

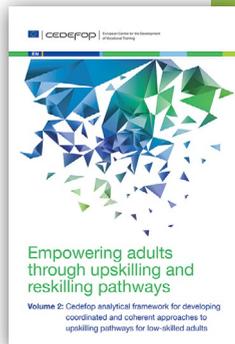


*Chapter 2.* **COORDINATED AND COHERENT  
APPROACHES TO UPSKILLING  
PATHWAYS FOR LOW-SKILLED  
ADULTS: ESSENTIAL FEATURES**

# **Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways**

Volume 2: Cedefop analytical framework for  
developing coordinated and coherent approaches  
to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults

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## CHAPTER 2.

# Coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults: essential features

Taking the principles underpinning the *Upskilling pathways* recommendation (Section 1.1.2) as a starting point and frame of reference, the analysis presented in this chapter contributed to the identification of the essential features needed for a unique approach to upskilling pathways for adults with low skills. This approach is articulated according to a lifelong learning perspective and focused on the empowerment of the individual learner/beneficiary.

### 2.1. Good and promising practices in relevant policy areas

Good practice analysis is a key way of increasing knowledge-sharing and learning mechanisms in various sectors to promote discussion, disseminate innovations, support learning of effective experience and improve results.

While policy practices that work in a specific context are often referred to as ‘good’ or ‘best’ practices, using both terms in an interchangeable way, there is no basic and shared common definition and/or univocal understanding of both terms and of their peculiar differences.

Within this report, we use the term good practices, along with the distinction between ‘promising practices’ and ‘good practices’ as in Hall and Jennings (2008).

Apart from understanding what constitutes and how to identify a good/best practice, as discussed in Annex 2, one of the main limitations of best/good practice analysis relates to contextual differences that can hamper transferability and implementation (Maynard, 2006). It is unlikely that best

practices are universal, or that their applicability is independent of time, place, and organisational, social, and political context.

Since the adoption of the *Upskilling pathways* recommendation, countries have made considerable progress in providing upskilling pathways opportunities. However, given the comprehensive nature of upskilling pathways this is a complex and ambitious process to gear up. The aim of the good practice analysis carried out for this report was to review existing good practices in the policy fields pertaining to upskilling pathways and to identify within these practices interesting systemic features relevant for the development of the analytical framework.

The methodology adopted for identifying and selecting good practices in the relevant policy fields is presented below.

### 2.1.1. Methodology for identifying and selecting good practices

Good practices were identified through desk research of official sources and relevant literature and policy documents; and were selected according to a set of criteria described in Table 1. The criteria/indicators are based on general and specific criteria. General criteria are related to general issues that can be applied to good practices in different fields while specific criteria specifically focus on elements relevant to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. Specific criteria have been selected according to the principles and frame of reference underpinning the development of upskilling pathways as outlined in the *Upskilling pathways* recommendation and its staff working document (European Council, 2016; European Commission, 2016b).

While good practice should ideally meet all the above criteria, this has proved very difficult. Therefore, practices explored in this study have been categorised as good practices when they meet at least the first two general criteria, effectiveness and clarity, as well as the first three specific criteria: cooperation and coordination, sound and appropriate methodology and flexibility. The remaining practices are classified as promising practices.

### 2.1.2. Good and promising practices in upskilling pathways policy fields

Adopting the methodology illustrated above, 21 practices belonging to policy fields relevant to upskilling pathways have been identified and reviewed as part of this research. Of these, 13 have been selected as particularly relevant to informing the development of the analytical framework. Table 2 illustrates the practices identified and which criteria they meet. According to our

categorisation, 11 practices are classified as good, while 2 are classified as promising.

The selected good and promising practices are summarised in Table 3. More details on the practices, including the systemic features relevant to the development of the analytical framework, can be found in the fiches in Annex 1.

Table 1. **Criteria for categorisation of good practices**

<b>General criteria</b>	
Effectiveness	The contribution made by results to achievement of the purpose, and how assumptions have affected project achievements with specific reference to the benefits accruing to target groups.
Clarity	Clarity in the definition of objectives, activities to be carried out, stakeholders, target groups and expectations.
Consistency	Consistency between set goals and implemented activities
Sustainability	The capacity of the adopted practices to be sustainable in the future, being able to produce the necessary financial resources or to get them from other sources and according to the efficiency already shown (how project results have been achieved at reasonable cost).
<b>Specific criteria</b>	
Has established successful coordination, cooperation, support and improved communication between all organisations involved	Coordination, cooperation, support and improved communication are intended at policy level between the relevant ministries and national institutions responsible for employment policy, education and training and social affairs, and also at programme level between employers, social partners and training institutions, centres for adult education and any other key stakeholders.
Adopts sound and appropriate methodological and didactic approaches to stimulate and involve low-skilled adults also through supportive guidance systems	Low-skilled adults may have negative perceptions of learning, which often stemmed from negative experiences in the initial stages of education that contributed to building resentment, even fear, of learning. They are also less 'used' to training and can show lack of engagement and/or difficulties in learning. Good practice should then use different and tailored didactic methodologies and approaches to stimulate their attention and involvement and being effective. The inclusion of a supportive guidance system could increase the possibility of success.

<b>Specific criteria</b>	
Has a flexible structure able to be adapted to different needs of the target group	Low-skilled adults are a complex and differentiated target group. Defining key competences that are most relevant for specific target groups within the wide, general low-skilled adult main target group is another crucial issue best practices need to tackle and embed coherently in policies and concrete programmes. Focus on particular key competences such as literacy, numeracy, communication and digital competences should go along with soft skills such as workplace conduct, as well as development of motivation, confidence and self-esteem. Any programme considered as good practice should then be flexible enough to guarantee that specific needs are considered and a good mix of basic, work-related and soft skills are included.
Ensures recognition of prior learning and validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning	This is important because learning among low-skilled adults often happens outside formal education. Many actions have been taken in this direction at European and national levels. Good practice should include this aspect in connection to the national, regional and/or local policy and regulatory framework.

Source: Cedefop, adapted from European Council (2016), European Commission (2016b) and EIGE (2013).

**Table 2. List of good and promising practices and their match to general and specific criteria**

Country	Title	General criteria				Specific criteria			
		GC1	GC2	GC3	GC4	SC1	SC2	SC3	SC4
<b>Good practices</b>									
Austria	Initiative for adult education ( <i>Erwachsenenbildung</i> )	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
France	Personal training account ( <i>Compte personnel de formation, CPF</i> )	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Germany	On the job training programme ( <i>Weiterbildung Geringqualifizierter und beschäftigter älterer Arbeitnehmer in Unternehmen - WeGebAU</i> )	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Italy (Lombardia)	Unique labour endowment <sup>(8)</sup> ( <i>Dote Unica Lavoro, DUL</i> )	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Ireland	<i>Skillnet</i>	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Netherlands	Language at work ( <i>Taal op de werkvloer</i> )	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Norway	<i>SkillsPlus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Portugal	New opportunities initiative ( <i>Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades - NOI</i> )	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Portugal	<i>Qualifica</i> programme	X	X	X		X		X	X
UK	<i>Union Learning Fund (ULF)</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
UK	Mid-life career review	X	X	X		X	X	X	

<sup>(8)</sup> Dote Unica Lavoro, DUL is also known in English as 'Unique labour dowry'. This publication will refer to the programme as 'Unique labour endowment'.

