



## Policy Learning Forum

# ON UPSKILLING PATHWAYS

7-8 February 2018

EESC | JDE building Rooms 60, 61, 62 | Rue Belliard 99, Brussels

A VISION  
FOR THE FUTURE

### Summary PAPER

#### Main common challenges ahead

The Policy Learning Forum showed that there are some fundamental questions that need to be addressed in the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways that are common in most countries:

- ⇒ How can a common vision for the Upskilling Pathways be created and shared by all relevant stakeholders?
- ⇒ How can a consistent and synergic approach across different policies be achieved?
- ⇒ What mechanisms exist to engage employers and SMEs in the design and implementation of the Upskilling Pathways?
- ⇒ How can social partners, other civil society organisations and local communities be involved in the process and contribute to outreach low-skilled adults?
- ⇒ Who will be responsible for tailoring training for the individuals and in what way will it be delivered and connected to prior learning?
- ⇒ How trust is built and quality assured in the process of upskilling pathways?
- ⇒ What financial and non-financial measures are in place, or can be implemented, to assure the sustainability of the Upskilling Pathways?

#### Introduction

Cedefop and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) jointly organised a Policy Learning Forum (PLF) with the aim of bringing together countries, social partners and civil society organisations to help one another in designing and implementing measures for improving literacy, numeracy and digital skills of adults with low level of knowledge, skills and competences, in line with the Council recommendation on 'Upskilling Pathways: new opportunities for adults'.





The Upskilling Pathway consists of three interrelated steps. Firstly, the targeted adults should be able to have their existing skills and upskilling needs identified. Secondly, individuals should be provided with a tailored, flexible and quality learning offer that can boost the skills they need most. Finally, their existing and newly acquired skills should be validated and recognised, so that adults can use the outcomes either in their transition to the labour market or towards acquiring higher qualifications.

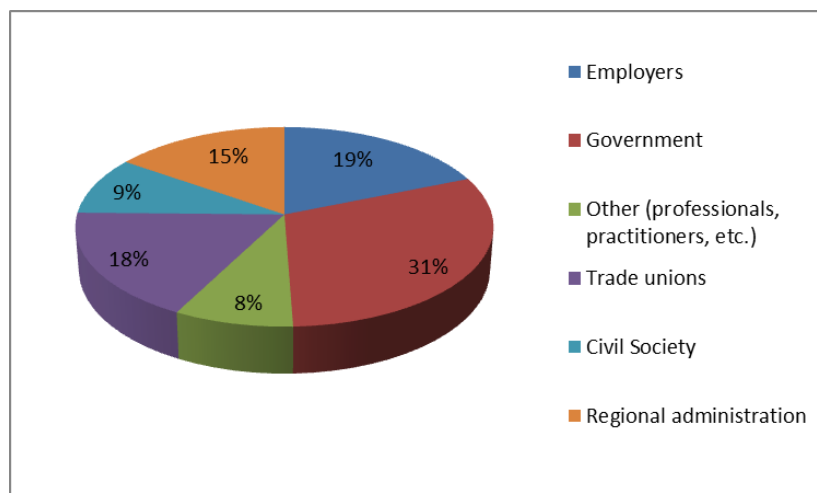
The policy learning forum was the first in a series of similar events organised by Cedefop to complement the Commission's ongoing initiatives in this area. The main aim of the first PLF was to reach a clearer understanding of the main challenges faced in the design and implementation of Upskilling Pathways by different countries and stakeholders. Three driving questions underpinned the event:

- How are strategies for upskilling implemented in each country and adapted to specific contexts? Do different stakeholders share the same vision and priorities?
- What are the main challenges different stakeholders and countries face? Are there common challenges that would benefit from peer learning?
- How can these challenges be addressed and overcome?

## Participants

There were a total of 142 invitees from all Member States (participation in the event was by invitation only) in addition to the members of the European Economic and Social Committee and to the participants from Cedefop. For this first event, priority was given to members of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT) as this is the group in charge of the follow up of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. The ACVT is composed of trade unions, employers and government representatives. Figure 1 shows the distribution of participants by broad stakeholder group. The event took place in the EESC premises in Brussels.

Figure 1: Overview of participants by main group





The event used the hashtag #UpskillingPathways in Twitter and a rich amount of information can be found reading the tweets from @EESC\_LMO and @Cedefop.

### Introduction from EESC and Cedefop

Carlos Trindade, president of the EESC's Labour Market Observatory opened the event, highlighting the role of civil society organisations in reaching vulnerable people, raising awareness about opportunities for up-skilling/re-skilling and providing a tailored support to low-skilled people. Antonio Ranieri introduced the work of the Department for Learning and Employability and its relevance in supporting the ongoing effort of Member States to build on existing national structures and set up arrangements to make Upskilling Pathways a reality.



