]

Latvia has started to participate in the study of OECD's PIAAC and the first results are expected to be published in 2024. The data obtained will contribute to highlighting the discrepancies between the supply and demand of skills in the labor market and influence of the relevant skills on the amount of remuneration, as well as compare internationally the quality of Latvia's human resources.

Provide individual learning accounts

In order to extend the opportunities and rights for adults to participate in education aimed to improve their skills and knowledge, a decision about a conceptually new approach - the creation of individual learning accounts, has been approved by the Latvia government in mid 2023. The individual learning account will be a personal virtual account that will provide adults with access to an individualized learning budget and learning opportunities that meet the criteria set by the state and respond to the needs of the labor market. With the support of the EU Recovery Fund, the goal is to develop and approve the individual learning account approach in Latvia by the mid 2026 with a total of 3,500 people involved within the pilot project. It is expected that introduction of individual learning accounts will address the main challenges of providing equal access to learning, information on learning opportunities, and will help overcome the barriers that often retain adults from engaging in learning. It is expected that the individual learning account will include a unified information and service platform on adult education and support opportunities, learning, career development and skills assessment tool. This approach is also expected to ensure unified access to education documents.

Implement vet skills competitions – awareness rising and skills promotion events

The State Education Development Agency, which is implementing VET competitions within SkillsLatvia[29] and represents Latvia in WorldSkills[30] and World Skills Europe[31]), is responsible for the coordination of activities of European Skills Year[32] in Latvia.

"… to keep up with the time and be competitive in the labor market, everybody should be open to new information and willing to learn more and more. Today there are broad opportunities for everyone to improve their knowledge, skills and competences to new levels…" emphasizes VIAA director.

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[28] https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/
[29] https://www.viaa.gov.lv/lv/skillslatvia
[30] https://worldskills.org/
[31] http://www.worldskillseurope.org/
[32] https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index_en

**Stakeholder cooperation in UP: successful cooperation mechanisms, missing stakeholders and gaps in cooperation**

Adult education coordination and governance mechanisms

In accordance with the Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020[33], the Adult Education Governance Model[34] (see Image 2) was developed in 2020 as a response to the fragmentation in the adult education system. The model sets vocational education as a priority and seeks to **improve transparency and communication, manage resources and coordinate stakeholders.** Aligned with Latvia's National Qualification Framework, the model aims:

> "to improve basic skills, support adult's transition to the labor market, recognize previous learning experiences and provide non-formal education."

Image 2: Adult Education Governance Model in Latvia[35].
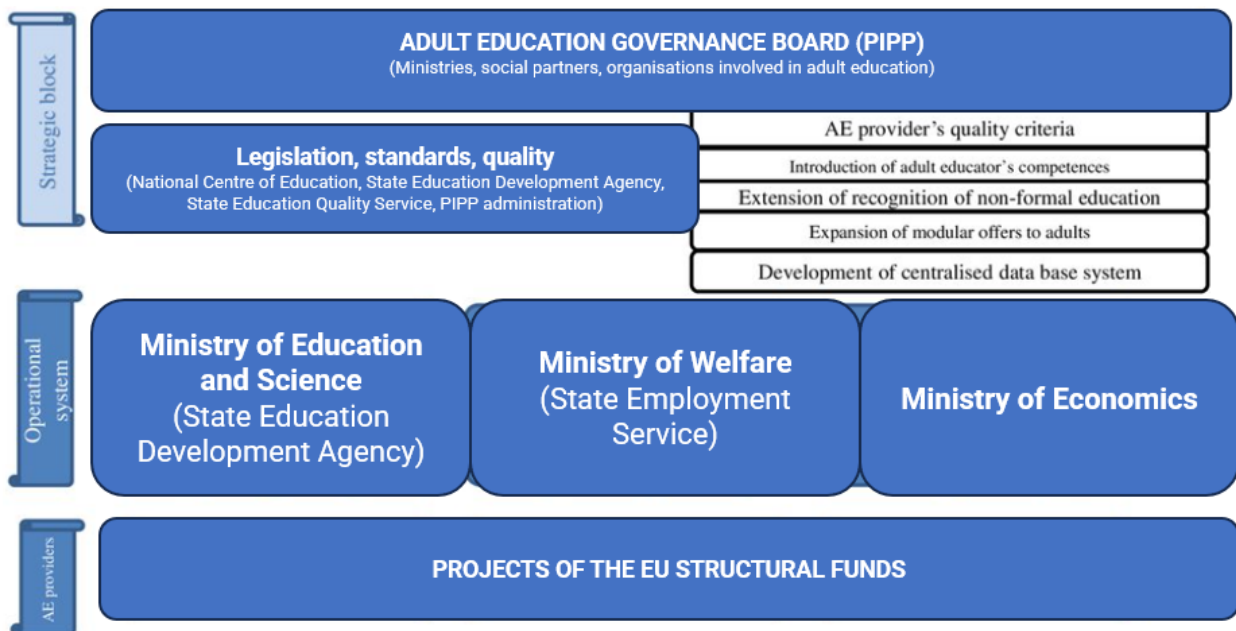
In Latvia, there are a number of bodies that co-ordinate across public and private stakeholders. At the national level, the Adult Education Governance Board (PIPP) includes the three main Ministries (MoES, MoW, MoE) and other ministries involved in adult education, such as the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Health; social partners such as the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK) and the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia; municipalities; and organisations involved in adult education, such as the Cross Sectoral Co-ordination Centre, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, and the Association of Planning Regions. The goals of the Board are to decide on

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[33] https://likumi.lv/ta/id/266406-par-izglitibas-attistibas-pamatnostadnu-20142020gadam-apstiprinasanu

[34] https://likumi.lv/ta/id/281992-par-pieauguso-izglitibas-parvaldibas-modela-ieviesanas-planu-2016-2020-gadam

[35] Source: Ministry of Education and Science, "Implementation of Upskilling Pathways in Adult Education in Latvia" Implementation of «Upskilling Pathways» in AE in Latvia - ppt download (slideplayer.com)

priority target groups and priority areas, confirm the quality criteria for adult education, and evaluate and analyse the quality of programmes (see Table 1 in the Annex 1).

As the overall approach it should be mentioned, that Ministry of Education and Science deals with the support for learning opportunities for the employed adults, the Ministry of Welfare provides support for the unemployed and jobseekers, while the Ministry of Economics provides support for adult learning upon the request of employers. Within the framework of their competences, ministries cooperate with a whole range of other stakeholders involved in the implementation of adult education - from inter-ministerial public bodies to various NGO's and private sector associations. In addition, each ministry of the sector implements the management of adult education and takes care of the development of human resources according to its competence and target audience - for example, the Ministry of Health manages the implementation of the education of healthcare personnel, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for the education of cultural workers, the Ministry of Agriculture deals with the training provision in the sectors of agriculture, forestry and fishing, etc. The offer of adult education – both formal and informal education – is provided by various public and private entities operating in the field of education in free market conditions.

At a regional level, the decision-makers are the Development Councils of the planning regions, which comprise the heads of the regional municipalities. Planning regions do not have a direct educational function, therefore the decision-making, adult education initiatives and budget allocation is diverse and depend on many aspects in the planning regions. A unified coordination system among the planning regions is not currently provided.

At a local level, municipalities share the responsibility for adult education, since they implement adult education policies at the local level and issue licences for non-formal education programmes. Some municipalities also provide adult education through public adult education institutions, which can be adult education centres, cultural clubs, associations, or others. However, similar to the regional disparity issues, the functioning and capacity of local adult education centres depend on the resources of the municipalities. Municipalities with more resources can provide better services than municipalities with fewer resources, which highlights the need for strong governance structures to ensure equity in adult learning across Latvia.

Challenges and gaps in cooperation
In order to understand the wide nature of cooperation, the authors of this report have developed a model of stakeholder cooperation that looks at the **cooperation at various levels** (national, regional and local), **the scope of cooperation among stakeholders** that starts from coordination and leads to collaboration, and describes the **cooperation areas**, such as cooperation in decision-making, providing services, etc. (see Image 3 below). When summarizing the cooperation challenges and gaps below, this model has been used to address a variety of aspects related to cooperation among stakeholders.

Image 3: A Cooperation Model developed by the authors of the report.

Level of cooperation

Adult education and skills development issues are discussed in Latvia Parliament. The main **national level challenge** in the stakeholder cooperation and overall adult education governance, as stated in the study implemented upon request of the Latvia Parliament (2021) "Digital, technological and language skills of adults: opportunities and challenges for their development in Latvia"[36], the arrangement of the adult education governance system has been included as a priority in the development planning documents since 2006, however, there are still significant deficiencies in the governance of this area. It was highlighted in the report that:

> "the cooperation of the parties involved is still insufficient, the training offer for the employed and the unemployed is not optimally coordinated, and the involvement of local governments in providing adult education is not sufficient".

The OECD recommends creating a united adult education governance institution in Latvia as the adult education system is fragmented. The main challenge is based on the fact that the horizontal nature of the field of adult education, the diversity of target groups and the distribution of financial resources require the implementation of governance within the framework of different sectors and policy planning levels. Thereby significant changes in the governance of adult education are not foreseen in the Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027. It is planned to maintain the current adult education governance model by strengthening the **Adult Education Governance Board** as a unified platform for adult education governance. On the other hand, from 2023, the role of the Ministry of Education and Science and support for adult education based on sectoral needs is expected to increase.

In the response to the above mentioned challenges, a recently (June 2023) established coordination body - Human Capital Development Council[37] is expected to determine the strategic goals of human capital development in collaboration with social partners and other non-governmental organizations, to provide national level evaluations on the labour market development scenarios and forecasts at the national and municipal levels, market, including the unemployment situation and its impact on the competitiveness of various population groups, to evaluate the tasks of the subordinate institutions of the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Science in the field of lifelong learning. The Council consists of the Minister of Economics (chair), the Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Welfare.

A few **conclusions from the completed focus-groups and interviews** about the existing challenges and gaps in cooperation among stakeholders' point to:

- The **governance structure for adult education policies is multilayered** with many stakeholders involved. The functioning and capacity of local adult education centres depend on the resources of the municipalities. Municipalities with more resources can provide better services than the municipalities with fewer resources, which highlight the need for strong governance structures to ensure equity in adult learning across Latvia.

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[36] https://www.saeima.lv/petijumi/Pieauguso_izglitiba_petijums.pdf
[37] https://likumi.lv/ta/id/342561-cilvekkapitala-attistibas-padomes-nolikums

Thereof, a consolidated approach to implementing adult education policies would be needed.

- A coordination mechanism shall be needed, which would ensure the achievement of common results through the cooperation of institutions based on their specific strengths and competencies. For example, the VIAA monitoring department might monitor the learning results of not only the employed, but also the unemployed; NVA career counsellors might be involved in various projects; programs and learning materials developed by one partner could be implemented by others. A **model based on the specialization of institutions** would facilitate the transition from on and off cooperation to sustainable cooperation.

- In the national projects**, information services** should be provided in line with the specific needs of the target groups for the distribution of information in different formats. Currently, for adults with low basic skills, this makes it difficult to understand the learning offer and make an appropriate choice. Insufficient attention is paid to the exchange of information and opinions of partners, ensuring feedback.
  The specific target group needs in the regional areas for assuring local supply and demand when implementing national level projects are not fully addressed.
  Transparent cooperation mechanism among national, regional and local players is adult education to respond to specific local needs could be strengthened. **Educational needs identified at the local level quite often lack implementation opportunities** – there are no education providers or appropriate offer in the territory of the municipality. Non-formal educational programs or small-scale learning activities are often implemented by own initiative.

- The coordination between the state institutions and municipalities for implementing **a unified approach to adult education policies remains challenging**. The adult education policies carried out in municipalities very much depend on the size, resources and priorities of individual municipalities. At the local level, there is a much greater opportunity to reach and engage different target groups. It goes hand in hand with the limited financial support for the development of adult education framework at a local level that would be in line with national policies.

- Adult education coordinators in municipalities often work par-time only, have a wide range of responsibilities apart from adult education and lack skills in implementing adult education policies. There is a need for **adult education coordinators in municipalities** to be fully employed with adult education coordination function, including the creation of local cooperation network, determining educational needs, building collaboration among national and local stakeholders, information dissemination, implementation of adult engagement initiatives, etc. to serve as a one-stop agency for adult education at a local level.

- Adult education coordinators, education providers and career counsellors in municipalities are involved in informing and advising adults. However, it often happens within the framework of a single organisation. **Local networks of all involved stakeholders in adult education** for the provision of accurate and timely information has to be strengthened.

- Lack of motivation and fear of failure are the most important factors that prevent the involvement of adults with low basic skills in learning. Solving the problem requires

implementation of **motivating activities before the educational process**. It is more convenient to provide such activities at the local level, as can be seen in the examples of good practice. Local initiatives are based on an individualized approach and allow to reach different target groups. The development of initiatives is hindered by the lack of financial support and regulatory obstacles, with regulatory documents emphasizing control mechanisms that do not encourage opportunities for new approaches.

- Local governments, employers and sectoral industry associations are involved in determining the learning needs of adults. Challenges arise from various understandings of educational needs. Individuals view life skills as important, whereas employers – skills needed in the labour market. In order to involve a person with low basic skills in educations and training, would require a **continuous approach to developing one's skills**. This would include a set of short practical trainings to motivate this target group leading to a longer training (diploma, qualification, etc.). It also requires a monitoring/mentoring activity that would support these people throughout this learning road, also after the end of the training. Moreover, regional differences should be taken into full consideration of the educational needs defined in the national level projects. The involvement of planning regions in determining learning needs would encourage the development of a more diverse educational offer. At the local government level, educational needs are determined with a target group approach, with detailed differentiation and taking into account the needs of disadvantaged groups.

- The professional development of specialists and the maintenance of educational material platforms would require greater state support and the promotion of continuous cooperation between digital professionals, regions, municipalities and adult education providers. The National Centre of Education has the potential to promote cooperation for the improvement of the competences of adult education professionals. Although the core activity of the center is focused on general and professional education, one of its functions is to coordinate and implement the professional development of teaching staff. VISC's existing cooperation with universities and developers of teaching and methodological tools allows to broaden the competency to adult education specialists. The Lifelong Learning Centres of universities provide a wide set of various forms of training for adults, including tailor-made courses for private and public sector institutions and enterprises. They also have significant experience and expertise in adult training, including academic studies in andragogy, therefor could be more involved in the provision of consultations for adult trainers.