Promising practices										
Austria	Labour foundations (Arbeitsstiftungen)	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Spain	Vives Emplea: team empowerment for labour integration	X	X	X		X			X	

NB: See Annex 1 for a description of each practice and sources.

**Legend:**

GC1: Effectiveness

GC2: Clarity

GC3: Consistency

GC4: Sustainability

SC1: A GP has established successful coordination, cooperation, support and improved communication between all organisations involved

SC2: A GP adopts sound and appropriate methodological and didactic approaches to stimulate and involve adults also through a supportive guidance system

SC3: A GP has a flexible structure able to be adapted to different needs of the target group

SC4: A GP ensures recognition of prior learning and validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning

Table 3. **Good and promising practices, summary table**

## A. Good practices

Practice, country	Brief description	Objective	
<b>Good practices</b>			
<i>SkillsPlus</i> , NO	National programme providing basic skills training with a workplace-training component. Since 2014 the programme has included verbal communication in combination with other skills and since 2016 Norwegian for speakers of other languages. It is part of the Norwegian strategy for skills policy 2017- 21.	To support the development of basic competences for working life: providing working-age adults, the opportunity to acquire basic skills in reading, writing, numeracy, and digital skills.	
<i>Skillnet</i> , IE	National agency dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of workforce learning. It facilitates the establishment of regional and sectoral networks of companies ( <i>Skillnet</i> networks) that identify training needs and organise training for companies in the network as well as free training for job seekers.	To promote and facilitate workforce learning in Ireland.	
Language agreements ( <i>Taalakkoorden</i> ), NL	National Initiative whereby employers enter into a language agreement to improve the language skills of their employees; and receive a subsidy to provide language courses at or outside the workplace.	To encourage businesses to invest in the language skills of their employees.	
Initiative for adult education ( <i>Erwachsenenbildung</i> ), AT	National initiative aimed at increasing the number of individuals with completed lower secondary education as well as increasing general skill levels in the population. The Initiative comprises two programmes: basic skills training training to complete lower secondary education (ISCED 1)	To enable adults who lack basic skills or never graduated from a lower secondary school (ISCED 1) to continue and complete their education.	

Target groups	Level of implementation	Stage of implementation	Funding
<p>Low-skilled employed adults (low-qualified adults with at most ISCED 2 qualification and those with low levels of literacy, numeracy and/or digital skills). People with Norwegian as a second language. Adults recruited through NGOs with no requirement of employment (since 2015).</p>	National	Continuous since 2006	National
<p>Employees of companies belonging to one of the sectoral/regional Skillnet networks. Registered unemployed in receipt of a welfare payment from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) or who meet alternative criteria laid out by Skillnet.</p>	National	Continuous since 1999	National funding + a joint investment model, part-funded by matching contributions from participating businesses in Skillnet networks.
<p>Employees with low and medium language skills in companies that want to address the issue of low language skills at the workplace.</p>	National agreed at regional level	Continuous since 2016	Co-funding arrangements in which employers bear part of the training costs and, at the same time, can apply for a subsidy paid by National funding.
<p>Individuals over 15 years with basic educational needs regardless of language, nationality and qualifications held. Individuals aged over 15 without a lower secondary education qualification (ISCED 1).</p>	National	Continuous since 2012	National and province funding since 2015, co-funded by the ESF.

Practice, country	Brief description	Objective	
<b>Good practices</b>			
<i>Union Learning Fund (ULF), UK</i>	National fund aimed at funding unions for delivery of learning opportunities for their members and to develop the capacity of union learning representatives (ULRs). ULF is managed and administered by Unionlearn, the learning and skills organisation of the Trade Union Congress.	To develop the capacity of trade unions and union learning representatives (ULRs) to work with employers, employees and learning providers to encourage greater take-up of learning in the workplace.	
Personal training account (Compte personnel de formation, CPF) FR	National programme aimed at empowering all labour market active individuals by acquiring training rights that can be mobilised throughout their working lives. Until 2018, individual beneficiaries accumulated 24 hours per year (capped at 150 hours) while since 1 January 2019, they accumulate EUR 500 per year (capped at EUR 5 000). Until 2018, low qualified (ISCED 0-2) benefitted from 48 hours per year with a ceiling of 400 hours. From 1 January 2019, this group can accumulate EUR 800 per year up to EUR 8 000.	To support individuals to continue learning throughout their working lives, enabling them to identify their own training needs and providing them with control over the learning/training with the aim to maintain employability and secure the professional career path.	
On the job training, ( <i>Weiterbildung Geringqualifizierter und beschäftigter älterer Arbeitnehmer in Unternehmen, WeGebAU</i> ), DE	National programme offering a combined wage and training subsidy scheme for improving basic qualifications among low-skilled workers in SMEs as well as of older workers.	To improve the employability of low-skilled and older workers and prevent unemployment by encouraging further training.	

	Target groups	Level of implementation	Stage of implementation	Funding
	Employees with low levels of skills, mostly older low-skilled workers	National	Continuous since 1998	National
	All labour market active individuals. Low-qualified individuals have a right to a higher ceiling.	National	Continuous since 2015 with revisions	Financed through a compulsory training levy. Self-employed contribute 0.2% of turnover through a training fund. PES and regions can complement funding for training for unemployed.
	<p>Older employees (since 2007, 'older' ones must be at least 45 years of age). From 1 April 2012, qualified employees under 45 years can be funded but only if the course costs are at least half paid by the employer, and only when the training begins before 31 December 2019.</p> <p>Low-skilled employees in small and medium-sized firms who: have no vocational qualification; have a vocational qualification, but who have not performed the job for which they had acquired this qualification for at least four years; are employed in low-skilled jobs and can no longer perform the learned job.</p>	National	Continuous since 2006	National and ESF

Practice, country	Brief description	Objective	
<b>Good practices</b>			
Unique labour endowment ( <i>Dote Unica Lavoro</i> , DUL), Lombardia Region, IT	Regional programme providing free of charge personalised learning and employment pathways. It provides an integrated approach to learning and employment pathways, grounded in lifelong learning, guidance and personalised approach.	To support the employment/re-employment and upskilling/reskilling of individuals in the Lombardia region.	
New opportunities initiative ( <i>Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades</i> , NOI), PT	National initiative providing upskilling pathways with a strong component of validation and recognition of prior learning.	To improve the qualification levels of the population.	
<i>Qualifica</i> programme, PT	National programme aimed at improving the qualification levels of adults by offering them tailored learning pathways, based on a process of validation of prior learning. The <i>Qualifica</i> programme moved from the re-design of the <i>New opportunities</i> initiative and from the resizing of its national network (NOI centres).	To improve the qualification levels of the population.	
Mid-life career review, UK	National programme aimed at improving lifelong guidance and career management services for older adults (45-64) to their understanding of own upskilling needs, interests and aspirations.	To enable older adults (45-64) to make informed decisions on their future by tacking stock of their individual options in work and in life.	