Antonio Ranieri (Cedefop), Carlos Trindade (EESC), Dana Bachmann (European Commission)

### Cedefop's evidence on low-skilled adults

Five presentations from Cedefop experts provided new evidence and perspectives on each aspect of the recommendation. Presenting outcomes from Cedefop's study [Investing in skills pays off](#), [Lidia Salvatore](#) showed the enormous cost and potential benefits of upskilling low-skilled individuals in the EU. She also demonstrated how the large heterogeneity of the low-skilled adult requires tailored interventions to their specific needs. [Irene Psifidou](#) provided an overview of preventive and early intervention measures drawn from Cedefop work [on tackling early leaving from education and training](#). Early school leavers are the future low skilled adults. Policies and practices to reach out timely to early leavers and reintegrate them back to education and training should be in line with Upskilling Pathways strategies. Cedefop [VET toolkit for tackling early leaving](#) is a rich source of successful practices, tools and guidelines to support Member



Cedefop's team presenting findings during the 1st PLF on Upskilling pathways

States in preventing citizens from becoming low-skilled adults. [Pedro Moreno da Fonseca](#) presented what must be done in terms of outreach and bringing back low-skilled adults into education and training, using guidance and skills identification as a first step. [Ramona David Craescu](#) highlighted the potential and peculiarities of work-based learning and apprenticeships for an effective engagement of adults in Upskilling Pathways. Finally, [Ernesto Villalba](#) provided an overview of crucial aspects of validation of learning arrangements in Member States derived from the work on the [European inventory on validation](#).



## Different stakeholders: different perspectives?

In the second session, representatives from different stakeholders took the stage: Erik Hess from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany, Christa Schweng, Vice-president of the EESC Section on Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, Agnes Roman, Adviser at the European Trade Union Confederation and Gina Ebner, Secretary-General of the European association for the education of adults. They discussed their views on Upskilling Pathways: why is upskilling important? What is the stakeholders' role in Upskilling Pathways? All stakeholders agreed on the importance of partnerships between governments, social partners and civil society. In most countries, there is still a lack of stakeholder coordination in order to properly implement the Upskilling Pathways. Getting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) involved in Upskilling Pathways is particularly challenging. Companies need help and assistance in identifying individuals with basic skills needs and guiding them through the process of upskilling. Civil society organisations have an important role to play as they have a strategic position for the provision of reaching out measures and they can normally be more flexible in their training offers, which is very relevant for enterprises.



Cedefop's Governing Board chair, Tatjana Babrauskienė, introducing panel discussion with Christa Schweng, Erik Hess, Agnes Roman and Gina Ebner

Stakeholders also presented some diverging views in their approach to Upskilling Pathways. While for some of the panellists training should be guaranteed to all individuals to facilitate access to the labour market and active participation in society, others considered that having a guarantee will make upskilling an unnecessary imposition. Nevertheless, there was wide support for an inclusive approach in implementing Upskilling Pathways, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and not one that would prioritise certain target groups over others.

## The three main phases of the Upskilling Pathways: Challenges and opportunities

Participants were divided into three parallel sessions (A, B, C) to discuss each of the three Upskilling Pathway steps and possible enabling factors. The purpose of the discussion was to gain consensus and a better understanding of common challenges in the implementation of the three Upskilling Pathway steps. A summary of each session was presented on the following day, highlighting the main challenges identified



for each of the steps. The detailed slides for each of the sessions can be found on the web page of the event: [Session A](#), [Session B](#), [Session C](#)).

Session A was about outreach, guidance and identification of skills. [Hester Smulders](#), Senior researcher at ecbo (expertisecentrum beroepsonderwijs), presented the case of the “learning and working centres” in the Netherlands, small entities created in 2010 that give independent and free career advice to young adults above 23 years old who may be low-educated, not in employment or education. A key success factor is the regional level of intervention, allowing for more independence in the governance and stronger stakeholder cooperation.

In Session B, participants listened to [Kurt Schmid](#), Senior researcher at institut für bildungsforschung der wirtschaft (ibw), who highlighted the main challenges of implementing tailored training within the context of work-based learning. The discussion showed that work-based learning (WBL), including apprenticeships, may be one effective tool to attract adults back to education and training and deliver Upskilling Pathways. Subject to people’s prior learning experiences and predispositions, other forms of education and training delivery may need to be used either instead or in combination with WBL. For instance, pre-apprenticeship training is in many cases necessary to bring people’s skills and competences to the entry level into an apprenticeship training.

In Session C, [Sveinn Aðalsteinsson, Managing Director and Fjóra María Lárusdóttir](#), Project managers at the Icelandic Education and Training Service Centre, presented how validation of non-formal and informal learning is organised and provided to low-qualified individuals (early school leavers) in the labour market. Among other issues, the Icelandic case raised particular interest among participants on the importance of social partners’ ownership, both employers and trade unions.