For further information, see **Stakeholder mapping table** here

Qualitative information about the analysis process

The analyses process, in particular, the focus group discussions, including the preparatory and follow up activities, **provided a considerable impact to the commitment and contribution** of the stakeholders involved.

Within the WP 2 of the project the partners in Latvia – the Latvian Adult Education Association (LPIA) and the State Education Development Agency (VIAA) – carried out 3 online focus group discussions as well as several individual interviews with the adult education experts.

The **1st Focus group discussion** was held on 27th April with 7 participants of the target audience – representatives of local municipal bodies and education institutions with the aim to learn about the process about the **implementation of adult education policy and initiatives in the local community**.

The **2nd Focus group discussion** was held on 17th May 2023 with 9 participants of the target audience – representatives of public and private adult education providers, employment and social sector specialists with the aim to learn about the **adult education training provision processes and services**.

The **3rd Focus group discussion** was held on 1st June for a specific target audience – adult educators from private and public institutions, dealing with **digital skills training**. The total number of participants – 6 representatives from the digital skills training organisation, an online interview with 2 specialists on digital skills training was held individually on 5th and 7th June.

Duration of each discussion was about 2 hours. Participants were selected, motivated and involved in a close mutual cooperation among VIAA and LPIA.

The level of participation of stakeholders in the analyses process could be considered as high, both responsive and pro-active, with significant components of mutual interaction among the stakeholders involved.

- The questions/themes to be discussed were sent to participants well in advance, together with explanatory e-mail about the focus and aims of discussion proposed and the main information about the "PartnerUP" project.
- After each focus group discussion minutes with key conclusions were sent to all participants for checking and possible amendments, the amendments provided were included in final version of minutes.
- During the focus group interviews equal opportunities were ensured for all participants to express their opinions on all questions, included in the agenda. In addition to that the participants had an opportunity to ask questions to each other, aimed to share and discuss details of good practices and challenges presented.
- Thereby the participants shared the good practices, created mutual contacts, aimed to share lessons learned from successful implementation of public awareness events, dissemination and use of developed learning materials and programmes, etc. One of special emphasis during the mutual discussions were about effective approaches of involvement of low skilled adults in learning process.

The total number of focus group representatives involved were 22 persons. In all discussions two representatives of LPIA (director and expert) and two representatives of VIAA (senior expert and senior project manager, contact person of "Partner UP" project from VIAA) participated. The discussions were moderated by a representative per partner, meetings were recorded in order to create detailed and accurate meeting minutes. At the end of each meeting the project team presented the main preliminary conclusions and considered notes from the participants.

According to opinion of the project team, the analysis, especially the focus group discussions and implemented preparatory and follow-up measures **positively contributed to strengthening relationships with stakeholders**, based on mutual respect and trust. The participants openly expressed their opinions, both highlighting achievements and good practices as well as critical

assessments of existing shortcomings in overall adult education provision and management as well as highlighted the challenges to be solved in order to increase effectiveness of lifelong learning and upskilling processes. The key conclusions and findings of the analyses implemented **will be used to by VIAA senior officials** for contribution to development of related lifelong learning policy planning and implementation documents, proposals for elaboration of existing cooperation mechanisms and implementation of public awareness increasing events. LPIA will use the network of its member organisations and partners to contribute to interaction of NGO sector to lifelong learning policy development and its implementation.

The overall conclusion of the project team is that **the analyses process was implemented quite well**. The possible **shortcomings** to be mentioned could be related to the overall approach to the interviews implemented with the main emphasis to stakeholders from local (municipal) and regional levels, national level stakeholders were less involved. One of the **main challenges** recognised during the analyses process were difficulties in gathering information about the involvement of low skilled adults, as there are various interpretations and understanding of adults with "low skills" (for example, uncompleted primary education, professions for adults with low qualifications - 8th, 9th basic group according to the Classifier of Occupations, low basic skills, low digital skills etc.) It should be highlighted, that the low skill adults are quite diverse group with different social situations and various learning needs, thereby correlation to age groups, income level, places of residence – cities or rural areas etc. should be taken into consideration The issues and challenges, related to involvement of low skilled learners should be specified during the further phases of project implementation.

Good practices

N.B. 'Good practices' are defined, in this context, as strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and/or evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result in supporting identification, engagement, commitment of stakeholders as well as cooperation among them, with specific reference to the UP initiative. The Good practices can be local, regional, national or international ones.

1. Best Practices at a National Level

Sectoral expert councils

Sectoral Expert Councils (SEC) founded in 2010 are operating under the legal basis of the Vocation Education Law coordinated by the Employers Confederation of Latvia[38]. SECs are aimed to facilitate the improvement of the effectiveness and quality of VET in the respective industry by promoting co-operation between the State, employers, trade unions and specialists on issues related to human resource development and compliance of VET to labour market requirements. Currently there are 13 NEPs established covering all main sectors of industry[39].

Sub-council of the national tripartite cooperation council on vocational education and employment

This sub-council may be considered as one of the first successful stakeholder collaboration samples on VET, adult education and skills development. The sub-council started its work already in 1999 as the Vocational Education Cooperation Council, with the main task to promote the cooperation of the government, employers' and employees' (trade unions) organizations in the field of development and implementation of the national policy and strategy of human resources development, education and employment. The sub-council has a wide set of tasks, including the evaluation and development of draft proposals of policy planning and legal documents in the field of human resources development, education and employment as well as the preparation of the proposals for their elaboration and updating.

National coordinators for the implementation of the european agenda for adult learning

This Erasmus+ project is implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science[40] with the main emphasis (but not limited to) on the collaboration with municipalities on the development of lifelong learning opportunities. It contributes to promoting adult learning, providing policy advice and gathering and disseminating best practices to national authorities. The network of adult education coordinators has been established in all municipalities, a competency development program for adult education coordinators has been developed and numerous

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[38] https://lddk.lv/en/about-lddk/more-about-lddk/

[39] In 2022 several hundreds of sectoral experts were involved in SECs activities from 90 employers' organizations, 56 companies, 17 trade unions and 10 state institutions as well as from 33 educational institutions and other sectoral organizations.

[40] https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/projekts/nacionalie-koordinatori-eiropas-pieauguso-izglitibas-programmas-istenosanai

trainings and seminars, as well as program piloting (DigComp[41], FinComp[42], GreenComp[43], EntreComp[44], LifEComp[45]) and methodology materials implemented[46].

2. Best Practices at a Sub-National Level

Latvian information and communications technology association (likta)

Association was founded in 1998 and it unites leading industry companies and organizations, as well as ICT professionals – more than 160 members in total. It is the flagship of the industry, which comes up with digital skills development initiatives, has created a digital skills partnership platform and represents the National Digital Coalition in Latvia. In its projects, LIKTA conducts training for ICT professionals, organizes information and motivation campaigns to invite the public and entrepreneurs to learn new digital skills, helps policymakers, industry associations and small and medium-sized enterprises to more effectively implement digital solutions in the public and private sectors. In order to develop basic digital skills and transversal competences for adults with low basic skills, LIKTA has developed an integrated modular digital competence system DCDS in cooperation with European partners[47].

Riga techgirls

Riga TechGirls[48] is the first community in Latvia dedicated to educating and inspiring girls & women about technology. It has more than 6 years of experience in providing trainings, workshops, inspiration events, hackathons, mentorships, educational programs, full day conferences and scholarship programs for learning technology. One of the activities best reported about is the Riga TechGirls mentorship program, which provides continuous support prior, during and post programme, in this way motivating participants throughout their learning road, from the very beginning and monitoring participants after the end of the programme[49].

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[41] https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp_en

[42] https://finance.ec.europa.eu/events/using-financial-competence-framework-adults-european-union-2022-05-05_en

[43] https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/greencomp-european-sustainability-competence-framework_en

[44] https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1317&langId=en

[45] https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/lifecomp_en

[46] The project experts have been involved in the development of uniform quality criteria for non-formal education (amendments to the Education Law 15.09.2022) and a draft of the Cabinet of Ministers regulations "Procedure for Issuing and Cancelling Permits for the Implementation of Non-formal Education Program".

[47] The creation of a common understanding, which LIKTA promotes by translating and popularizing EU initiative documents - the European educators' digital competence framework DigiCompEdu, the European cyber security skills framework, etc., is essential for the cooperation of partners.

[48] https://rigatechgirls.com/

[49] Education providers familiarize themselves with the local commune, its current issues, traditions, routines - programs are created on their basis. The learning tasks use processes that the participants encounter on a daily basis. Time is given to experiment cooperation with technology. By trying the new skills and seeing how they make work or life easier, the participants lose their fear and want to continue. The philosophy of the center is that learning is not the acquisition of a narrow field of knowledge under the guidance of a teacher. It is the development of an independent thinking and self-directed personality

Latvian adult education association

With more than 60 members from different types of AE institutions (incl. 14 training centers and institutes, 3 regional adult education centers, 5 universities and their further education centers, 1 college, 11 NGO, 5 municipalities/ municipal boards of education, 1 competence development center, 1 Vocational secondary school, 1 folk high school) and 23 individual members (AE trainers), the association operates in different ways:

- represents their members and nonformal AE sector in the EU Structural Fund and Cohesion Fund Monitoring Committee, in AE management board, provides opinions to ministries for improvement of legal acts;
- exchanges with actual information and experience, shares new methodological materials within their member organizations, in network of European Adult Education Association, in Nordic Baltic AE network;
- organizes seminars, conferences, summer schools, discussions and visits to European AE institutions.

3. Best Practices at a Local Level

NGO 'Limbazi Foundation'
Limbazi Foundation[50], operating on the territory of Limbazi municipality, was founded in 2009; it aims is to improve the quality of life by raising funds and attracting sponsors to support non – governmental organisations, informal groups of society and private initiatives. The foundation organised support to socially disadvantaged locals to improve their living space by organizing practical lessons for these families on how to renovate an apartment with limited resources, materials were donated for the repair. The self-confidence of these family members rose and afterwards they became active supporters of the foundation.

Jaunpils foundation 'Rats'
The non-profit foundation "Rats"[51] is a local NGO, established in Jaunpils parish[52], Tukums municipality, aimed to promote local and regional development. It implements various lifelong learning events, guided by the expressed wishes of the population and the demand of the labor market, looking for possible cooperation models with other educators in order to "bring education closer" to the learner. "Rats" implemented a training cycle for young mothers who often have low self-esteem, are lonely and have insufficient education. A council chairman, social worker, lawyer, health education teacher, psychologist, hairdresser, beautician and cook worked with them for a year, trying to give them knowledge, skills and abilities in previously unlearned areas. In order for the mothers to get to the lessons, the city council financed the bus, and the representatives of the association ensured that the children were looked after during the lessons. As a result, the young women's self-esteem increased, communication improved and several training participants got jobs.

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[50] https://www.limbazufonds.lv/
[51] https://www.facebook.com/JaunpilsRATS?locale=zh_CN
[52] https://jaunpilspils.lv/

Priorities for Development Groups

Based on the desk analysis and focus-group discussions on the existing challenges and gaps in cooperation of stakeholders in Upskilling Pathways, the following priorities have been proposed.

1. **Promotion of good practice, information exchange, communication and publicity for greater involvement of adults with low qualifications**

Goal: to achieve wider opportunities and formation of closer partner cooperation for greater involvement of adults by increasing the exchange of information between the parties involved at all levels, the publicity of their activities and active promotion of good practice examples.

2. **Digitization strategy for the development of adult education**

Goal: to contribute to the development of adult education by wide dissemination of effective digital innovations in learning content, and provision of information with an emphasis on the involvement of adults with low digital skills.

3. **Support for local adult engagement initiatives**

Goal: to create conditions for the active cooperation of institutions, associations, entrepreneurs and education providers at the municipal level for the development of initiatives for the development of adult involvement and learning opportunities with an emphasis on the motivation, involvement, guidance and support of adults with low qualifications.

4. **Involvement opportunities of planning regions in promotion of adult education development**

Goal: to discuss and highlight the opportunities of effective contribution of planning regions in coordination of adult education development on a regional level.

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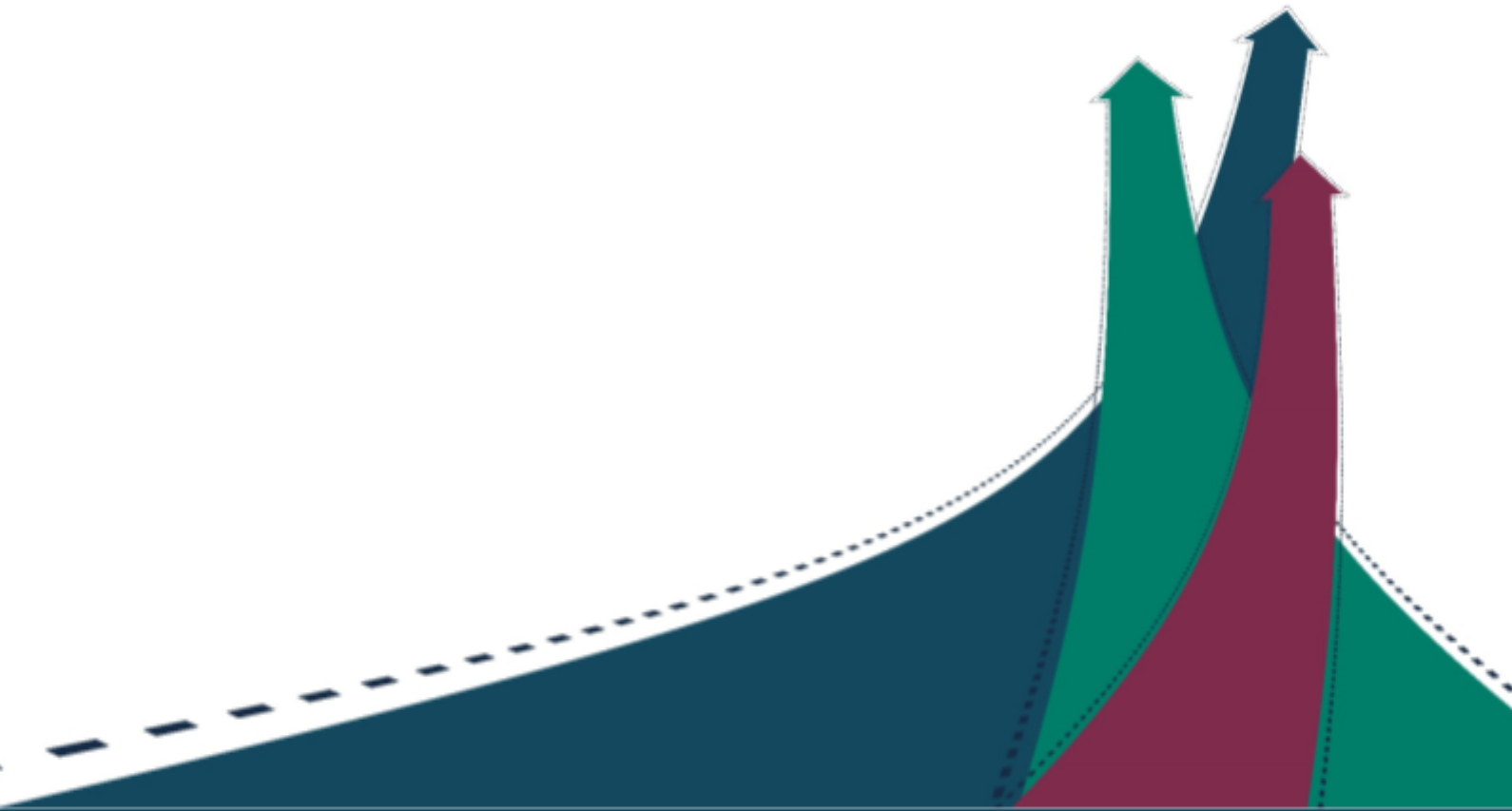
Country Analysis