Target groups	Level of im- plementation	Stage of implementation	Funding
<p>Individuals up to 65 years who reside in Lombardia and are either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- unemployed;</li> <li>- enrolled in a 1st and 2nd level university master;</li> <li>- working in the armed forces.</li> </ul> <p>Individuals up to 65 years, employed in a company in Lombardia affected by reduced working time or temporary suspension of work under a wage compensation scheme (wage guarantee fund, solidarity contract, solidarity agreements etc.) if they are not already benefiting from other active policy measures.</p> <p>Young people up to 29 years do not access the DUL as they can benefit from an endowment activated under the <i>Youth guarantee</i>.</p>	Regional	Continuous since 2013	Regional and ESF
<p>Working adults, either in employment or not, needing to acquire a qualification through recognition of competences.</p> <p>Young people aged 15-18 who had only completed lower secondary education and/or who had dropped out of the education system before completing 12 years of schooling.</p>	National	2005 to 2012	National and ESF
<p>Less qualified adults. Unemployed people. NEET (not in education, employment or training).</p>	National	Continuous since 2016	National and ESF
<p>Adults (employed and unemployed) aged 45-64.</p>	National	Continuing. Piloted (in EN) in 2013-15, Mainstream since 2015	National

## B. Promising practices

Practice, country	Brief description	Objective	
<b>Promising practices</b>			
Austria labour foundations ( <i>Arbeitsstiftungen</i> ), AT	National initiative set up by social partners at company or regional level aimed at promotion of upskilling, reskilling and reintegration in the labour market. When a large company in economic difficulty has to lay off employees (outplacement foundations, type 1) or when particular staffing bottlenecks occur in relation to specific skills (in placement foundations, type 2). There are also target group foundations (type 3), which are implemented for upskilling specific target groups such as persons aged 45+, women, refugees.	To support job seekers to upskill, reskill and reintegrate into the labour market.	
<i>Vives Emplea</i> : team empowerment for labour integration, ES	National project consisting of the creation of a working team of unemployed people at risk of exclusion working together to improve their social skills and skills for employment.	To improve people's employability through their participation in teamwork pathways for social and labour integration, helping them to access the job market or return to education.	

### 2.2. Good and promising practices: interesting features for developing the analytical framework

This analysis is organised along three levels of the policy process: decision-making, support and implementation. The three levels are also used to structure the key areas of analytical framework.

Decision-making is about adapting and streamlining existing structures and resources to unlock the right synergies, paving the way for coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways and for the right support and implementation conditions. It includes:

- integrated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults;
- planning strategy for identification of target groups;
- multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance;
- monitoring and evaluation.

Target groups	Level of im- plementation	Stage of implementation	Funding
Registered unemployed whose jobs have become redundant due to restructuring or economic difficulties, with special attention being paid to older job seekers and young job seekers.	National and regional	Continuous since 1987	National (PES and the provincial government) and the company/ies involved.
Unemployed people registered as job seekers, aged between 18 and 60: they must have knowledge of the Spanish language, a basic literacy level and a basic knowledge of new technologies	National	Continuous since 2013	National and ESF

Support is about ensuring that coherent and coordinated approaches, developed under the decision-making phase, are sustained with the right support for inclusive and accessible learning pathways. This requires continuous quality support and includes:

- (a) financial and non-financial support;
- (b) outreach;
- (c) lifelong guidance system.

Implementation is about grounding the comprehensive, inclusive and coordinated approach to upskilling pathways developed in the previous two phases, in the idea of an adaptable and flexible learning pathway tailored to individual learner needs and built around skills assessment, tailored learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills and competences. It includes:

- (a) skills assessment;
- (b) tailored learning offer;
- (c) validation and recognition of skills and competences.

### **2.2.1. Decision-making: creating synergies for coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways**

Upskilling pathways is about adapting and making use of existing structures and resources to unlock and exploit the synergies leading to comprehensive and sustainable pathways.

#### *2.2.1.1. Integrated approach to upskilling pathways*

At decision-making level, which creates the optimal conditions for the support and implementation levels, facilitating and sustaining upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults starts with an integrated approach. This ensures vertical (connecting decision-making and implementation, national, regional and local entities) and horizontal coordination of all relevant policy areas (such as education and training, employment, social, economic, welfare, justice, migration, family, health and related policy areas) and systems. It aims to improve policy coherence and effectiveness, thereby increasing the chances that the highly diverse potential target groups will be reached and that the needs of vulnerable low-skilled adults will be addressed (European Commission, 2016b). Grounded in a shared vision of sustainable and inclusive lifelong learning pathways, an integrated approach to upskilling pathways must be comprehensive and inclusive, and offer a combination of flexible, adapted and tailored learning with personalised support which also allows for recovery of the inactive and long-term unemployed, leading to social and economic gains, as well as long-term welfare savings <sup>(9)</sup>. An optimal mix of components or features of the approach can create the conditions for consolidating, developing, and implementing upskilling pathways in a sustainable way, despite changing target groups, skills needs, and governments, over time.

Since the adoption of the recommendation on upskilling pathways, countries have made considerable progress but, given the comprehensive nature of the pathways, this is a complex and ambitious process to gear up. Consequently, the aim of the good and promising practice analysis was not to identify and review existing practices specifically designed for upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults, some of which are existing practices predating the recommendation. The aim was to review existing good (and promising) practices in the policy fields of upskilling pathways and identify

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<sup>(9)</sup> On the economic and social benefits in upskilling the low-skilled EU adult population see, for example, Cedefop (2017b).

interesting systemic features which may be of interest for the development of the analytical framework.

A shared vision, embedded with political commitment at the highest level and characterised by strategic funding and coordination of multiple relevant policy domains in a holistic fashion, are important systemic features for an integrated approach to upskilling pathways. For example, strong political commitment and earmarked and allocated funding ensuring the initiative's sustainability, together with an integrated approach to the training programme design, implementation and delivery, are regarded as success factors of the Norwegian *Skills Plus* initiative. Strategic financial planning is also one of the key elements of *Erwachsenenbildung*, the Austrian initiative for adult education: the three-year funding period increases planning certainty among key stakeholders, including learning providers, and contributes to greater professionalisation of adult learning delivery. An integrated approach to offering adaptable, flexible and tailored learning pathways embedded with guidance, skills assessment, tailored learning/training and validation are the main features of the *Unique labour endowment (Dote Unica Lavoro, Lombardia region, IT)* and the Portuguese *Qualifica* programme. *Qualifica* is implemented in dedicated *Qualifica* centres, progressing from the redesign of the *New opportunities* initiative (NOI) (*Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades*) and from the resize of its national network (NOI centres). NOI was characterised by a pathway approach encompassing the three steps as well as several other upskilling pathways components. The experience of NOI contributes to emphasising the pivotal role of political commitment and strategic funding at appropriate levels to ensure sustainability and efficiency over time: while initial strong political commitment translated into substantial budgetary and other structural support for the initiative, a change in government, during a severe economic and financial crisis, together with heavy reliance on European funding (European Social Fund), resulted in the programme being discontinued despite its achievements.