Participants in one of the working sessions



The groups and plenary discussions showed that countries face similar challenges and that stakeholders agree on the complexity and difficulties of implementing Upskilling Pathways. Participants highlighted the importance of creating coherent policies and measures that involve all relevant stakeholders and cut across traditional sectors. The creation of the Upskilling Pathways requires a common, coherent vision across its different components. Different ministries, as well as social partners and stakeholders, need to be involved in its implementation. Katarina Grgec, Head of Service at the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in Croatia and Ana Radulescu from the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice in Romania illustrated this by sharing with the participants their experience in gathering relevant stakeholders in their respective countries to discuss Upskilling Pathways and plan its implementation.

The involvement of the relevant stakeholders will help in building trust in the Upskilling Pathways and its related steps and approaches. Lack of trust was mentioned on a number of occasions. On the one hand, low-skilled individuals who have left education and training before completing upper secondary education tend not to trust the system and might not want to go “back to school”, as they perceived formal education institutions as having failed them. On the other hand, social partners might not trust the outcomes of Upskilling Pathways, especially in relation to specific steps such as validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A coherent approach to Upskilling Pathways implies not only aligning its different steps, but also ensuring complementary policies. Different sets of policies (youth, labour market, educational, social protection policies) need to be aligned. There are many challenges associated with data protection issues or social security entitlements that might hinder actual participation in training. There is a need to avoid fragmentation. Similarly, stable and sustainable structures and financial resources are required to assure continuity.

At the same time, participants highlighted the need for flexibility and tailored provision of training. The tailoring of training constitutes an important challenge, due to the diversity of the target groups. Tailored training may need to be accompanied by a set of financial and non-financial incentives addressed to the specific needs of the target groups; these may help to overcome the barriers preventing specific groups of low-skilled adults from engaging in learning and training. How to ensure training provision responsive to both the specific needs of the individuals and the needs of the labour market is a further major challenge identified by many participants of the event.

The discussions clearly highlighted the challenge represented by the strong interlink between the three steps of the Upskilling Pathways, especially when it comes to the implementation process. For instance, both the identification of skills and successful tailored training should be preceded (and not only followed) by validation to be effective.



## The global and local perspectives

The final session of the PLF brought together a regional and a global perspective, chaired by Indre Vareikytė, Member of the EESC who represents young people. In a global perspective, [Margarete Sachs-Israel](#) from the UNESCO Institute for lifelong learning (UIL) shared the UNESCO experience in delivering basic skills training to adults. She highlighted the importance of lifelong learning and how the upskilling directly supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4. Learning occurs everywhere and it is important that there be multiple entries to the learning process; validation of prior learning, thus, is a key pillar for implementing Upskilling Pathways, as without it initiatives will not be successful.

[Francesco Lorusso](#), representative of the Lombardy Region in Italy, provided the local perspective of the implementation of Upskilling Pathways. As demonstrated by the experience of "Dote unica lavoro", regions can serve as a test bed for innovations that can afterwards be scaled up and implemented at national level. The regional perspective crucially confirmed the importance of having a clear vision and accompanying implementation with adequate support, communication and awareness campaigns.

## Conclusion and next steps

The conference was closed by Cedefop Director James Calleja and the President of the Section for Employment and Social Affairs of the EESC Pavel Trantina. Mr Calleja underlined that careful analysis of learning needs is required to create adequate policies, highlighting also the importance to use all the different tools available. Mr Trantina advocated for the creation of a quality charter in the validation of non-formal and informal learning to ensure trust on the upskilling pathways measures and emphasised the importance of guidance in a lifelong learning context.



James Calleja, Cedefop's Director and Pavel Trantina, President of the EESC Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) (Various Interests Group, Czech Republic) before closing the PLF

The PLF demonstrated that many countries are already equipped to provide skills identification, training provision tailored to individuals' needs or validation and recognition of prior learning. It also confirmed that much needs to be done in bringing together these services in a coordinated manner and within a coherent strategy. Different stakeholders generally hold similar views on aims and challenges, confirming that existing differences can be overcome through debate and consensus building. It is, thus, crucial, to establish an adequate social dialogue and involve social partners and civil society organisations in the design and implementation of the upskilling vision.



Cedefop and the EESC will work together with the Commission in bringing together countries to explore solutions to the common challenges identified during the PLF. Complementary activities include the Commission's Mutual Learning Workshops which support some countries in building the necessary capacity to implement Upskilling Pathways. Cedefop will build on the outcomes of the first PLF on Upskilling Pathways to develop a policy learning programme that will lead to further Policy Learning Fora in February 2019 and 2020.

Recent and ongoing Cedefop work relevant to support evidence-based policy making in the development of Upskilling Pathways for adults

- ⇒ [Investing in skills pays off](#)
- ⇒ [Tackling early leaving from education and training](#)
- ⇒ [Labour Market integration and social inclusion](#)
- ⇒ [Work-based learning and adults](#)
- ⇒ [Apprenticeships for adults](#)
- ⇒ [Validation of non-formal and informal learning](#)
- ⇒ [Lifelong Guidance](#)
- ⇒ [Validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance](#)
- ⇒ [Financing adults](#)