CROATIA

2.3 Country Analysis - Croatia

Country	Croatia
Responsible organisation/s	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE), Adult Education Institution Dante

Upskilling Pathways in each country: state of art in the implementation, main target groups, challenges

Pursuant to the Adult Education Act, adult education includes: implementation of formal education programs for the acquisition and evaluation of sets of learning outcomes/curricula for the acquisition of qualifications at **level 1** (primary education certificate), **level 2** (vocational education certificate), **level 3** (upper-secondary VET certificate, 1-2 years), **level 4, level 4.1** (upper-secondary VET certificate, 3 years), **level 4.2.** (upper-secondary VET certificate, 4 years) and at **level 5** (VET specialist programmes)[53] of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF), namely:

a) education programmes for acquiring and evaluating **sets of learning outcomes (i.e., micro-qualification)**

b) education programmes for obtaining a **partial qualification**

c) education programme for obtaining a **full qualification**.

Education programs for obtaining a partial qualification include:

a) **vocational training** - partial qualifications that are acquired at level 2, 3 and 4 of the CROQF, and are accessed at least from level 1 (primary education certificate)

b) **professional development programmes** - partial qualifications that are acquired at CROQF level 4, and are accessed from at least the same level

c) **professional specialist training** - partial qualifications that are acquired at CROQF level 5, and are accessed at least from level 4.1.

The Croatian qualifications framework (CROQF) is an instrument governing the entire system of qualifications awarded at all education levels in the Republic of Croatia. The CROQF introduces **occupational standards** and **qualification standards** that serve as the basis for creating educational programmes at all education levels. The occupational standard includes a list of all key jobs of a specific occupation and a list of competences required for their successful performance; the qualification standard includes all learning outcomes that must be acquired in each programme leading to a specific qualification[54].

The new Law on Adult Education adopted in 2021 was one of the novelties for Croatia at a systemic level, introducing the recognition0 of **microcredentials**. In compliance with the new Law, the Agency for VET and Adult Education developed a detailed 'Methodology for creating adult education programmes for acquiring micro-qualifications, partial qualifications and complete qualifications financed through vouchers and other sources of financing'.

The novelty of those programmes leading to microcredentials also lies in their type of financing, as they introduce **vouchers** for people engaged in education. Vouchers have been issued by the Croatian Employment Service (CES) from April 2022. By the end of October 2022, more than 102

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[53] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/2021-09/Croatia-nqf-country-page.jpg

[54] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/croatia-follow-croatian-qualifications-framework-register

adult education institutions were listed with more than 711 microcredential programmes available, including a vast number of programmes honing digital and green skills. Learners who are granted a voucher receive on average EUR 1 300 (paid directly to the selected and certified ALE provider). The majority of these learners are unemployed or searching for a new job opportunity (78%). To this date, more than 10 700 people have submitted a request to receive a voucher. Microcredentials promoted through this voucher system have already become one of the most forward-looking measures in attracting learners to adult education, while ensuring that the education provided is aligned with labour market needs.

Benefits of all these reforms in the Croatian adult education system include:
- prioritising skills development and **work-based learning**, adopting a learner-centred approach
- reshaped the structure for labour market anticipation and **feedback loops** between occupational standards, qualification standards and curricula
- drastically increasing the number and variety of vocational training and professional development programmes available **free of charge** for individuals (as prior to this reform the majority of the programmes were paid for by learners themselves or infrequently financed by the CES through public procurement calls for specific deficitary professions)
- allowing both **employed and unemployed** individuals to access education free of charge
- enabling adults with **CROQF level 1** (primary education certificate) to access micro-qualifications and partial qualifications that are acquired at level 2, 3 and 4 of the CROQF, thereby ensuring greater vertical mobility

However, a number of challenges still remain.
- A major challenge mentioned by all stakeholders is **reaching out to and motivating** adults with low qualifications to participate in education, considering their experiences in formal education, self-confidence, and sense of accomplishment. There is a need for more targeted and innovative approaches to engage these individuals effectively – to implement national media campaigns to promote the benefits of ALE, to offer necessary support that can enable them to access learning (i.e., paid transport costs for learners living further away from ALE providers, paid training during work enabling adults to do both with employer's support). This also includes professional guidance and/or any information provided to learners – this would significantly decrease the number of adults that drop out of the initial stages of the process as well as increase the number of adults interested in learning.
- While the voucher system has brought great improvements to the system of acquiring micro or partial qualifications, **the process of acquiring a full qualification** at level 3/4 (secondary education) is still too long and not adapted to adults (i.e., containing subjects and content initially developed for teenagers accessing so-called regular education in secondary schools), which greatly discourages individuals from accessing those education programmes and this leaves them unable to access further education and learning opportunities that require CROQF 3 or 4. In addition, the development of green and digital skills is offered through vouchers, but a disproportionate number of participants are interested in digital skills, not green skills.
- While there are some training programmes available through the voucher system that **only require CROQF 1** – it's a disproportionately low number, resulting in poor vertical mobility of learners. In addition, the training programmes funded through the voucher

system are only related to developing digital or green skills, thereby **limiting the range of topics and qualifications** that are offered free of charge for adults.
- **Formal qualifications cannot be acquired through recognition of non-formal and informal learning,** but OECD's project to establish a validation system of prior learning in Croatia has been underway[55].

Stakeholder cooperation in UP: successful cooperation mechanisms, missing stakeholders and gaps in cooperation

Key Croatian stakeholders in UP and adult learning at the local, regional, and national level have been interviewed. This includes public bodies like the Ministry of Science and Education, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, and the Croatian Employment Service. Other stakeholders at the national level that participated are associations - the Association of Adult Education Institutions, Association for the Advancement of Human Resources and Adult Education at the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, Croatian Andragogy Society, and the Croatian Employers' Association. A variety of ALE providers, and regional/municipal branches of national associations and bodies were also interviewed. Shortcomings and challenges in the education system emphasized by the stakeholders include the lack of time for workers with low qualifications, the outflow of the labour force, and inadequate employer investment in their workers' development. If employers are not investing adequately in worker development, further engagement and advocacy might be needed to encourage them to participate in upskilling efforts. The focus on micro-qualifications and digital competences should align with the evolving demands of the labour market and ensure the relevance of the skills being taught. The existing system lacks recognition of prior knowledge, needs an expanded voucher system, requires more media promotion for certain occupations, and improvement in the guidance provided to adults.

As evidenced by all of the stakeholders' responses, there is already a good web of cooperation to address these issues between relevant ministries, ALE associations, employment services, employers, trade unions, and ALE providers. (e.g., employment service with relevant ministries, employers and ALE providers, employers with ALE providers and relevant agencies). Additionally, as indicated by one of the stakeholders, through European projects and the implementation of CROQF, in the last few years, the cooperation between the stakeholders has increased significantly, from the labour market to state institutions, especially the CES, the Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. Cooperation also extended to European institutions, especially agencies (EACEA, CEDEFOP).

An important finding regarding gaps in cooperation is that while each stakeholder seems to identify where they contribute to improving UP in Croatia, they seem to find other stakeholders responsible for solving the issue, i.e., they have suggestions on what should be done and steps they are taking in that direction, but they primarily assign that task to someone else, another stakeholder. Stakeholders with more of a national reach seem to believe that stakeholders working on a local level can reach individuals better and vice versa.

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[55] https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/skills-and-work/adult-learning/validation-prior-learning-croatia.htm

This indicates that both stakeholders and their cooperation would greatly benefit from coming together, sharing and re-evaluating their roles and expectations from each other. One stakeholder even suggested establishing of a joint body that would include all important stakeholders. Agreeing on a joint strategy could help ensure that needs are being met and issues are not left unaddressed.

For further information, see **Stakeholder mapping table** [here](#).

Other relevant experiences of stakeholders' activation/cooperation

Across the stakeholders involved in the UP Initiative, a pattern of collaborative efforts emerges. Many stakeholders actively collaborate with each other to design and implement upskilling programs that align education with the demands of the labour market. These collaborations often involve seeking increased funds to support education and training programs, with a particular emphasis on allocating funds for basic skills training and specialized programs aimed at bridging the skill gap.

A common goal among stakeholders is to ensure that these programs are designed with a focus on quality and relevance. They recognize the importance of tailored programs that specifically address the unique needs of individuals with low qualifications while maintaining high standards of education. This focus extends to regulatory frameworks and the recognition of prior learning, where stakeholders work to establish guidelines that ensure program effectiveness and alignment with the national qualifications framework.

However, stakeholders are cognizant of the challenges in motivating individuals with low qualifications to actively participate in these programs. They acknowledge that engagement strategies need improvement to overcome barriers to enrollment and participation. Additionally, some stakeholders highlight challenges in terms of collaboration itself. Communication and coordination among the various stakeholders are areas that need further attention to ensure effective collaboration and implementation.

To address these challenges, stakeholders advocate for change. Many stakeholders emphasize the introduction of micro-qualifications, improved funding models, streamlined processes, and enhanced communication strategies. They recognize that raising awareness and promoting participation in education programs are vital aspects of their efforts.

Central to the stakeholders' commitments is the goal of addressing skill gaps in the workforce. Stakeholders are dedicated to bridging the divide between education and industry needs, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the skills demanded by a rapidly changing job landscape. Their initiatives align with broader national strategies and policies, such as the 2030 National Strategy and other skill development initiatives, showcasing their commitment to supporting the economic and social advancement of the country.

A recurring theme is the emphasis on access and inclusivity. Stakeholders are committed to providing education and training opportunities that cater to individuals with varying skill levels and backgrounds. This commitment stems from a belief in the transformative power of education, enabling individuals to acquire the skills they need to succeed in their careers and contribute to the growth and prosperity of the nation.

Qualitative information about the analysis process

A total of 14 stakeholders were interviewed, either in person or via a video call. Each stakeholder was addressed during a separate (one-to-one) interview. A wide range of key stakeholders have been included in the process – representatives of relevant ministries, ALE associations, employment services, employers, trade unions, and ALE providers.

Stakeholders participating in the analysis process have demonstrated a commendable level of engagement. Through their input, questions, and reflections, they actively contributed to the exploration of upskilling pathways in Croatia. Their willingness to share experiences, raise pertinent questions, and respond thoughtfully to insights highlights their high level of participation and genuine interest in comprehending the complexities surrounding upskilling initiatives.

Their willingness to participate in the analysis process as well as the answers provided during the interviews indicate that there is good, already established, cooperation among stakeholders but that it could be strengthened with better and continuous communication and a clearer division/sharing of responsibilities when it comes to addressing barriers to/in upskilling pathways for adults.

In addition to including more stakeholders in the next project steps, we hope to include the same responders to encourage better networking among them and support them in devising solutions and mitigating strategies for the identified barriers to upskilling pathways in Croatia.

Good practices

N.B. 'Good practices' are defined, in this context, as strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and/or evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result in supporting identification, engagement, commitment of stakeholders as well as cooperation among them, with specific reference to the UP initiative. The Good practices can be local, regional, national or international ones.

Good practices have highlighted the significance of offering tailored, interactive, and engaging learning experiences for individuals with low qualifications. ALE providers should adapt teaching methods to adult learners' needs, promoting practical skills relevant to their desired professions. By offering flexible scheduling, psychosocial support, and simplified enrollment processes, institutions can increase learners' self-confidence, motivation, and retention.

In addition, good practices include designing training programs tailored to employers' needs, involving them in curriculum development, and facilitating practical training opportunities. Collaborative efforts between ALE providers, employment service, and employers can enhance learner employability and align training with industry demands.

Half of the stakeholders interviewed also mentioned the *Zaželi* project. 'Zaželi - women's employment program' was financed under the Operational Program Effective Human Resources 2014-2020 from the European Social Fund. The project was being implemented by local government units and associations for a duration of up to 30 months, and is intended for the employment of women in a disadvantageous position on the labour market, with an emphasis on women over 50 years of age, women with the highest completed secondary education, women with disabilities, women victims of human trafficking, treated drug addicts, women victims of domestic violence, homeless women.

Through 'Zaželi - women's employment program' and its three phases of implementation, a total of 1,184 projects were successfully financed. More than 22.5 thousand women were employed who provided support and care services for almost 130 thousand elderly and/or

infirm persons, which testifies to the importance and effectiveness of the program in strengthening social cohesion and providing the necessary care and attention to the most vulnerable groups society.

One stakeholder also praised AVETAE's national campaign Lifelong Learning Week through which citizens are informed on the importance of education and learning and which has been running for over 15 years. The backbone of each of the Lifelong Learning Weeks is informing the citizens on the ways they can become a part of the lifelong learning process and motivating them to do that. The campaign has developed during the years: the number of activities, implementation areas and institutions involved has risen, the involvement of key stakeholders has been strengthened and – most importantly – the number of citizens participating has constantly been rising. During the campaign, citizens are able to visit free workshops, lectures, round tables and similar events; a number of institutions open their doors and introduce potential learners to their educational programmes.