Centrality of the learner is another systemic element emerging from the good practice analysis. Placing the individual at the centre of the learning process and enabling the learner to take the responsibility, ownership and control of their own learning, is an important feature of the French personal training account (*Compte personnel de formation, CPF*) the *Qualifica* programme, *Skills Plus*, the Lombardia region *Unique labour endowment (Dote Unica Lavoro, DUL)*, the Spanish *Vives Emplea*: team empowerment for labour integration as well as of *Mid-life career*

review (UK). For example, *Mid-life career reviews* are an innovative tailored approach to providing lifelong guidance and career management services to older adults (45-64). Reviews adopt a person-centred approach which goes beyond employment and learning needs and considers the individuals' whole life: these include family, health, caring responsibilities, financial circumstances, interests, aspirations and motivations. Reviews aim at tacking stock of the individual adult's options in work and life more broadly and supporting them for the future.

#### 2.2.1.2. *Planning strategy for the definition and identification of target groups*

Implementing a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways that supports the shared vision involves a well-defined planning strategy for defining and identifying target groups. Depending on the strategy, it can imply a prioritisation of specific groups of low-skilled adults or a more universal approach that targets a diverse set of groups in need, or a combination of both. The approach may depend on many factors, such as policy planning cycles, societal conditions and ideologies, but also on the shared views on inclusion favoured in a country/region. The value of upskilling pathways may be in its ability to facilitate sustainable access for all target groups.

Identification of target groups involves the study of comprehensive and integrated information on the different potential adult populations and their needs. It also requires in-depth understanding of current and future skills needed in the labour market. An effective strategy, therefore, requires effective skills anticipation mechanisms <sup>(10)</sup>; these rely on official statistics/data sets, and other labour market intelligence resources, which support the identification process and increase opportunities to analyse data on adult skills and competences of potential target groups as well as labour market needs. In Poland, for example, the *Bilanz Capitalu Ludzkiego* (BKL) is a large-scale study on human capital. It surveys employers, the general population and training providers with the aim of understanding the country's skill needs in terms of both demand and supply of skills. The survey is conducted every two years, with smaller mid-term surveys in between to track development over time (European Commission, 2018).

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<sup>(10)</sup> Consult Cedefop work on skills anticipation at: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/assisting-eu-countries-skills-matching>

A comprehensive information system on the needs of both low-skilled adults and the labour market (current and future), relies on an integrated approach to the governance of skills anticipation mechanisms. This implies putting in place appropriate institutional structures (intermediary, formal or informal, skills bodies), operational processes (regulation, management, financial and non-financial incentives) and dissemination channels (online or offline platforms) that may facilitate a feedback loop between relevant stakeholders and sustain policy reaction based on reliable labour market information signals (Cedefop, 2017a).

The Portuguese qualification needs anticipation system, *Sistema de Antecipação de Necessidades de Qualificação* (SANQ), was created in 2015 in Portugal with the aim of providing comprehensive analysis of skills supply and demand. SANQ brings together data from various skills anticipation exercises to inform government policy-making (at central, regional and local levels) on skills and in planning education and training provision, both in the public and private co-financed sectors. The comprehensiveness of the SANQ is seen as one of its strengths, especially in linking skills assessment with funding of the vocational education and training (VET) system (Skills Panorama, 2017).

### 2.2.1.3. *Multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance*

The inclusive and comprehensive nature of upskilling pathways relies on effective and inclusive multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. This involves the efficient coordination of stakeholders at all levels, including local/community actors, in order both to reach diverse adult beneficiaries/learners and also to serve their potentially comprehensive needs. While governance will be expressed according to national specific institutional settings and needs, a coordinated and coherent approach is embedded in the shared vision of sustainable and lifelong learning pathways.

This form of governance can widen access to different pathways and empower even those further from the labour market, or who are most vulnerable, to participate fully in a lifelong learning society. The meaningful involvement of multiple actors at different levels and systems can demonstrate that all stakeholders are valued, and their contributions recognised. Governance in the context of upskilling pathways emphasises the strategic role of the diverse local/ community partners, especially for their role in reaching and engaging those hardest to reach and who are vulnerable low-skilled; it also implies the need for capacity-building strategies.

Strong partnership and cooperation among stakeholders (State/ employers/training providers/social partners, learners' representatives), with strong engagement and accountability, are among the core features of the *Skills Plus* initiative, one of the initiatives of the three areas of work of the Norwegian strategy for skills policy 2017-21; this was developed by a wide range of stakeholders including five ministries, the Sami Parliament, four employer associations, four trade union associations and one organisation representing the voluntary sector and adult learning associations. The strategy aims to ensure that individuals and businesses have the skills that give Norway a competitive business sector, an efficient and sound public sector, and an inclusive labour market. To achieve this objective the partners have agreed on three areas of work: informed choices for the individual and societies; promoting learning and effective use of skills in the labour market; and specific support for low-skilled adults with weak labour market attachment <sup>(1)</sup>. The strategy includes several measures aimed at improving coordination at different levels, including the establishment of a future skills needs committee. Implementation of the strategy is monitored by a Skills Policy Council (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2017).

Effective multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance is one of the key features of several practices analysed for this report. Shared governance through a multilevel partnership between the Federal level, the provinces and accredited education and training providers (for the delivery) is one of the characteristics of the Austrian initiative for adult education (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung*), while the *Unique labour endowment (Dote Unica Lavoro)* (Italy, Lombardia) adopts a multi-stakeholder governance approach based on shared responsibility and public private partnerships. The social partners play a pivotal role in upskilling low-skilled adults: they hold vital information on training needs and can inform on priorities to be set and most suited training and learning delivery modes. Austrian labour foundations (*Arbeitsstiftungen*) aim at promotion of upskilling, reskilling and reintegration in the labour market in the event of large layoffs (outplacement foundations, type 1) specific skill shortages (in placement foundations, type 2) or targeted to specific target groups (such as persons aged 45+, women, refugees, type 3). While social partners at company or regional level are responsible for their establishment, labour foundations are characterised by strong cooperation and partnerships at all levels, including involvement of different adult learning

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<sup>(1)</sup> For this area of work refer to the fiche on *Skills Plus* schemes in Annex 1.

providers or VET institutions in training delivery within the labour foundation. In the UK, *Unionlearn* is the learning and skills organisation of the Trade Union Congress and works to assist unions in the delivery of learning opportunities for their members as well as for managing the *Union Learning Fund* and training union learning representatives (ULRs). Low-skilled adults may include particularly vulnerable people with complex needs and/or difficult life situations, who may not normally seek support or engage with institutional actors. Effective governance in upskilling pathways recognises and values the active involvement and contribution of the local and community level, as well as of non-traditional actors. In the UK, *Mid-life career review* is grounded in local partnerships while in Spain *Vives Emplea: team empowerment for labour integration* supports the creation of multiple alliances with public and private actors, private companies, private foundations and other social entities consolidated within the third sector.

#### 2.2.1.4. *Monitoring and evaluation*

A coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways can be effective and efficient only if it is sustained by a systematic and sustainable monitoring and evaluation system and strategy, operating on two main levels. It intersects with all individual areas (including support, implementation, provisions, programmes, initiatives) that should have dedicated monitoring and evaluation. It is also overarching, since it is closely related to planning and designing strategies for identification of target groups and is a key component of an integrated upskilling pathways approach, without which, there can be no consistent and continuous feedback to improve systems and make them accountable to stakeholders and beneficiaries. Monitoring and evaluation contribute to the improvement of many aspects of policy and strategies for upskilling pathways, such as: the shaping of strategic goals, the planning of services, the development of programmes, the identification of gaps in service delivery, the consistency between services offered, the training needs of professional practitioners and the optimal use of resources and of investment in delivery. Monitoring and evaluation also address accountability issues, support identification and mainstreaming of best practices and allow for the timely identification of potential problems during implementation. An overarching monitoring and evaluation approach needs to be informed by a comprehensive and integrated data collection system to guarantee the effectiveness of upskilling pathways interventions and policies; alignment of data collection systems and indicators used

within countries and systems at all levels is indispensable. Involving the appropriate stakeholders can aid effective data collection and address some of the challenges, such as low response rates and data sensitivity. Raising awareness among data collectors of the importance of having accurate data, but also communicating the monitoring and evaluation results back to the different levels, (national, regional and local) may facilitate and encourage stakeholder engagement and ownership.

Monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of the Austrian initiative for adult education (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung*) and it has helped provide a robust evidence base of what works and under which conditions, resulting in useful learning for all stakeholders. All institutions taking part in the initiative commit to continuous monitoring and evaluation and the entire process and its results are supervised by a monitoring board. The feedback loop between initiative implementation and monitoring and evaluation ensures that issues are identified and addressed in a structured and timely fashion, with resulting changes leading to programme improvements.

### **2.2.2. Support level: inclusive and accessible upskilling pathways**

Once existing structures and systems have been adapted and streamlined, and resources allocated, earmarked and budget secured, it is important that these are sustained with the right support enabling low-skilled adults to take full advantage of these learning and upskilling opportunities. This support is sometimes directed to individual beneficiaries via employers and companies, as well as through education providers. Support is conceived of as targeted and flexible, of quality and continuous.

#### *2.2.2.1. Financial support*

Despite considerable progress in recent years, many member states are still far from the desirable number of adults engaged in learning activities (15%) and this is even more of a concern for low-skilled adults (Cedefop, 2020). According to Eurostat's Adult education survey (AES), the most significant barrier to adult participation in education and training is lack of time because of family responsibilities and conflicting training and work schedules. The associated financial cost is another important factor: according to the AES, 28% of adults in the EU in 2016 did not participate in education and training (formal, non-formal and informal learning) due to its cost. Similarly, high financial cost also hinders company provision of training. According to Eurostat's continuing vocational training survey

(CVTS), 28% of companies in the EU cited the cost of training as the reason for not providing training in 2015.

Lack of necessary financial resources may be an even more significant barrier for low-skilled adults as research shows that they are more likely to be unemployed or inactive and tend to be employed in low-skilled occupations or in precarious work when in employment (Cedefop, 2017b). Well-targeted financial support may help to reduce this barrier and attract low-skilled adults to participate in education and training, as well as encourage employers to invest more in training of their (low-skilled) employees.

Paid training leave may help to overcome both time and financial constraints and encourage low-skilled adults to undertake education and training. Suitable financing instruments targeting individuals include grants, vouchers/learning accounts; subsidised, income-contingent loans; and paid training leave of adequate duration (long enough to acquire higher qualifications). Instruments targeting companies include levy-grant mechanisms, tax incentives, grants, and payback clauses.

Effective financing instruments for supporting individuals to take up, and companies to offer, upskilling pathways opportunities need to be carefully designed to ensure effective targeting of low-skilled adults. This may include preferential treatment towards low-skilled adults and ensuring that training low-skilled employees is in-built in financing mechanisms, such as granting these groups higher levels of subsidy or priority for funding. Eligibility criteria (in terms of groups and type of education and training) should be carefully determined to target diverse groups of low-skilled adults. The amount of subsidy must be adequate/attractive, taking into consideration both direct and indirect costs of education and training, and must be provided in advance, before education and training takes place (important especially for low-income individuals). When designing and implementing effective financing instruments, complementarity of existing instruments needs to be assured and possible drawbacks (such as heavy administrative burden, dead-weight losses) considered.

The German *On the job training* initiative (*Arbeitnehmer in Unternehmen WeGebAU*) is a financial instrument targeted at low-skilled workers in SMEs and workers aged 45+; since 1 April 2012 the instrument has also financed adults younger than 45 but only if the employer covers half of the training cost. It uses financial incentives to promote both employee and employer engagement: wage subsidies incentivise employer engagement while the voucher system guarantees reimbursement of training costs for employees.

The instrument envisages strategic use of the funding: to avoid funding being used for training that would have been carried out even without the financial support, WeGebAU does not support employer or task-specific training. For low-skilled workers, subsidies are only available for accredited courses leading to a certificate, though this requirement may be lifted for SMEs. Courses must last at least four weeks and the employer is obliged to ensure leave of absence. The Austrian *Initiative for adult education (Erwachsenenbildung)* relies on strategic financial funding as accredited providers are funded only if there is a need and a target group for the accredited learning offer.

Analysis of the good (and promising) practices carried out for this study also revealed the importance of allocating an appropriate level of funding, and of joint funding mechanisms. The financing structure of the Austrian labour foundations – *Arbeitsstiftungen* – is always the result of a negotiation process involving company management, the social partners, public employment services (PES) and other financing authorities such as the provincial government. During participation in the labour foundation, workers receive unemployment benefits while additional allowances for course-related costs (such as travel expenses or childcare) can also be granted. Foundations are regarded as cost-intensive but also as highly effective. Co-funding mechanisms are also a major feature of *Language at work (Taal op de werkvloer, NL)* and of the Irish *Skillnet*: while *Skillnet* Ireland, as a national agency, has national funds, it operates under a joint investment model, partly funded by matching contributions from participating businesses in *Skillnet* networks.