Priorities for Development Groups

1. Gathering the same stakeholders that participated in this round of interviews, but trying to include representatives of local municipalities/governments as they have a large impact on a local level, but most stakeholders mentioned an infrequent level of collaboration
2. Discussing what motivation, promotion, and guidance strategies can be introduced or improved as well as who plays what role in the process/delineating responsibilities
3. Discussing how to make the UP system more vertically mobile for adults with CROQF 1 or no qualification
4. Discussing possible expansion of micro-qualifications to a variety of skills, not just green and digital

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Country Analysis

ROMANIA

2.4 **Country Analysis** - Romania

Country	ROMANIA
Responsible organisation/s	ASOCIATIA EURO ADULT EDUCATION

Upskilling Pathways in each country: state of art in the implementation, main target groups, challenges

Legislative context

Concerning the legislative framework, there is a special part within the Law of Education 1/2011[56], dedicated to 'permanent education´.

Lifelong learning is seen to represent all educational activities realised by each person within formal, non-formal and informal backgrounds for training purposes and for developing competencies including personal, civic, social, or labour competencies.

Lifelong learning therefore includes early education and compulsory education, superior education (high school), university, and continuing adult vocational training. The Romanian state ensures and sustains (including financially) access to education and continuing professional training for:

- Young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education;
- Young people who left the educational system before obtaining a professional qualification;
- People with special educational needs;
- Young people and adults who return to the country after a period of working abroad;
- Young people and adults who are residents in economically and socially disadvantaged communities;
- Employed people over 40 years old with a low educational background with low qualification levels;
- Students with a high risk of school failure;
- Any citizen who wants to benefit from permanent education.

Lifelong learning education is financed from public and private funds through public or private partnerships, with financing and co-financing from employers, non-governmental organisations, etc.

 According to law, lifelong learning focuses on the organisation of these permanent education programmes through educational institutions, particularly stating that they must ensure:

- compensatory education (a "*second chance*" route into education for adults who did not obtain the basic level of school qualifications);
- continuing vocational training;
- civic education and - personal education designed to enable people to play an active role in society;

These laws aim to create training opportunities for newly disadvantaged groups, and stimulate employment. Many groups can be classed as '*disadvantaged*', and therefore qualify for this

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[56] https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/legea-educatiei_actualizata%20august%202018.pdf

public support, including the long term unemployed, women, the disabled, those returning to work after maternal or paternal leave, or after military service, single parents, and those in rural areas with a low income.

Key measures in place

1. A project was started by the Ministry of Education with **'Center Education 2000+'**[57] which offered a second chance for young adults between 14-25 years who did not complete compulsory education, where they were offered a *'basic education recovery' programme* in parallel with an apprenticeship type of training. These apprenticeships deliberately combined traditional Roma professions with other, more "*modern*" professions to motivate student participation.

2. Another national program, **The Second Chance program** according to the Ministry of Education,[58] is addressed to teenagers, young people, and adults, coming from diverse social backgrounds and of varying ages, who have not attended or completed primary and secondary education.

The program offers these categories of people the possibility of continuing and completing their compulsory education without having to interrupt their possible professional or family activities in which they are involved.

The program is structured on two levels:
   a. Second chance - primary education and
   b. Second chance - lower secondary education (the latter also having a professional training component)

For the program **A second chance - primary education**:
   - they did not participate in formal school education at all;
   - were enrolled, but dropped out of primary education - regardless of the time and reasons for dropping out;
   - they did not graduate from primary education until the age of 14.

For the **Second Chance program - lower secondary education**:
   - they graduated from compulsory primary education (including in the Second Chance system) but did not continue their education further, or
   - they graduated part of the classes corresponding to secondary school education (V, VI or VII), but dropped out of school during this education cycle - regardless of the time and reasons for dropping out.

The Second Chance Program is a flexible program, so as to motivate students and help them complete it, to offer more autonomy to schools in terms of its implementation. Through the program, innovative elements were introduced into the educational process, such as: the modular curriculum and the credit system for basic education, the evaluation, certification and

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[57] https://www.devex.com/organizations/center-education-2000-22809
[58] https://www.edu.ro/etichete/doua-%C8%99ans%C4%83#

recognition of previously acquired skills by students, and the provision of an individualised training program.

The courses can be held according to several timetables (during the week in the afternoon or evening, on Saturdays or during school holidays, etc.) depending on the possibilities of the students and the teaching staff. The program also has a flexible duration. Graduates have the right to continue their studies, according to the provisions of the law.

3. **The Employment Agencies** organise literacy and numeracy programs for adults[59] who have not completed primary education. Many county agencies organise these courses for the beneficiaries of the minimum guaranteed income because most of them are people who unfortunately do not know how to write, read and calculate, therefore they are offered the chance to enter into the labour market by becoming literate. After learning to write, read and calculate, they will be able to take a qualification course. The courses are held in the halls of some educational institutions, with qualified staff from the Employment Agency.

4. **Roma communities** - Within Romania there are areas with a high Roma population, and there has been a policy to encourage more Roma people to become teachers, in order to serve as positive role models[60]. In order to achieve this there are '*positive discrimination*' programmes to attract young Roma students into teacher training, including a distance learning programme through the University of Bucharest, and a system which allocated special places for Roma students within all universities. The "*Centre Education 2000+*", also supports Roma students with the condition that they work within their communities for some time after they graduate.

5. Romania organised in 2017 one international **Mutual Learning Workshop** with the topic Implementing Upskilling Pathways. The workshops aimed to bring together seven countries to explore the policy actions and practical levers that can support the implementation of the EU Upskilling Pathways (UP) Recommendation.
It comprises two sessions: The first session in November 2017 which focused on supporting countries to understand what UP is and develop a "*to-do list*" of actions as first steps for implementing UP in their country. The second workshop in April 2018 which was expected to review the early implementation of this list. This will examine what is working well and some of the challenges encountered by Member States and how they could be overcome, and will go further in implementation by focusing on UP steps, enablers and funding.

6. **European programmes**
Various institutions and organisations use the opportunities to access ESF and Erasmus+ funding to support the implementation of the UP for low-qualified adults.

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[59] https://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/MMPS/SNOFM_2021-2027.pdf
[60] https://www.romaeducationfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/romania_report.pdf

Many programs and projects have been implemented, but the results are not exactly what was expected, sometimes the cooperation between employers, educational organisations, government, public and/or private providers, etc. faces a lack of tangible and immediate effects.

c. Wide target groups addressed in Romania

Priority **target groups** of adults with low qualifications in Romania for UP implementation were identified, including:

a. Active/employed people
b. Unemployed people
c. Inactive people that are usually invisible and harder to reach (not employed, not registered with PES)
d. People who have not completed their studies
e. Refugees and individuals from a migrant background
f. People in rural areas, which have less access to education or training facilities
g. Minorities such as Roma communities, particularly those where there have been multiple generations in unemployment
h. Retired people

To engage these target groups requires targeted outreach; it is needed to have a partnership, including working with local authorities, learning/ training providers, social services, civil society networks, employment services, employers, social partners, chambers of commerce, libraries, cultural houses, church groups, schools. Sometimes financial incentives are a source of motivation to bring them to a training provider courses or back to school

d. Main challenges in reaching out to the target groups

Romania, as well as all European countries recognised that UP could provide an opportunity to create a more coherent support system for low-qualified adults. This could be done through existing EU supporting mechanisms, such as the European Agenda on Adult Learning or funding programmes like ESF or Erasmus +.

e. Main challenges in skills assessment, provision of tailored learning and validation and recognition of skills acquired

According to our analysis of the answers to the questionnaires and the discussion in the focus groups, the main challenges in training and upskilling low-qualified individuals in Romania may be seen from different perspectives, as follows:

- Maintaining stable political commitment for implementing UP and tackling fragmented governance
- Lack of existing data/evidence or research to identify key target groups and the information is not accessible to them.
- Education availability/access: Due to geographical or financial reasons, low-qualified individuals in Romania face challenges in accessing education and training opportunities.
- Lack of flexibility for the VET training programs in terms of accessibility, duration and practical learning.
- The biggest number of low-qualified people are in the rural areas and the training providers are in the big cities and the travel costs for the trainees are not covered in many cases.

- Unsatisfied labour market needs due to misalignment between companies' needs and low-qualified individuals' training and needs for training. Even if certain training has been available and implemented and certain low-qualified individuals have been involved in these programmes, the result has not fulfilled the labour market need, as the individuals did not valorize the training into real labour market employment for sound periods.
- Secure and sustainable funding to develop or refine existing provision to incorporate the three UP steps
- The employers do not have an obligation to support the training and up-skilling of their staff; especially in the HORECA sector and in the construction sector they do not give priority to the training and qualification.
- Motivation and stability: Low-qualified individuals encounter difficulties in investing through training and lack of skills for specific roles may be identified after the specific training program is effectively implemented.
- Stigma and discrimination: Even significant progress has been noticed, in certain situations low-qualified individuals may face discrimination in the workplace.
- Lack of digital skills: Many low-qualified individuals in Romania may not have access to or be comfortable with technology, which is becoming mandatory nowadays.
- Linguistic skills: More and more domains need more than native language proficiency, so low-qualified individuals appear at risk of position and exclusion due to linguistic skills, even for training opportunities.
- The legal frame and the national policies do not encourage the training and qualification of low-qualified people. Only the ESF program supporting currently the qualification within investing in people projects
- Fostering *a lifelong* learning culture and creating incentives for adults to learn

f. Actors delivering Upskilling Pathways

The factors involved in Upskilling pathways are mainly:

1. Government authorities - issue the necessary legal framework and facilitate the professional training process by providing public-private services and facilities as part of education and development programs, as well as by allocating funds for educational projects.
   a. Ministries: Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of European Investments and Projects, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance
   b. National Authority Employment
   c. County Employment Agencies
   d. Municipalities
   e. National Authority of Qualifications (ANC)
2. Educational Institutions
3. VET/Training Providers
4. Validation of Non-formal and Informal (VNFIL) Centres
5. NGOs and Adult Learning and education providers -non-formal education
6. Adult Learning and Education providers – formal education
7. Chambers of Commerce

8. Churches
9. Trade unions/ social partners
10. Employers
11. Library
12. Universities
13. Companies and employer associations

Stakeholder cooperation in UP: successful cooperation mechanisms, missing stakeholders and gaps in cooperation

a. Successful cooperation mechanisms

There are various successful cooperation mechanisms initiated, which we can mention:

National Level:

- **Cooperation in the second chance program: in all Romania, this program is running as a Partnership for education - school and community**

The main stakeholders involved are: Schools, County School Inspectorates, local administration, NGOs, mediators, trainers, counsellors, mass media, employers, training providers.

School-community collaboration in promoting the "*Second Chance*" Program resulted in expanding the number of classes from primary education and secondary education in disadvantaged communities and communities geographically segregated. Campaigns were carried out promotion and information in different forms (arrangement of information spaces in schools and town halls, meetings, with young people and adults who have not completed their education mandatory, exchange of experience, presenting examples of good practice, TV shows, information in the press etc.) through the support provided by representatives of local authorities, non-governmental organisations, school and health mediators, counsellors etc. in the promoting and informing the benefits offered by the program.

Involvement of responsible factors from schools and communities in popularising, information on the benefits of the Program ''*Second Chance*" led to the increase in the number of requests to view completion of compulsory education, increasing the availability of teaching staff in supporting the program and involvement in specific activities, at the manifestation of an increased interest from students.

Regional Level:

- **Cooperation in literacy and numeracy programs: County Employment Agencies, schools, municipalities, training providers, NGOs.**

The Employment Agencies organise literacy and numeracy programs for adults who have not completed primary education. Many county agencies organise these courses for the beneficiaries of the minimum guaranteed income because most of them are people who unfortunately do not know how to write, read and calculate, therefore they are offered the chance to enter into the labour market by becoming literate. After learning to write, read and calculate, they will be able to take a qualification course. The courses are held in the halls of some educational institutions, with qualified staff from the Employment Agency.

As a result, vocational training courses represent an alternative through which the unemployed can have an extra chance to get employed.

The Employment Agency intends to qualify the labour force needed by the structures subordinated to the town halls, for example green space caretakers and asphalt pavers. In this sense, collaboration protocols were signed with the municipalities, so that practical training is done within these structures and theoretical training in classes provided by the town halls.

Also, the persons registered with the employment agencies can benefit, free of charge, from assessment and certification services of the professional skills acquired through non formal and informal learning, the financing of which is ensured from the unemployment insurance budget.

Local Level:
- **Collaborations in various projects, with European funding, for various target groups:**

For example, the representatives of stakeholders involved in the Focus Group in Suceava highlighted some projects in the region where very good collaboration where established:
- People from rural areas: - close cooperation between NGOs with the labour office on profiling and registering all people with low qualifications that we identify in rural areas. We are organising job fairs together, meeting with employers and creating facilities for those difficult to employ.
- People with disabilities and special needs - close cooperation between NGOs with special schools from the region because they do not have many options to support the qualifications of youngsters with disabilities and special needs and we try to complete the offer with training opportunities offered by training providers and keep together the youngsters in the school.

b. Missing stakeholders, gaps in cooperation and challenges

There are some gaps which were identified in our focus groups, interviews, and analyses:
- Common understanding of the concept of Upskilling Pathways and the low-qualified adults
- The steps of the Upskilling Pathways according to the Recommendation of Upskilling Pathways adopted in December 2016 by the Council of European Union
- Challenges in implementing UP
- Strategy for action plan based on need analysis
- Equal policy and programs distributed between the regions

- Flexibility on organising training on the job or apprenticeship model, the most interested for vulnerable low-qualified groups because brings training, certification and income as well
- Lack of responsibilities distributed among the state offices with a big gap in communication and cooperation
- The legal frame and the national policies do not encourage the training and qualification of low-qualified people. Just the ESF program supporting currently the qualification within investing in people projects
- Specific problems in collaboration, depending on the availability of local authorities, often based on personal relationships, the disinterest of local authorities
- Mentality – the cooperation based on interest

- Ignorance of legal obligations

c. Suggestions for improvement of the challenges and gaps
- Information and awareness campaigns among low-qualified people, in different forms and at different levels, considering the complexity of the target group
- Awareness of the need and explanation of the advantages of having a competence, a qualification

- Resettlement of skills at the profile level
- Support for disadvantaged families
- Mediators and advisors for this target group
- Contact person in each public institution for the guidance of families from the Diaspora
- Updated databases with this target group and feedback from these people regarding the training/retraining, literacy programs

For further information, see **Stakeholder mapping table** here

Other relevant experiences of stakeholders' activation/cooperation

We would like to present one example of the Euro Adult Education Association's project financed by the European Social Fund, where cooperation between various partners functioned very well and we had implemented all 3 steps from Upskilling Pathways.