#### 2.2.2.2. *Non-financial support*

Financing instruments may work or fail depending on the broader economic, social and educational context. They might not be successful in the absence of a more comprehensive approach addressing additional obstacles to participation and so need to be complemented by targeted non-financial support to both employers and individuals. This includes information about the existence of the financing instrument, advice to companies and guidance for learners on the use of the instrument, raising awareness on benefits of learning (through public relations campaigns and marketing measures), tailored training delivery, consultancy services for companies, and quality assurance. This aspect of the support level crosses with the area of lifelong guidance systems (see below and in the analytical framework), particularly

concerning guidance for the employed, which can be provided in different settings and involve public and private actors/owners <sup>(12)</sup>.

As SMEs may lack the necessary (financial and non-financial) resources to promote and provide upskilling pathways opportunities to their employees, specific support should be provided for them. This could include information and guidance on funding opportunities, consulting services in defining SME training needs, administrative support in applying for funding, promoting partnerships to increase SME training capacity and innovative learning approaches to adapt to specific SME needs and constraints (using coaches at the workplace to teach new tasks, self-regulated learning or distance learning, use of networks and pooling of resources). *Skillnet*, for example, through the establishment of company networks, promotes workforce upskilling in small and micro enterprises, which may not have the resources and capacity to provide upskilling opportunities to their workforce.

### 2.2.2.3. *Outreach and lifelong guidance system*

Ensuring that a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways is inclusive and sustainable implies the integration of appropriate strategies and services to reach out to, motivate, engage and support low-skilled adults to access and navigate relevant opportunities. Such an approach needs strategic coordination within the area of outreach measures and lifelong guidance systems accompanied by a change in service culture that is proactive, decisively moving towards a lifelong and life-wide process support logic. This should enable better access for beneficiaries and adults with potential for upskilling, reaching individuals in their own life contexts, to increase support needed not only for sustainable career and life transitions, but also for developing career management skills needed for individual empowerment in a constantly challenging and changing societal context.

Among the good (and promising) practices analysed, *Vives Emplea: team empowerment for labour integration* (Spain) adopts an innovative methodology to reach out to different individuals and to foster their empowerment. Municipalities, other private foundations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) cooperate to reach out to potential

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<sup>(12)</sup> For more information on 'guidance for the employed', see the dedicated section in the recently launched European inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices>

beneficiaries and to disseminate potential benefits. This is aided by strong cooperation and partnerships: multiple alliances among public and private actors, private companies, private foundations and other social entities consolidated in the third sector actively cooperate to bring success. The innovative methodology is based on teamwork sessions with a coaching approach and includes individual coaching sessions, an employment intermediation programme and a corporate volunteer programme. This approach aims at creating the right synergies to sustain a transformative process among participants in terms of self-knowledge and reinforcement of their personal, social and employment skills. While individuals are responsible for their own learning process and have the leading role in the project performance, they are supported by a coach-coordinator in charge of developing individualised sessions and guiding the team to achieve its own objectives.

In the UK, *Union Learn* adopts training advocacy through union learning representatives (ULRs) to engage learners, including those that are otherwise hard for providers to reach, and offer support and guidance to learners throughout their learning/upskilling pathway: they offer information, advice, guidance, carry out initial assessments of skills, link learners with providers, assist learners through Union Learning centres, arrange flexible provision for shift workers, and plan next learning steps.

*Mid-life career reviews* are an innovative tailored approach to providing lifelong guidance and career management services. Along with adopting a person-centred approach, they are grounded in the principle of learning as a human right. They use local partnerships to maximise participation, reflect the diversity of individual needs and aspirations, promote learning across the lifespan with their focus on older adults, overcome negative stereotypes related to ageing, provide age-proof services and encourage intergenerational relationships.

### **2.2.3. Implementation: tailored, adaptable and flexible upskilling pathways**

At implementation level, a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways is grounded in the idea of adaptable and flexible opportunities and learning pathways tailored to individual learner needs. Skills assessment, a tailored learning offer and validation and recognition of skills and competences are key elements.

Upskilling pathways that lead to continuing higher and/or adult education and training, or other forms of learning, are generally based on the idea that all learning is valued, promoted and made visible. In consequence, low-skilled adults can progress towards individual empowerment by embarking on a sustainable upskilling journey, tailored to their own specific needs. The process may be short-term (one-off skills assessment and validation, recognition of prior learning (RPL), or a work-based learning (WBL), training module), intermittent and alternate between employment and education and training, or it may involve a longer-term and continuous learning commitment leading to a qualification; but it is always built on the idea of a pathway towards individual empowerment and grounded in lifelong learning.

#### 2.2.3.1. *Skills assessment*

This journey may start with skills assessment. As experience demonstrates, low-skilled adults may be all but low-skilled. While adults may lack some basic skills or qualifications, they likely have acquired other important skills throughout their lifetimes, including in employment. Inactive and long-term unemployed individuals might have been involved in domestic work or voluntary activities that provided a broad or specific source of learning and competence development. Immigrants might have undocumented sets of skills valuable for host-country labour markets. Particularly for low-skilled adults, identification of previously acquired skills and competences will aid engagement and motivation for further learning, as well as provide pathways to meaningful employment. For some, the discovery and increased awareness of their own capabilities will be a valuable outcome of the process.

A skills assessment is a process in which an individual's learning outcomes are checked against specific reference points or standards. It can also be referred to as a 'skills audit' or 'skill profiling'. In the context of upskilling pathways, skills assessment is focused on the identification and documentation of an individual's prior learning in any context (formal, non-formal and informal) and of any gaps in relation to their desired level of skills. This path can lead to further targeted education and training but can also contribute to enhanced employability and progression in employment (such as promotion, transition to another position), so there are multiple pathways of opportunity.

Identification and documentation of skills is also crucial for designing a targeted training approach based on an individual's point of departure. It may reduce the length of training and increase system efficiency, matching

the learner or employee with a suitable position or career. It can also help in overcoming so-called situational obstacles such as family responsibility, conflicting time schedule, financial costs, lack of employer support or proximity concerns.

#### 2.2.3.2. Tailored learning offer

Tailored learning in upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults provides multiple paths for broad, transitional and flexible training offers adapted to individual needs, both in the formal (including non-formal) and informal systems. Tailoring addresses the heterogeneity of the low-skilled adult population by acknowledging and building on prior learning (skills assessment) and removing obstacles (institutional, as well as those linked to shared individual characteristics, experiences, knowledge), so easing adults' participation in learning. Linking learning offers to the prospect of valid qualifications and to an occupation or a field, may increase individual motivation to engage. When adults are aware of the purpose of their studies, and of the utility (professional and personal) of a diploma, chances of engagement and success are higher. Linking learning offers to valid qualifications implies identifying and addressing the basic skills and knowledge gaps which need to be addressed for the purpose of a qualification; these will be addressed individually as part of the overall learning journey.

Among the good practices analysed in this study, tailoring to the needs of the individual learner is one of the features of the Austrian *Initiative for adult education (Initiative Erwachsenenbildung)*, the *Unique labour endowment (Dote Unica Lavoro)* and of the French *Personal training account (Compte personnel de formation, CPF)*. The *personal training account* stresses the importance of flexibility in organising one's own learning: individuals can develop skills that can be validated and be used for obtaining a full qualification.

Work-based learning (WBL) has the potential to be particularly attractive for adults, especially for low-skilled adults. This group may have had negative experiences in traditional school settings, so WBL offers them an alternative setting to apply immediately what they have learned, and understand the relevance and impact of their learning on and off the job. The problem-solving focus and attention to tasks rather than subjects, applied in WBL, are both central elements in andragogy. In addition, in apprenticeships adults are remunerated while learning and learn predominantly in a company setting, which implies that they are integrated into a working environment and are able

to identify more with being workers than learners; this may be an important incentive for low-skilled adults who may be particularly vulnerable in the labour market. The tailoring aspect refers to providers' capacity to make use of the different forms of WBL to respond better to the needs of an individual and/or a homogeneous group of individuals. When workplace learning is involved, tailoring also refers to addressing the needs and expectations of companies (which is particularly relevant for apprenticeships).

Training under the *Skills Plus* (Norway) is highly flexible and tailored to the needs of both the individual learner and of the employer. Flexibility in content and focus, as well as in the delivery/mode of learning, contributes to strengthening participant motivation to continue learning as well as employer engagement. Training tailored to the needs of both the companies and the learners is also an asset of Dutch *Language at work (Taal op de werkvloer)*, as well as of the *Union Learning Fund (ULF)*. By supporting ULRs at the workplace to work closely with employers and training providers, ULF ensure that the training provided is relevant to the needs of both learners and employers, who are then more likely to promote and engage in workplace learning.

Strong employer engagement and buy-in through the use of a marketing strategy is one of the elements of the Dutch *Language at work (Taal op de werkvloer)*. The initiative is based on the business case for language training and associated workforce upskilling. Language training is aimed at solving problems the companies face (such as employees not understanding safety instructions). The use of 'argument cards' proved very effective as the benefits of basic skills training is not always evident to employers (or employees). *Skillnet* (Ireland) is a successful example of an enterprise-led approach to upskilling, resulting in strong enterprise ownership and engagement in the process. Encouraging enterprise to lead the process helps ensure that programmes delivered through Skillnet Ireland are highly relevant to the needs of industry. This approach also enables cohesive enterprise networking and the flexibility to respond to ever-changing skills demands through both formal and informal learning. As discussed in Section 2.2.2, creation of enterprise networks facilitates workforce upskilling in small and micro enterprises which may not have their own resources and capacity to provide upskilling opportunities to their workforce.

Apart from being relevant to the needs of individuals and/or companies, in an upskilling pathways perspective, tailored training needs to be of quality and delivered by well-trained and fully enabled professionals (with the

right tools/ means/resources). In the *Initiative for adult education (Initiative Erwachsenenbildung, Austria)*, in order to receive funding and participate in the initiative, providers must be accredited and satisfy several robust criteria for programme quality: curricula, target groups, outreach strategies, previous dropout rates, partnerships, guidance and assessment strategies and other quality criteria. Trainers and counsellors need to meet initiative quality standards, such as special training for basic skills teaching professionals.

#### 2.2.3.3. *Validation and recognition of prior learning*

An important step in the upskilling pathway journey, which can also be seen as a point of access or as a type of upskilling method, is certification of the tailored learning or any prior learning through validation and recognition. The *Upskilling pathway* recommendation specifies that upskilling pathways should offer individuals opportunities for certifying skills or key competences acquired, which can be particularly relevant in progressing towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4 according to national circumstances. In the context of upskilling pathways, validation is combined with recognition and broadens the scope to learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Qualifications acquired in other countries or regions might be also considered within the process of upskilling.

The outputs of a validation process can take many different forms, ranging from formal qualifications to certificates issued by different institutions and within different sectors (companies, NGOs, chambers of commerce). These aim to increase the visibility and value of all the learning acquired, thereby making it possible for the individual to use this documentation to continue to further education, to maintain employment or enter the labour market. Validation and recognition are an integral part of upskilling pathways.

Validation can make a significant difference in better matching skills and labour demand, promoting transferability of skills between companies and sectors and in supporting mobility across the European labour market. It can also contribute to social inclusion by providing those at risk of exclusion, particularly low-skilled adults, with a way to improve their employability and engagement in society.

The *Qualifica* programme and the Lombardia *Unique labour endowment (Dote Unica Lavoro)* are interesting examples of tailored learning and employment pathways. *Qualifica* adopts a standardised four-step approach: information and enrolment; analysis and development of a skill profile; discussion and definition of appropriate education and training path; referral

to recognition procedures or appropriate tailored education and training provision. *Unique labour endowment* is based on the principle of employment pathways: a nominal voucher (*dote*), based on different aid intensity levels calculated on a standardised profiling process, is given to beneficiaries, who are free to choose the public or accredited private employment services they consider most capable of responding to their needs. The selected employment agency provides beneficiaries with tailored guidance services according to a personalised action plan. This plan sets out a tailored path for the beneficiary, including training and other activities such as competence mapping, orientation and accompaniment, and job placement services. The inclusiveness of the initiative is guaranteed by the introduction of the aid intensity levels; these distinguish differing degrees of difficulty in being (re)integrated in the labour market and prevent employment agencies from favouring clients who have a good chance of entering/re-entering the labour market.

*Labour foundations* (Austria) include important elements of upskilling pathways. They respond to specific training and career needs, adopting a comprehensive approach with central elements: career guidance, assorted training measures (qualification), active job search, work experience programmes and (in the case of outplacement foundations) assistance with business start-ups. The basis of qualification measures is always an individual initial assessment and training plan, outlining individual needs and training goals, which needs to be signed by all parties (participant, foundation management and, where applicable, future employer) and be approved by PES. It is targeted to companies by size: type 1 foundations are designed for large companies, while type 2 and type 3 are used by SMEs to train new employees.

*Qualifica* is also an interesting example of effective integration of validation and skills assessment into existing services, such as career guidance and education and training provision. The network of *Qualifica* centres offers comprehensive one-stop-shops for guidance on participation in lifelong learning. They provide face-to-face information, guidance and mentoring to adults on education and training pathways opportunities based on a process grounded in validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The process is supported by the *Qualifica* passport, an online tool where qualifications and skills acquired are recorded. This is integrated with the credit system and aligned with the ECVET framework: it is based on units and learning outcomes which are part of qualifications and can be assessed

and validated, hence ensuring flexibility for the adult in the pathway for obtaining a qualification. It also includes a tool aimed at providing orientation and information on possible pathways, leading to completing or obtaining a new qualification in line with skills and competences acquired in work-related and other non-formal and informal settings.