"RURAL FORCE - TRAINING, Certification, more chances for employment!" was a project co-financed by the ESF, Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013, Priority Axis 5 "*Promotion of active employment measures*", Major Area of intervention 5.2 "*Promotion long-term sustainability of rural areas in terms of the development of human resources and employmen*t" - POSDRU/135/5.2/S/128962.

The project lasted 18 months with the **general objective**: Ensuring increased opportunities for 940 job seekers through information activities and career counselling.

Project partnership: S.C.MPA S.R.L. - Sibiu – coordinator; ASOCIAȚIA EURO ADULT EDUCATION – București; Asociatia Dezvoltarea Capitalului Uman - Alba Iulia; Asociaţia INCEPTUS ROMANIA - Cluj Napoca; BPI S.R.L. ITALIA - Milano, Italia.

The target group consisted of 940 **people from rural areas** (50% women): 370 people looking for a job, 370 inactive people and 200 people in subsistence agriculture.
Specific objectives/Results

Development of job search skills for 940 people through **information activities and professional advice**

- Providing information about the labour market at the local and national levels,
- Evaluation and self-assessment of personality in order to guide the career,
- Developing the skills and self-confidence of job seekers,
- Training in job search methods and techniques,

Development of **professional skills** for 752 people:
- by organising professional training programs (FP) in the fields of: entrepreneurship, foreign languages, and IT – 352 people
- by a**ssessment and certification of skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning** – 400 people

Integration of 160 people into the labour market, of which:
- 140 beneficiaries of job placement services
- 20 beneficiaries of consulting activities and assistance for starting a business

Increasing the level of information of the target group through information campaigns on education and training opportunities, the labour market at regional, country and European Union level, occupational, sectoral and geographical mobility.

Organisation and implementation of internships in ITALY for 40 participants

Qualitative information about the analysis process

The Upskilling pathways analysis process consisted of:

- Analysing existing documents in the field,

- Analysing the responses of stakeholders to the questionnaires developed in the project,

- Interviews with representatives of stakeholders,

- Organising of three focus groups,

- Participation in the Job Fair organised by the Employment Agency Ilfov where we had discussions with unemployed people with low-qualification and employers.

Did the analysis process improve/change the stakeholders' commitment and contribution?
The analysis process brought a clarification of the concept of Upskilling Pathways for low-qualified individuals because we found that some of the stakeholders did not have the same understanding of this concept, as well as of the term low-qualified adult. A clarifying discussion on these concepts and reaching a consensus was needed.

Various stakeholders were involved who have attributions in a certain field and with a specific target group (for example Employment Agency - unemployed) or other stakeholders who

address several categories of persons with low qualifications (for example NGO through European projects).

We believe that an improvement in the commitment of the participants and their contribution will be achieved during the project, in the development group meetings, but the first step was made through the discussions and consensus regarding Upskilling Pathways for low-qualified adults.

How do you evaluate their level of participation in the analysis process?
We initially addressed several regions in Romania, some were very interested in participating in this project, others less. We chose to do an analysis at the level of three regions in Romania, namely North-East (Suceava), South-West Oltenia (Ramnicu Valcea) and Center Region (Brasov) and three focus groups were organised in Suceava, Ramnicu Valcea and Brasov.
Regarding the level of participation of stakeholders in the focus group in Suceava, it was special that representatives from more than 15 institutions involved in working with the target group participated and they want to be part further in the next phase of the project, namely development group.
The local television was interested and conducted an interview, and some participating institutions published information about the event on their social media pages.

In the other regions, the interest was lower, so the development group will be established in Suceava with the participation of stakeholders from the other 2 regions.

How the analysis impacted your organisations and relationships with stakeholders?
The three focus groups were organised in the 3 regions through the involvement of our partners, namely the Bucovina Institute Association in Suceava, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Brasov and the Dual Learning Association in Ramnicu Valcea.
The analysis carried out in the project contributed to the consolidation of the collaboration with our old partners but also to the development of new relationships with other stakeholders from the respective regions.

How the analysis impacted the relationships among stakeholders?
The participation of so many stakeholders in this event once again highlighted the current situation, but especially the challenges that each stakeholder faces and what ideas to find solutions to solve them.
We can say that some of the stakeholders have met before in other projects/meetings, but the current focus group brought together various types of stakeholders involved in UP for low-qualified adults.

What went well:
The focus group organised in Suceava (North East Region) was a great success. Representatives of the most important stakeholders in the region participated, who were represented by decision-makers, such as the vice mayor, deputy director of the Employment agency, school inspectors, etc. The participants were very active and committed and interested in improving

the situation of adults with low qualification levels and collaborating for this. Most of them want to continue the collaboration in the project, even to be part of the development group.

What went wrong?
Focus groups were also organised in other regions, but the participation was lower.

Lessons learnt (if any)
It is important to bring together decision-makers for discussion and consultation because they can influence the process of change and improvement of upskilling pathways for low-qualified adults and can also continue involvement in our development group.

Good practices

N.B. 'Good practices' are defined, in this context, as strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and/or evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result in supporting identification, engagement, commitment of stakeholders as well as cooperation among them, with specific reference to the UP initiative. The Good practices can be local, regional, national or international ones.

Upskilling Adults 45+ with Migrant Background it is an ERASMUS+ program and the implementing organisation in Romania is Romanian Institute for Adult Education.
The project is designed to train facilitators and provide services for educational providers that focus on upskilling middle-aged adult migrants of all genders so that they can thrive in the modern workforce. The project recognizes that migrant adults aged 45-plus constitute a vulnerable population. They face difficulties (re)integrating into the labour market due to (long-term) unemployment, de-skilling and a competency gap.

The project lists the following objectives:
- To design dedicated programmes to train staff working with adults 45+, tested as part of the project by 18 educators.
- To provide tailored, holistic services for adults aged 45+ from migrant backgrounds, so that they can access the labour market and actively participate in their community. This involves creating a combination of validation services and training offers (for upskilling), together with guidance on entrepreneurial initiatives and how to find a job.
- To develop a two-pronged learning strategy: digital skills and soft skills that can be adapted to different contexts and target groups.

More information on the website:
https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/upskilling-adults-45-migrant-background-romania

WISE for Digital Upskilling is an ERASMUS+ program and the implementing organisation in Romania is Workshops Without Borders.

The project has the following objectives:

- Developing, testing and implementation of innovative digital learning materials to be used for up-skilling of disadvantaged workers participating in work-based training in work integration social enterprises – literacy/numeracy and basic digital skills
- Developing, testing, implementation and dissemination of a set of tools and innovative digital learning materials to better prepare job coaches in work integration social enterprises as professionals equipped to promote and achieve equity, diversity and inclusion challenges in the work-based learning environment – tools for skills assessment, designing integration pathways for disadvantaged workers and life and job coaching
- Strengthening the cooperation, networking and practice sharing between organisations engaged in work-based training for adults with low qualifications in participating countries. A common set of basic digital knowledge training materials for adults with low qualifications will be developed to also include new technologies that are emerging into the labour market.

Also as a result of the project, 70 work integration social enterprises, and other parties interested to support and develop work integration social enterprise such as labour agencies that will attend the multiplication event will receive project outputs on these topics. 20 trainers/ staff that perform job coaching activities will improve their knowledge and skills. In addition, 10 work integration social enterprise managers and future trainers will improve their knowledge and skills on designing and implementing effective work integration programmes for low skilled adults, identifying social indicators and social reporting in a work integration social enterprise following the short-term joint staff training events.
More information on the website: https://riseromania.ro/en/wise-for-digital-upskilling

SEPAL project
Leader of the project was Bucovina Institute Association and worked closely with the Suceava Labor Office on supporting young NEETS to access the training and practical stages of learning within the SEPAL project.
The SEPAL Project is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway grants found for youth employment. SEPAL is implemented in 5 European countries in partnership with: Bucovina Institute in Romania, Fundacio Privada Pere Closa in Spain, with ZISPB in Lithuania, with KoiSPE Diadromes in Greece and with KOMES in Poland.
SEPAL project aims to empower young individuals by offering support services for employment and practical apprenticeships stages for 600 NEETs, aged 18-29 years old and coming from vulnerable groups: youth with disabilities, Roma, migrants, low skilled and school drop-outs.
The cooperation with Suceava Labor Office started in November 2018 when the Bucovina Institute through project SEPAL offered practical apprenticeship stages to the NEETs youngsters. We signed a cooperation agreement in order to support registration of young NEETs from rural areas, profiling them according with local legislation, offering counselling and orientation by Bucovina Institute WISE services (Work Integration Social Enterprise services that we are accredited) and the labour office support on organising the job fare mediation with employers and the companies willing to host a learning practical stage for youngsters.

We developed an LSC approach (Local Stakeholders Committee) with coordination of the Labour Office and it was based on constant meetings and actions in order to support the youth NEET employment in our region Suceava.

The project developed a platform for NEETS registration, diagnoses and communication peer to peer and the list of available jobs provided by LSC Suceava Labour Office was permanently updated.

The specialists from Suceava Labor Office (SLO) was involved on the development of support services for NEETs employment in close working with Bucovina WISE specialists, on the piloting stage of the SEPAL Innovation Book and Apprenticeship Book, we had delegates for the international exchanges stages and the SLO participated on the international training sessions.

The great results of this cooperation proved that, we need to cooperate and complete our support services on supporting youngsters for employment, if the NGO sector has more access to the funds for innovation the labour office has the role for validation of the new approach, the experience on being part of all stage of the project implementation bring a significant chance for training, specialisation and exchange with the best practices across Europe.

More details: www.bucovinainstitute.org , info@bucovinainstitute.org;

Priorities for Development Groups

The Development Group will be composed of representatives of various stakeholders from two regions in Romania (North-East and South-West Oltenia) and will meet regularly. The category of the stakeholders: Public authority, Adult Learning and Education providers – formal and non-formal, VET providers, NGOs, Employment Services, Employers, Trade Union, Social services, Universities, Secondary schools, Libraries and Adult Education centres.

The meetings of the development group will be organised as much as possible face-to-face so that the discussion will be more interactive and constructive.

The priorities for the Development Group, based on the focus groups meetings and on the desk research are the following:

- Clarification of the concept of Upskilling Pathways and Common understanding of the Recommendation of Upskilling Pathways adopted in December 2016 by the Council of European Union;
- Identification of the target group that the project refers to low-qualified persons;
- Dissemination of good practices that members of the development group have and lessons learned;
- The limits of competence of the stakeholders and the responsibilities between stakeholders;
- Improve the tracking mechanism of low-qualified persons and find solutions to be better guided on the labour market needs regarding their skills;
- Involvement of the companies in the learning and evaluation process for the low-qualified persons and motivation of the companies;
- Discussion on how to improve flexible learning pathways, but also outreach, and skills assessment for the target group
- Discussion and find solutions for improving cooperation structures between stakeholders;
- Continuous capacity building for trainers who are involved in the upskilling target group;

- Dissemination and exploitation of other European partner's experiences regarding Upskilling Pathways.

The Development group will have at least 4 meetings to analyse, discuss and have consultations about the following tasks:

In the first meeting of the development group we will focus on the following:
- The detailed presentation of the project and clarification of the concept of Upskilling Pathways;
- Common understanding of the Recommendation of Upskilling Pathways adopted in December 2016 by the Council of European Union;
- Identification of the target group that the project refers to low-qualified persons;
- Analysis of the target group's training needs and the possibility of being involved in community life;
- Dissemination of good practices that members of the development group have and lessons learned and set up an online group for discussion.

The second meeting will be brainstorming with all members of the development group on the following topics:
- The limits of competence of the stakeholders and target groups that they address;
- To set the responsibilities and improve the field`s governance in terms of overlapping, responsibilities between stakeholders,
- Improve the tracking mechanism of low-qualified persons and find solutions to be better guided on the labour market needs regarding their skills.
- Discussions and consultation about the target group's attitude regarding the incentives.

In the third meeting, starting from the identification of the GT and the delimitation of the Limits of competence, we will establish the role, the attributions of each one and the future actions. The next topics will be discussed:
- Actual situation and the gaps in UP;
- Collaboration mechanism between Stakeholders;
- How can we improve skills assessment and tailored learning offers for the target group;
- Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning but also recognition of second-chance learning;
- Involvement of the companies in the learning and evaluation process for the low-qualified persons and motivation of the companies;
- Identification of possible cooperation structures.

In the fourth meeting we focus on the improvement of the actual situation:
- Discussion on how to improve flexible learning pathways, but also outreach and move from non-formal to formal
- Discussion and find solutions for improving cooperation structures between stakeholders;
- Continuous capacity building for trainers who are involved in the upskilling target group;
- Dissemination and exploitation of other European partner's experiences regarding Upskilling Pathways.
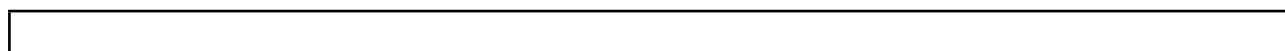
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Country Analysis

GREECE

2.5 **Country Analysis** - Greece

Country	GREECE
Responsible organisation/s	HELLENIC ADULT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Upskilling Pathways in each country: state of art in the implementation, main target groups, challenges

1. **Identification of the target groups**

The issue of identifying target groups is complex. Within the process of focus groups, three views have been identified.

The first view adopts the criteria of the staff working document of the European Commission (2019):

a. Adults with lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2). At the end of the 2010s, 3/10 of the adult population belonged to this category.

b. Adults with low basic qualifications. According to the PIAAC study[61], 2/10 of Greek adults scored at/or below the lowest level in both literacy and numeracy (25th position in 32 OECD member countries), while Greece held the 26th position regarding adults who failed ICT core or had no computer experience.

However, the question arises as to whether people with low basic qualifications should include those who lack new basic qualifications. According to CEDEFOP (2014), ICT skills, foreign languages, social, organizational, communication, and entrepreneurship skills are new basic qualifications which, together with basic skills, are needed to develop in the contemporary knowledge society.

According to the second view, adopted by the Labour Market Needs Assessment Mechanism, the adults with low qualifications are identified according to the criteria used by the International Labour Organization (ISCO system), where people with low qualifications are considered unskilled workers. In Greece, this target group amounts to 14% of private sector workers and is composed mainly of women and older people.

According to the third view, adults with low qualifications should also include a) workers who do not have the skills required by their jobs (a survey by the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises/SEV showed that this percentage is around 20%), b) workers at risk of losing their jobs due to technological development, c) the portion of upper-secondary general education graduates who do not continue their studies and lack professional qualifications, d) immigrants and refugees.

In any case, the group of adults with low qualifications tends to decrease over time. As an example, in 2022, only 9% of new jobs in the private sector were for people considered to be with low qualifications according to the ISCO system.

In conclusion, **the category of *with low qualifications* is not sufficiently defined, which makes it difficult both to explore upskilling pathways and to discuss the formulation of an upskilling strategy**. In the following sections, we will follow the criteria for identifying the first aforementioned view, which is shared by the majority of participants in the focus groups.

2.Upskilling pathways

In Greece there are 4 upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults:

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[61] OECD, 2019

a. CVET
b. General adult education
c. Skills assessment and validation
d. Professional Guidance

2a. The CVET system
Overview
The CVET system is the basic pathway through which adult upskilling can take place. 8/10 of education and training programmes for adults are vocational in nature. However, within the CVET system, the share of CVET programmes for adults with low qualifications
is limited. According to CEDEFOP data (2020), Greece was in the bottom three positions in the European Union with a CVET participation rate for low-skilled 25-64-year-olds, of 0.8% compared to 4.3% of the EU average. More recently, the RegALE survey on Greece (2023) showed that 91.3% of the participant experts stated that there are no investments to adequately meet the learning needs of disadvantaged groups. This situation is due to a number of reasons:
a) Until 2021, there was no national strategy for the upskilling of adults with low qualifications. In 2021, the Strategic Plan for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth of the General Secretariat of the same name was announced, which includes a specific chapter on access to ALE for people with low qualifications. Important provisions are mentioned concerning Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET), as well as Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) and General Adult Education programmes, which are aimed at people with disabilities, prisoners, migrants and refugees, as well as students attending Second Chance Schools. However, there is no explicit provision for the other target groups of low-skilled.
b) Programmes for adults with low qualifications are very demanding (requiring extensive practical training and specific adaptation to the educational needs of the participants), and therefore costly.
c) The adults with low qualifications themselves avoid participating in relevant programmes because of internal and external barriers (see section 2a.6).
d) There is a widespread perception in government agencies that in a few years the group of adults with low qualifications will have radically shrunk.
Regarding the overall quality of the CVET programmes, recent studies found it to be low (CEDEFOP, 2019; European Commission, 2022). Specifically, regarding CVET's contribution to skills development, Greece's score across indicators was 10 out of 100 in 2018, with an average EU level of 34 (CEDEFOP, 2019). Below are presented the parameters of the CVET state of the art with specific references, where data are available, to the points concerning adults with low qualifications.
Governance
The lack of coherent and collaborative planning of CVET actions, as well as the overlapping responsibilities of the Ministries of Education and Labour are long-standing features of the field[62].
Providers
The main CVET providers are the 250 Centres of Life Long Learning (KDVMs). In the period 2012-2019, the only requirement for the licensing of KDVMs was that they had the necessary

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[62] CEDEFOP, 2018; RegALE, 2023

building infrastructure. From 2020, KDVMs are required to have at least three staff members with experience in lifelong learning and distance learning. However, in the previous period, their expertise suffered a serious setback as they functioned without the obligation to operate by adult education standards. From 2022, for KDVMs to be eligible to implement CVET programmes co-financed by EU funds, they are additionally required to have ISO certifications (e.g., 9001/2015, 27001/2013, 27701/2019, 21001/2018, 29993/2017, 29990/2010, etc.). However, these certifications concern organisational and administrative functions and not educational ones, except for 29990/2010, which is not required for small-sized KDVMs, which constitute the majority, while for medium and large-sized KDVMs it is optional.

Other providers are the 18 Centres for Training and Lifelong Learning (KEDIVIMs) that are linked to Higher Education Institutions, as well as the in-house training units of enterprises. Both of these types of providers are doubtful whether they have the necessary CVET know-how because they are often not properly staffed. Also, their activities are limited. As an example, according to a survey by SEV (2019), only 44.3% of enterprises with less than 50 employees (99% of enterprises) provide training to employees. Moreover, in a recent CVET programme targeting 150,000 unemployed, KDVMs trained 95% of the beneficiaries while KEDIVIMs only trained the remaining 5%.

Trainers

In the period 2007-2009, adult trainers attended an extensive training programme offered by the state, much of which concerned the training of vulnerable social groups. In 2009 this action was abolished, however, according to the mentioned Strategic Plan for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth, it is to be reactivated.

Relation of CVET to labour market needs

This relationship has been underdeveloped in Greece over time. Recently, some progress has been made, although difficulties remain (see next section on cooperation mechanisms).

Disposition and incentives for trainees to participate

In most cases, adults with low qualifications do not express an inclination to participate in CVET programmes because of the following complementary reasons: a) The programmes often do not correspond to their educational needs (they have an increased theoretical character and little practical part, apprenticeship is absent, and they are also not related to professional rights; see 2c. b) They face external barriers to participation (lack of available time, difficulties in travelling, difficulty in paying the fees for programmes that are not offered free of charge through co-financing by the EU and/or the Greek state). c) They have internal barriers, because they often have traumatic experiences of involvement in the education system, lack of familiarity with the learning process, and doubt that they will be able to meet the requirements of the programmes. d) They have insufficient information about the programmes offered. e) The problematic quality of the CVET field discourages participation.

It is also noted that the training allowance provided for participation in the co-funded programmes could distort the trainees' incentive to learn.

2b. The general adult education system

General adult education is mainly provided by the Second Chance Schools (SDE), which operate in all Departments, as well as by several NGOs, Cultural Centers, etc. SDEs lead to a diploma of lower secondary education and offer multiple opportunities for creative learning and skills

development. However, the diploma does not lead to professional rights, which is an increasingly persistent demand of students.

2c. Validation and recognition of skills acquired

All the CVET trainees must participate in a certification process[63]. This process can open up an upskilling possibility and can lead the participants to an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses regarding their skills. However, often the certification process is limited to oral and/or written examinations and lacks a laboratory part. Also, almost all candidates are certified, which reduces the credibility of the process. Additionally, the certification is not linked to professional rights. The latter, which only concern the legally regulated professions, are awarded after special exams by the Regional Directorates of the Ministries and the Chambers of Commerce. Finally, there is no formalized system for assessment and validation of prior learning.

2d. Professional Guidance

This service is offered mainly through the Employment Promotion Centres (KPA), run by the Public Employment Service (DYPA) and, in addition, by the Community Centres of the municipalities. In the last three years, efforts have been made to strengthen professional guidance: a) The National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Professional Guidance (EOPPEP) is designing a certification system for career guidance advisors and manages an online system of professional guidance. b) A pilot system of Individual Learning Accounts (ALDs) is established by DYPA. The ALDs record the CVET programmes received by each holder and the available subsidized CVET and guidance rights. c) A Digital Skills Portal has been created. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of guidance advisors (1 for 3.300 unemployed), and a number of them do not hold the necessary qualifications[64].

Stakeholder cooperation in UP: Successful cooperation mechanisms, missing stakeholders and gaps in cooperation

Overview

As mentioned, a structural historical characteristic of the CVET system and the adult education field in Greece is the lack of a coordinated strategy, governed by cooperation mechanisms and synergies. In the survey of the research organization diaNEOsis *Adult Education and Training* (2021), the 33 experts who participated expressed the opinion that the lack of strategy is the second problem of the field after the lack of quality. In the RegALE survey (2023) 87% of the Greek respondents shared the view that the field is constituted by a set of misaligned systems and a lack of synergies among relevant stakeholders (much higher than the European average: 72%).

Another key feature of the Greek system is its centralised structure. Most of the responsibilities are held and decisions are made by the Ministries and the implementing central agencies, while the role of Regions and Municipalities, as well as of social partners, is limited. Regarding the providers of the field, they do not participate in any planning and decision-making bodies. On

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[63] Joint Ministerial Decision 82759/2022, article 5
[64] Glaroudi, 2018

the other hand, however, synergies between other stakeholders are not frequent either, although there are positive examples.

The following paragraphs deal with two key issues where the dysfunctions of the governance of the field are explicitly manifested including, as is understandable, the dysfunctions of its sub-sector, which is the processes of upskilling of the low-qualified. The first issue concerns the diagnosis of skills needs, and the second is the process of designing and implementing training programmes. The relevant good practices that have been identified will be presented in the last section of this Annex.

Skills needs analysis

Several central agencies have been created during the last three years and are tasked with skills diagnosis and its alignment with labour market needs: a) DYPA; b) Employment, Social Security, Welfare and Social Affairs Expert Unit (MEKY) that is specialized in skills diagnosis and formulates related policy proposals; c) Central Council for Vocational Education and Training (KSEEK) that is supervised by the Ministry of Education, is charged with planning and evaluating VET actions, policies and programmes, and submits to the Minister every three years a *Strategic Plan for VET, Lifelong Learning and Youth*; d) Production-Labour Market Liaison Councils, that are regional bodies which promote the involvement of employers in the development and update of VET programmes; e) National Council of Human Resources Skills (NCHRS) that is supervised by the Ministry of Labour and formulates the *Strategy of Human Resources* which is submitted to the Minister every year. Moreover, the social partners also investigate the labour market needs through their own research institutes. All these bodies, whose responsibilities seemingly overlap, form a mechanism which it is provided that is coordinated by the Government Skills Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, while, at the same time, DYPA's governor is named National Coordinator for Skills.

As a result of the complexity and overlaps of the above structure, it is difficult to formulate a single and comprehensive body of data on skills needs This difficulty is reflected in Joint Ministerial Decision 82759/2022[65], which states that accepted diagnosis for CVET programmes may be anyone coming from any of the mentioned bodies.

However, in practice, MEKY is the most adequately equipped body with expertise, specialists and infrastructure. MEKY has already established a valid and broad database of skills needs with a four-year horizon and has an open channel of cooperation with social partners. However, several problems arise: The data of MEKY are not sufficiently exploited by central authorities, Regions and providers because they either overlook them or lack relevant information. Therefore, a crucial challenge is to make these data available to all relevant actors, and for the central administration to simplify the skills diagnostic system by explicitly putting the NICU at the centre.

Process of designing and implementing CVET programmes

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[65] Article 3.1.1

The problems of lack of synergies that emerge in this process are as follows.

a. The design of programmes is carried out exclusively by the central administration without the involvement of the social partners, employers and providers. In this context, the programmes, including the apprenticeships that take place within them, are not sufficiently linked to the needs of the labour market and the trainees.

b. Municipalities and Regions do not have the expected financial and technical support from the central government to develop upskilling programmes. For example, the Municipal Lifelong Learning Centres, which offered general adult education programmes mainly to low-skilled citizens, have ceased to operate.

c. In the evaluation of CVET programmes, as regulated by Law 4921/2022[66], there is no provision for an internal evaluation with the opinion of the key actors, which are the staff who designed and organized the programmes, as well as the trainers.

For further information, see **Stakeholder mapping table** here

Other relevant experiences of stakeholders' activation/cooperation

The development of partnerships between stakeholders is not a structural characteristic of Greek society for reasons that are due to the historical formation of its culture which is competitive rather than cooperative[67]. Indicatively, the RegALE survey (2023) showed that 95% of Greek adult learning professionals share the view that there is weak alignment between central and local policies.

Nevertheless, some positive experiences can be recorded, stemming from individual initiatives of cooperation between state agencies, municipalities, social partners, adult education providers, and universities. Some of these initiatives are, indicatively, the following.

1.A methodology for developing CVET programmes was recently developed through the collaboration of all stakeholders, EOPPEP and DYPA.

2.The Labour Institute of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (INE/GSEE) coordinated the action *Access to the Labour Market: Gaining Work Experience*, which targeted 7,000 young people (up to 29 years old), graduates of secondary and post-secondary vocational education. The action was carried out through a consortium of training institutions of all social partners. The aim was to develop vocational and social skills to support participants in entering or remaining in the labour market.

3. Nine Greek Municipalities have joined UNESCO's network *Learning Cities*. The Learning Cities encourage the cooperation of institutions and active citizens to diffuse learning in the city, with a focus on supporting vulnerable social groups. The example of Larissa-Learning City, which has been awarded by UNESCO and the European Association for the Education of Adults/EAEA, is

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[66] Article 38
[67] Fleming, Kokkos, & Deliyannis, 2022

considered particularly positive. In Larissa, 102 educational, professional, cultural and social actors cooperate to run the Citizens' University and several educational and cultural activities, mainly targeting the unemployed, young people, parents, people with disabilities, elderly people, refugees, migrants and Roma. The outstanding success of the Larissa project is due, firstly, to the strong political will of the municipal authorities who prioritized synergies for learning, secondly, to a group of citizens with experience in adult education who embraced the project and actively participated in it, and thirdly, to the fact that Larissa drew on the expertise of UNESCO and Greek organizations specialised in adult education.

4. A consortium, consisting of the Youth and Lifelong Learning Foundation/INEDIVIM (a governmental body), the Hellenic Society for Local Development and Self-Government/EETAA, the General Secretariat of Professional Education, Training, Lifelong Learning & Youth, the National Council of Youth, and the Hellenic Open University implemented a project to support the Lifelong Learning Centres of the 300 Municipalities of the country. The project included (a) the training of 4,000 adult educators, and (b) the development of 67 manuals of teaching materials in the thematic areas of environment, new technologies, entrepreneurship, social skills, foreign languages and arts. These materials were the reference for adult education in the municipalities in the decade 2013-2023, until the abolition of the Municipal Lifelong Learning Centres.

5. The Institute of Industrial and Business Education and Training/IVEPE, in cooperation with the cultural organization NEON and the Hellenic Adult Education Association/HAEA, conducted a training programme for 1,200 teachers and adult educators from all over the country on the topic of linking the use of artworks to the curriculum of various courses.

6. A number of Second Chance Schools/SDEs are working with municipalities aiming to integrate graduates into the labour market, on the one hand, and providing care for sick students, on the other. Also, SDEs cooperate with NGOs to integrate refugees and migrants into the curricula.

7. Some Banks, such as the National Bank of Greece, and some other companies cooperate with Higher Education Institutions to train their staff and organize student apprenticeships within their framework.

8. In the last three years, HAEA has collaborated with 12 Universities in the country to organize two conferences entitled *Skills Development* and *Education and Change*.

9. Several KDVMs are collaborating with enterprises to organize staff training programmes, as well as to organize apprenticeships for unemployed trainees within their framework.

10. Cooperates with social partners to diagnose skills needs.

Qualitative information about the analysis process

Stakeholders' participation, commitment and contribution
The stakeholders showed particular interest in participating in the focus groups. This can be attributed, firstly, to their commitment to the field of adult education, secondly, to the fact that they rarely have the opportunity to meet and exchange views, thirdly, to their desire to have their voice heard in order to contribute to the improvement of the problematic situation in the field, and fourthly, to the prestige of the specific European project, the coordinating organization and the Greek partner organization, which created the guarantees of a valid scientific approach. Almost all the invited stakeholder representatives participated in the focus groups (which lasted 2.5 hours) despite their very busy agenda.

The stakeholders' contribution can be considered very important because, due to their great experience, they provided views and information not found or partially reported in the literature. Also, their coexistence around the same round table allowed them to enrich their views through the perspectives of the other participants and to interact with each other. The result was that the final, overall statement of views was synthetic and very rich. Therefore, the methodological choice of gathering views through focus groups can be considered apt.

How the analysis impacted the relationships among stakeholders

Participants had the opportunity to get to know and appreciate the views of other stakeholders, which they were not aware of or had not been informed of all their dimensions. This process added additional depth and validity to their considerations. At the same time, relationships and plans for networking, partnerships and collaborations were developed among the participants. Also, the need for regular meetings and exchanges of views between stakeholders, something that is lacking in the Greek adult education field, was perceived. Typical relevant references expressed:

> *I have never seen us talking in depth very much together about our issues. It would be good if we could get together more often. We shouldn't be discussing in fragments, but we need serious discussion from all the relevant actors who can bring about changes in our field.*
> *I suggest that a more permanent forum like this be created to generate recommendations to policymakers. I would be very interested in participating.*

How the analysis impacted our organization and relationships with stakeholders

One of the main tasks of our organization is to promote dialogue and networking among the stakeholders of adult education. So far, our activities have been conferences, conferences, workshops, as well as webinars with the participation of 2-to 3 guests. In these formats, the dialogue is conducted either among many persons or among very few. However, the round table's format, which has analogies with the focus group, has the additional specific advantages mentioned above. We will therefore include this form of dialogue in our future activities. During the focus groups, the HAEA committed to the participants to take the initiative and invite them to a subsequent round table' or similar webinar. The proposal was well received by all.

What went well

See how the process impacted the participants.

What went wrong

The participation of 8-9 people in the FGs limited, to a certain extent, due to time constraints, the full expression of the opinion of some participants. From now on, it seems preferable to have 6-7 participants in relevant FGs.

Lessons learned

-See the last paragraph.

-Some interesting suggestions emerged from the focus groups: a) To provide specific and adequate counselling services to low-skilled adults. b) To follow up on the progress of low-skilled people after their participation in adult education programmes, which is not done so far. c) An institutional framework should be created to provide for the participation of stakeholders of adult learning and education/ALE in the design of the relevant programmes. d) The resources allocated to various private bodies to organize certification procedures not linked to professional rights should be given to enterprises. The aim would be for enterprises to organize structured apprenticeships, aimed in particular at job-seekers in the sector with low qualifications, with the

obligation to recruit a number of them. e) A think tank should be set up to study the European experience on training, counselling, certification and vocational integration of people with low skills. This experience could be adapted to the Greek reality, put to consultation and formulate proposals to the relevant bodies.

Good practices

N.B. 'Good practices' are defined, in this context, as strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and/or evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result in supporting identification, engagement, commitment of stakeholders as well as cooperation among them, with specific reference to the UP initiative. The Good practices can be local, regional, national or international ones.

The project EaSI/*BASIC Building Alternative Skills' Innovative Schemes*

Within the framework of the European Council Recommendation *Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*, DYPA submitted a proposal to participate in the European-funded project EaSI and then participated, in 2018-2020, in the project BASIC. DYPA undertook to carry out the Greek part of the project in collaboration with the General Secretariat of Professional Education and Training, Life Long Learning & Youth, the Centre for Educational Policy Development of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (KANEP/GSEE), and the Small Business Institute of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (IME/GSEVEE).

The project aimed to formulate a comprehensive set of methodologies and tools regarding upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults to assist them in being included in Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework/NQF. The main components of the project were as follows:
- Identification of target groups and relevant upskilling pathways.
-Review of theories and methodologies regarding adults with low qualifications upskilling pathways and the assessment of skills acquired.
- Development of manuals for trainers and trainees on the development of basic skills (numeracy, literacy, ICT skills).
- Creation of a digital tool for the online upskilling process based on Moodle technology.

The project was piloted, based on the principles of adult education, with target groups a group of long-term and a group of short-term unemployed. The duration was 435 hours (260 hours of face-to-face learning and 175 hours of online learning). An evaluation and dissemination of the results followed. However, to date, there has been no generalised implementation of the project.

Certification of security guards

EOPPEP, in collaboration with the Centre for Studies and Security/KEMEA, organizes every two months a professional certification process that is addressed to security guards. The participants must be graduates of secondary education or, alternatively, have relevant professional experience or have successfully completed a relevant KEMEA's CVET programme. The certification exams include a theoretical and a practical part, which use questions randomly drawn from a question bank. Candidates that complete the certification exams successfully are awarded by EOPPEP a Certificate of Professional Competence that corresponds to Level 3 of the NQF, and acquire professional licenses through procedures organized by the individual Regions.

EOPPEP plans to extend the application of the certification of adults with low qualifications to other professions. Procedures are already in place for hairdressers and nail care technicians.

Training of machine operators

INE/GSEE collaborated with PYPA and MEKY to develop a training programme aimed at adults with low qualifications who are small-scale machine operators. This occupational sector is not regulated by law, so it is questionable whether workers have the necessary skills. A specific occupational profile was created through an extensive study of the needs of the labour market and the target population, which was carried out with the broad participation of professional organisations, employers, and the workers themselves. In this way, the training programme carried out was highly targeted, effective, and secured the consensus of all stakeholders.

Brewer's training programme

The Hellenic Brewery Atalantis/EZA SA organized a 3-year two-way training program (theoretical training and in-house apprenticeship), which was addressed to unemployed graduates of secondary general education. The program was implemented in cooperation with the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises/SEV, the Association of Small Independent Brewers of Greece, and the Hellenic-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The benefits of the program were: a) Development of the skills and culture of continuous improvement of the participants. b) Professional integration of all graduates in the brewing business. c) Increased productivity and level of in-service training of EZA, as well as strengthening the social responsibility of the company.

Agricultural training program

The Hellenic Open University/EAP collaborated with the American Agricultural School of Thessaloniki for the training of adults with low qualifications on organic farming, as well as the production and management of cabbage products. The theoretical training was conducted through the EAP platform and the practical training took place at the farm of the Agricultural School.

Synergies in the context of certification procedures

Within the framework of the professional certification examinations that are held in each Region, the examination committees are composed of a representative of the competent Directorate of the Region, a representative of EOPPEP, and a representative of the relevant Federation. The practical part of the examinations consists of practical assessments that are carried out through synergies of the Region with the employers and the training providers of the area which offer their facilities for this purpose.

Priorities for Development Groups

The issues of upskilling pathways for adults with low qualifications are interconnected and at the same time are interwoven with the broader issues of the ALE field. The key interconnected issues that are proposed to be discussed within the Greek ALE framework, as well as in subsequent Development Groups of stakeholders are as follows:

1. Development of a culture of collaborative and ALE culture among the stakeholders of the field.
2. Decentralization of the ALE system with greater involvement of the Municipalities and Regions, while strengthening their ALE know-how.
3. Improvement of the field's governance in terms of overlapping responsibilities between governmental agencies, as well as the development of an integrated and coherent strategy.
4. Formulation of an institutional framework that promotes synergies between stakeholders, with an emphasis on the upskilling of adults with low qualifications.
5. Identification of the adults with low qualifications and the relevant sub-groups.
6. Examination of adults with low qualifications training needs, their attitude towards training and apprenticeship, as well as the incentives and pathways that regard their involvement in upskilling procedures.
7. Improvement of the skills diagnosis mechanism with particular emphasis on the labour market needs regarding the basic and new basic skills.
8. Informing stakeholders about the role and database of the Employment, Social Security, Welfare and Social Affairs Expert Unit (MEKY).
9. Reinforcement of the link between the content of ALE programmes and labour market skill needs.
10. Training of staff of CVET providers and development of their know-how, with an emphasis on the processes of low-skilled upskilling.
11. Training and continuous professional development of ALE trainers with an emphasis on skills development.
12. Participation of ALE providers' staff and trainers in the evaluation of ALE programmes.
13. Incentives for enterprises to become more involved in the provision of apprenticeship opportunities, especially for the low-skilled.
14. Link of CVET and general adult education with professional rights.
15. Improvement of the skills assessment and validation processes.
16. Recognition and validation of prior non-formal and informal learning.
17. Qualitative and quantitative reinforcement of professional guidance services, in particular of those addressed to low-qualified adults.
18. Creative use of the Digital Portal and the Individual Learning Accounts.
19. Dissemination of good practices of upskilling pathways that have taken place, as well as of the lessons learned.
20. Creation of a forum for dialogue between stakeholders on crucial ALE issues, with an emphasis on upskilling processes of adults with low qualifications.
21. Exploitation of European experience regarding the above issues.
22. Incentives and provision of know-how to the municipalities to become Learning Cities according to the Larissa model.
23. Exploitation of European experience regarding the above issues.
24. Incentives and provision of know-how to the municipalities to become Learning Cities according to the Larissa model.

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Country Analysis

ITALY

Country Analysis - Italy

Country	Italy
Responsible organisation/s	FORMA.Azione srl

Upskilling Pathways in each country: state of the art in the implementation, main target groups, challenges

The Italian legislative framework concerning Upskilling Pathways is consistent and relevant, as the **National Report on the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation**[68] highlights, and adult participation is increasing steadily, but slowly.

The **National Strategic Plan for the Upskilling and Reskilling of the adult population**[69] has developed an action for the first three-year implementation period (2021/23) that focuses on three main aspects, in order to strengthen the coordination between the different national policies:

- the first one is about **improving the existing services and their outreach** by addressing strategic investments not only to increase the services' attractiveness, effectiveness, accessibility and proximity, but also to raise the skills of guidance professionals;
- the second one concerns the importance of **keeping a balance between maintaining basic skills central while personalising the existing offer** according to various factors, such as context, final beneficiaries, content, timing and methods of learning assessment, teaching and IT support. By basic skills it is meant raising and updating the literacy and qualification levels of the adult population, offering a personalisation of education, training, work and social-work inclusion services, and qualifying demand and use of skills by strengthening entrepreneurship and management competences;
- the third one is about **intermediating and synchronising skills supply and demand**, by intervening both at a system and at an individual level. The main action will involve the improvement of the quality of services in order to enhance the portability of skills, promote the alliance between formal and non-formal and informal learning and strengthen active ageing and reverse mentoring.

The implementation of UP in Italy involves various **stakeholders**, starting from the **Italian government** that plays a crucial role both in formal ALE, aimed at obtaining middle-school or high school diploma as well as literacy in Italian as a second language (Ministry of Education), and VET and non-formal ALE (Ministry of Labour through the National Agency for Active Labour Policies, that coordinates the Regional authorities, that transpose and implement the national laws in the reference territorial areas).

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[68] The full report can be read here (Italian):
https://www.lavoro.gov.it/notizie/pagine/apprendimento-permanente-report-upskilling-pathways
[69] The plan is available here (Italian):
https://www.lavoro.gov.it/priorita/pagine/piano-strategico-nazionale-per-lo-sviluppo-delle-competenze-della-popolazione-adulta

Universities, vocational training centres and adult education centres design and implement adult education programs, provide learning resources and facilities and collaborate with other organisations to offer a diverse range of learning opportunities.

Non-profit organisations, community-based groups and NGOs also contribute, mainly in non-formal ALE and for specific areas, such as language learning, immigrant integration or skills development.

ALE providers, employers and Public/Private Employment Services cooperate in order to align the skills taught with the labour market needs.

Employers and industry associations work together with educational institutions to develop vocational training programs, offer internships and apprenticeships, and provide input on curriculum design, but not always regularly.

Research institutions and evaluation agencies (INDIRE, INAPP – public research centres) are also indirectly involved, as their studies and findings contribute to develop evidence-based policies, improve programs and share best practices among stakeholders.

As for the main **target groups**, adults with low skills in literacy represent 27.9% of the adult Italian population (16-65 years), according to the latest available PIAAC survey. However, this percentage does not correspond to a specific target group but rather to individuals with different characteristics. Adults with low qualifications tend to be concentrated in the older age groups (55-65 years), but a significant share can be found also among younger individuals (9,6% in the 16-24 years old group and 15% in the 25-34 years old one).

Concerning the implementation of Upskilling Pathways, specific challenges were identified:

- the first one is about **ensuring that the variety of actors and levels of governance that participate in adult education are a strength rather than an obstacle**. Since the country is now equipped with a multi-year scope and duration national strategy (National Plan for the development of the skills of the adult population), there should be no impediments in terms of fluidity of the decision-making process and the implementation of the defined policies.
- The second one concerns the need to **concentrate investments, resources, intelligences and skills** to achieve the objectives set out in the European Skills Agenda for 2025[70] and in the Action Plan on the Pillar of Social Rights by 2030[71]. All stakeholders involved should concentrate their investments in areas like motivation, outreach, guidance and validation, path customization and Labour Market Intelligence.
- The third one is about **using the new financial support instruments to their maximum potential**, therefore planning and monitoring carefully to avoid dispersion and/or redundancy, which can threaten the ability to solve problems and respond to citizens' needs.

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[70] Please find the document here:
https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9723&furtherNews=yes#navItem-1
[71] Please find the document here: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1607&langId=en

- The fourth one concerns the **assurance that the objectives and messages of the VET Recommendation[72] and those of the Osnabrück Declaration[73] are fully taken into account** and included in the National Implementation Plan.
- The fifth and final one involves the ability to **increase the mastery of Skills for life** (Action 8 of the Skills Agenda) by adults with low qualifications, developing skills audit systems, personalised educational paths, identification and validation skills systems built ad hoc to enhance the mastery of this type of skills. VNFIL opportunities and services should be further promoted and be more accessible for both citizens and VET/ALE professionals, especially at a regional and national level.

Stakeholder cooperation in UP: successful cooperation mechanisms, missing stakeholders and gaps in cooperation

Just as different stakeholders are active in Italy in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways, so we can find different examples of cooperation mechanisms.

- the **GOL programme**, a reform action within Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), whose aim is to upgrade active labour policy services. GOL is implemented by the Regions and Autonomous Provinces and it envisages the cooperation between public and private actors in order to offer various services, such as paths to access the labour market, professional upskilling and reskilling and paths in cooperation with other territorial services in case of complex needs (e.g. disability, fragility).
- **Interprofessional funds**, that support the training needs of workers from different sectors and are funded by contributions from employers and employees. The amount of the contribution depends on a percentage of the workers' wage and it is collected by the National Social Security Institute (INPS) or other entities. The programs, which are delivered by accredited providers, may offer vocational training, professional development courses, language courses and other forms of continuous learning.
- **Territorial networks for lifelong learning** are also involved in the implementation of UP in Italy. These networks include educational institutions (schools, Universities, vocational training centres and adult education) as well as employers and industry associations, community organisations and NGOs. The coordination and support to the network is provided by local authorities (municipalities, regional government). This form of cooperation, however, is not present in every region.
- **Repubblica Digitale** (Digital Republic)[74], a national initiative promoted by the Department for Digital Transformation of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The main aim is to accompany the country's digital transition process by combating digital divide, supporting digital inclusion and fostering education in ICT through open working

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[72] Please find the document here:
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1606987593071&uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29
[73] Please find the document here:
https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f731da19-6d0b-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
[74] Italian website here: https://repubblicadigitale.innovazione.gov.it/it/

groups that elaborate policy documents and promote the exchange of best practices. The Technical Steering Committee is composed of many different actors, such as representatives from different ministries, the Conference of Regions, of Provinces and of Municipalities, the Chamber of Commerce, representatives from Universities, research and public media companies, employers' associations, VET providers, citizens' associations of the National Coalition for Digital Competences.
- the National Group for Lifelong Learning (GNAP), that promotes lifelong learning as a right of every person through consultation, public events and working groups to address all the relevant policy makers in adult education.

The main reason why gaps occur in stakeholders' involvement is the **lack of a closer coordination and a more effective communication among the different actors in ALE** (mainly government agencies, educational institutions, employers and civil society organisations). In particular, the ALE system in Italy doesn't see as main player Public Employment Services and Employers, as well as CSOs: this hampers the capacity both to reach out to learners, especially the ones with disadvantaged backgrounds, and to effectively link their learning path with employment opportunities or employers' needs for skills.

Since **the Regional authorities are in charge of implementing the national legislation**, there are also significant variations among the different regional/local ALE offers; this should be evened out by promoting interregional cooperation and sharing of best practices.

Such a context also leads to **difficulties in recognition and validation of prior learning and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal means**, which can ease individuals' access to further education and employment opportunities. This aspect could be improved with provision of clearer guidelines, processes and mechanisms.

The **mobilisation of additional funding and resources** can benefit too from a closer cooperation between stakeholders like government bodies, private organisations, enterprises and foundations.

Another gap that should be filled is the one concerning the **collaboration with technology companies** in order to ensure affordable digital infrastructures and, more generally, digital literacy training.

For further information, see **Stakeholder mapping table** [here](#)

Other relevant experiences of stakeholders' activation/cooperation

Among the other relevant experiences of stakeholders' activation and cooperation, the following European projects can be included:
- **MASTER** project[75] (Measures for Adults to Support Transition to further Education and Re-skilling opportunities). The project, started in 2019 and ended in 2022, contributed to smoothen the introduction of adults with low qualifications to training and educational opportunities in order to improve their situation in the labour market, by developing their self-assessment skills and their personal, social and learning competence [PSL].

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[75] Project website here: https://www.master-project.it/

The project was based on a multi-stakeholder and community-based approach, developed both by consulting the stakeholders while elaborating and finalising the outputs, and by involving representative of key actors (ALE professionals, Public Employment Services, representative of national networks in ALE, Higher Education and VET) in testing them. This approach promoted an effective cooperation between public and private organisations, according to a bottom up approach, which led to the effective engagement of target groups, to the design of tailored pathways (self-assessment + learning), to an increased PSL competence of the different practitioners working with adults in transition phases and to an effective management of the transitions between the different stages of the pathways through the activation of feedback loops.

- **MOVE-UP**[76] (MOtherhood Valorisation and Empowerment for professional development – Upskilling Pathways). This project, started at the beginning of 2023, intends to develop a flexible and quality upskilling pathway for unemployed mothers with low qualifications, offering the opportunity of assessing, validating, and further developing their prior learning for facilitating their participation in training and in the labour market, by enhancing the competences they gain thanks to their role of parent. The project provides a framework to AE stakeholders for setting up effective renewed policies in favour of unemployed mothers with low qualification, thus contributing to a more gender equal labour market.

- **ONE**[77] (Opening adult education Networks to European cooperation). The project, started in 2021, is working to reinforce the quality of Adult Education (AE) and its relevance in terms of social inclusion in Europe, by providing capacity building support to existing national networks of AE providers in Italy, Portugal and Slovakia with reference to specific themes: guidance services; reaching out and active engagement of adults in both education and validation processes; validation of non-formal and informal learning; soft and basic skills for inclusion and active citizenship. The ONE partnership, involving organisations and public authorities from project countries, is pursuing this objective by adopting a multi-stakeholder approach. Such approach has guided the partnership throughout all the proposal design and implementation, activating the partner organisations in mapping, contacting and involving the variety of actors at stake in adult education for the success of the ONE initiative. Coherently with the approach of the ET2020 working group on adult learning and the EU policies for adult education, the stakeholders include the following types of organisations: formal and non-formal providers; learners' representatives, including adults with low qualifications; local, national and transnational adult education networks; local, regional and national public authorities; trade unions for their role in promoting work-based learning and its quality; social and cultural organisations operating at community or national level and often offering non-formal learning opportunities; higher education representatives; etc. Throughout the project activities, in order to reinforce the structure of the whole work plan, ONE has planned ad-hoc activities targeting external stakeholders and policy makers or the way to involve them in the others.
Italian AE Ambassadors: network of highly competent experts, able to transmit their knowledge and experiences carried out both in the specific context of the Erasmus+ Programme and within the EPALE community of adult learning professionals. The aim is to increase participation in

[76] Project website here: www.motherhoodskills.eu
[77] Prject website here: https://www.adult-learning.eu/en/

initiatives such as European training and international cooperation opportunities in the regions where the activities take place, to give a significant input for improving the quality of international cooperation between adult education organisations and to stimulate internationalisation in all its forms. The role of the Ambassadors, more specifically, is that of actively support the Indire's Erasmus+ Agency and the EPALE Italia Unit during the national online and face-to-face seminars, both in the planning and organisation and in the actual carrying out of the activities; it is also required to produce materials – articles, training content and teaching materials – to feed the EPALE platform, with particular attention to the thematic priorities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027: social inclusion, digital transformation, green transition, strengthening internationalisation.

Qualitative information about the analysis process

The stakeholders have been asked to participate in **online focus groups and interviews** or, if they were not able to participate in, to fill an **online questionnaire**.
All the stakeholders contribute to the analysis according to what they were requested and some of them, especially the ones working at regional level, had the opportunity to reflect about their **actual and future commitment in Upskilling Pathways**, opening **new perspectives with reference to the cooperation among stakeholders at local leve**l.
The level of participation of stakeholders was generally good. The more committed stakeholders were the ones working at regional level to set the **Territorial network for lifelong learning** (Reti Territoriali per l'Apprendimento) because the project supports their mission and priorities for development, and allows them to learn about new strategies, methodologies and tools to promote and enable cooperation (i.e. increase the proximity, accessibility and integration of services for adults with low or no qualifications).

The PARTNER-UP analysis improved our relationships with stakeholders, **strengthening the role of FORMA.Azione as a relevant actor in ALE**, able to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation among stakeholders, as well as the development and systematisation of innovative solutions for capacity building of networks and professionals.
The analysis developed and reinforced **horizontal links among the different stakeholders** which will support the realisation of joint initiative, especially to advocate for Adult Education towards regional and national authorities in the perspective of a renewed Upskilling Pathways Agenda.

With reference to the stakeholders mapped and reached, it's really necessary to **involve more employers and CSOs representatives in the Italian National Group**. Generally, they are not perceived as part of the ALE system, despite their relevant role in outreach and guidance processes, as well as in facilitating adults' (re)access to the world of work and the participation as full citizens in communities.

Good practices

Various good practices emerged especially during the focus groups that involved different stakeholders. Many of them include examples of the above-mentioned territorial networks, as follows.

ReSAP (Regional Network for Lifelong Learning in Sardinia)

The foundation of the RESAP network was laid starting from contacts between the CPIA (Provincial Centre for Adult Education) 4 of Oristano and the University of Cagliari, that established an agreement aimed at initiating direct and indirect internships at the CPIA for training teachers of Italian as a second language. The network expanded then towards the University of Sassari, the USR (Regional School Office) and the regional government's department for education, cultural heritage, information, entertainment and sports, which provides funds to promote UP in the adult population (e.g. the project FOR.POP.AD PLUS). All these stakeholders, together with RUIAP (University Italian Network for Lifelong Learning), Coreform (Coordination of the Network of Training Institutions in Sardinia), trade unions and other organisations signed the RESAP agreement (June 2023), in order to make their goals official. These include the activation of specific PhD programmes to implement action research in CPIAs and map students' and teachers' needs, the improvement of integrated study plans within the upper secondary school level with support of USR and the addition of activities aimed at achieving professional qualifications in the CPIAs institutional curriculum.

REMAP (Metropolitan Network for Lifelong Learning)[78]

This multi-stakeholder territorial network involves 84 public and private signers in connection with the Metropolitan City of Bologna (August 2022). Among these, the regional government of Emilia-Romagna, the University of Bologna, upper secondary schools, CPIAs, the Chamber of Commerce, trade unions, the National Association of Italian Municipalities and VET organisations. The main core of this agreement is the promotion of lifelong learning as a fundamental right for every individual, not only in terms of employability but also as a boost to a more active citizenship. The main goals for 2023-2024 are the promotion of a territorial system of citizenship training and guidance, in order to raise awareness on ALE, and of an innovative service of skills validation and certification with shared tools and the exchange of good practices.

ReTAP Campania (Territorial Network for Lifelong Learning in Campania)[79]

The Campania Region has a newly born (end of 2022) territorial network as well, that includes 8 CPIAs, the USR, the Regional government's department for education and the Regional Center for Research, Experimentation and Development in Adult Education in Campania (CRR&S). The main aim of the network is to map the public and private stakeholder active in the area and engage them in strategic partnerships in order to promote lifelong learning.

Pluriversum[80]

Pluriversum is a consulting firm with more than 25 years of experience in developing services and tools for territorial guidance systems, services to prevent early school leaving, and

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[78] Italian website here: https://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/scuola/remap
[79] Italian website here: https://www.cpiacaserta.edu.it/retap/
[80] Italian website here: https://www.pluriversum.eu/

employment services. Based in Tuscany, its network expanded beyond regional borders and reached different regional governments other than the Tuscan one (Marche, Piedmont, Friuli-Venezia Giulia). Pluriversum also cooperates with provinces, municipalities, local organisations and with the University of Florence. Their focus is lifelong learning united with lifelong guidance, where skills validation can improve the employability of vulnerable adults and young adults, together with fighting early school leaving. Their focus is also on cooperation with the academic world, in order to implement action research activities and bring innovative tools for skills validation to fruition.

AGCI (General Association of Italian Cooperatives) – AGCI Umbria[81]
This association, with representatives all over Italy in regions, provinces and different work sectors, approaches lifelong learning and VET in particular through interprofessional funds. AGCI benefits from the resources provided by Fon.Coop[82], whose strategic calls allow an extensive analysis of the companies involved concerning the aspects to be improved through training, with a special focus not only on pure technical skills and their sharing within the firm, but also on sustainability, gender equality and work life balance. VET is meant in this context as a transformative tool that implies a holistic approach.

Priorities for Development Groups

Priority 1
Ownership of adult learning policy – the lack of "clear" weakens coherence in the adult-learning system, and governments' efforts to engage local actors to support collaboration and coordination have to be strengthened to help narrowing the gap between national policies and local needs – this happens where National Action Plans for Adult Education have been elaborated but the actual implementation is undermined by the lack of funding and of implementing regulations, leading to the self-referentiality of each network and provider and to undervaluing Adult Learning and Education as a means for personal and professional developments, as well as of citizenship.

Priority 2
Link between ALE and the world of work - incentive for sustaining the **engagement of key players/professionals** in public/private partnerships are limited, particularly for employers, usually interested mainly in VET (qualification courses).

Priority 3
Information, outreach and active engagement of adults in education and validation processes – due to the complexity and the variety of adults with low qualifications, it's necessary to find creative and effective ways to reach out to potential learners. Indeed, this target group usually find it more difficult to recognise their learning needs and hence are less likely to seek out training opportunities.

Priority 4
Validation of non-formal and informal competences – at regional level, we'll wait for establishing clear roles, guidelines, processes, and mechanisms for recognizing prior learning

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[81] National website (Italian): https://www.agci.it/; Umbria Region division (Italian): https://agciumbria.agci.it/
[82] Italian website here: https://www.foncoop.coop/

that make value of adults' experiences and facilitate individuals' access to further education and employment opportunities.

Priority 5

Professional profile of ALE teachers/trainers - for formal ALE, delivered by Public Adult Education Centres, ALE trainers/teachers don't need, as requirement, a specific training focused on ALE. They have the same professional background as the one of primary/secondary school teachers. For this reason, and even due to the fact that ALE is undervalued in general, ALE trainers' professionalism is not always recognised, both at policy and at community level. This happens also with VET trainers.

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