### 2.3. Developing coordinated and coherent upskilling pathways approaches for low-skilled adults

The analysis of practices presented in Section 2.2 suggests a number of important systemic features for the development of the analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults.

#### 2.3.1. Decision-making level

At decision-making level, development of upskilling pathways requires a nationally agreed vision grounded in lifelong learning and embedded with a joined-up inclusive, flexible and accessible learning pathway. It relies on political commitment at the highest level and is sustained with earmarked and/or allocated funding. It involves coordination of multiple relevant policy domains in a holistic fashion and recognises the centrality of the individual beneficiary at different levels and in different processes, beyond their participation in tailored learning opportunities. Implementing a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways that supports the shared vision requires a well-defined planning strategy for the definition and identification of target groups, capable of anticipating changing needs. It must enable the creation of the necessary arrangements through consultation and partnerships with stakeholders, particularly with social partners and other civil society organisations. The inclusive and comprehensive nature of upskilling pathways relies on effective and inclusive multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. This involves the efficient coordination of stakeholders (spanning education, training, employment and social service sectors as well as community level and non-traditional stakeholders) at all levels, reaching diverse adult beneficiaries/learners and serving their needs. Governance in this context emphasises the strategic role of the diverse local/ community partners, especially for their role in

reaching and engaging those most hard to reach and the low-skilled; it also implies the need for capacity-building strategies. A coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways can be effective only if it is sustained by a systematic and sustainable monitoring and evaluation system across all areas, ensuring synergies are in place and sustained, and also within those individual areas. This also implies that there should be an agreed concept of quality covering all areas (support, implementation, provisions, programmes, initiatives) that have their own dedicated monitoring and evaluation systems and mechanisms.

### 2.3.2. Support level

At support level, analysis of the good practices highlighted the importance that the synergies developed under the decision-making phase, are sustained with appropriate support so low-skilled adults can take full advantage of upskilling opportunities. Support needs to be targeted, of quality and continuous. Effective financial instruments can support individuals to take up, and companies to offer, these opportunities. However, they need to be carefully designed to ensure effective targeting of low-skilled adults. It is also important that an appropriate level of funding is secured and that it is based on a cost-sharing mechanism grounded in the idea that investing in upskilling is a shared responsibility. Promoting the benefits of investing in learning can contribute to engaging both companies and learners and can stimulate their sense of responsibility. It is also important to note that the wider theme of earmarked and/or allocated funding tied to broader financing and budget issues is not an essential feature of the support level but is an aspect of the decision-making level of the analytical framework under the first key framework area, the integrated approach to upskilling policy.

Financial instruments need to be complemented by targeted non-financial support. This may include information on the financing instrument, advice to companies and guidance for learners on the use of the instrument, such as raising awareness of the benefits of learning. This is particularly relevant for SMEs as they may lack the necessary (financial and non-financial) resources to promote and provide upskilling pathways opportunities to their employees.

Ensuring that a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways is inclusive and sustainable also implies the integration of appropriate strategies to reach out to, motivate, engage and support low-skilled adults to navigate the opportunities. This needs the strategic coordination of outreach and guidance services and should be accompanied by a change

in service culture to a lifelong and life-wide process able to reach out to people in their own contexts and support them towards sustainable career and life transitions. It should adopt a holistic approach and be embedded in community: it values, recognises and strengthens the capacity of the community and other non-traditional actors.

### **2.3.3. Implementation level**

At implementation level, a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways is grounded in the idea that all learning is valued, promoted and made visible, so that low-skilled adults can progress towards their empowerment by embarking on a sustainable upskilling journey, tailored to their own specific needs.

Low-skilled adults may have had negative experiences in traditional school settings, so work-based learning has the potential to be particularly attractive for them. Flexible, adaptable and tailored pathways recognise the heterogeneity of the low-skilled adult population and build on prior (formal, non-formal and informal) learning, offer tailored learning and training opportunities, and allow for validation and recognition of skills and competences. These pathways recognise the centrality of the individual and her/his needs, and they depend on quality assurance for their sustainability. They rely on creating the right synergies and promoting stakeholder engagement and cooperation. The value and sustainability of upskilling pathways, also in relation to the learning acquired in non-formal and informal setting, can be assured only if there is buy-in from all stakeholders. Without the trust of the relevant actors, their success and usefulness are severely hindered. Quality assurance in skills assessment, learning and training provision, as well as validation and recognition processes, are necessary elements.

### **2.3.4. 10 key areas of the analytical framework**

The important systemic features discussed above, have been articulated around 10 key areas/themes of the policy process and form the principles/ areas of analysis of the analytical framework which will be presented in Chapter 3 of this report.

Decision-making:

1. Integrated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults
2. Planning strategy for identification of target groups

3. Governance (multilevel/multi-stakeholder)
4. Monitoring and evaluation

Support:

5. Financial and non-financial support
6. Outreach
7. Lifelong guidance system

Implementation:

8. Skills assessment
9. (a) Tailored learning offer leading to a qualification  
(b) Tailored learning offer with WBL
10. Validation and recognition of skills and competences

## 2.4. Stakeholder consultations

Development of the analytical framework followed an iterative approach which included both desk research and stakeholder consultations. This consultative aspect demonstrates that the framework is mostly conceived as a tool for reflection and inspiration for policy-makers and other stakeholders; as such, its development relies on stakeholder engagement and feedback.

Development of the analytical framework, therefore, benefitted from two rounds of stakeholder consultations on two different draft versions.

### 2.4.1. First stakeholder consultation

The first draft version of the framework developed under the first two research phases (Section 1.2.1) was tested in country focus groups, among selected national stakeholders in Ireland, France, Italy, Romania and Sweden. For each country, two focus groups were organised between December 2018 and January 2019, to provide feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the draft framework as well as the relevance of specified key areas.

Participants in this first round of stakeholder consultations included representatives from relevant ministries, trade unions, public and private sectors and services such as the public employment services, employer representative bodies, representatives from adult education and training and learning organisations, as well as other providers and civil society.

#### 2.4.2. Second stakeholder consultation

A second round of stakeholder consultations took place during the Second policy learning forum on upskilling pathways for adults: a vision for the future <sup>(13)</sup>, and was aimed at discussing in detail the second draft version of the analytical framework which Cedefop research team prepared in February 2019.

The second draft version of the framework included refinements resulting from the feedback received during the first round of stakeholder consultation (country focus groups discussed above).

Participants in the learning event included representatives of the EU Member States, European and national social partners, the EESC and the European Commission, as well as representatives from civil society and adult learning organisations.

#### 2.4.3. Stakeholder consultations outcomes and reflection points

Participants in both rounds of stakeholder consultations largely agreed that Cedefop's analytical framework is a useful source of inspiration and a tool for reflection and identification of key areas for action.

Discussions clearly indicated that all 10 framework key areas are relevant and can be adapted to specific (national/local) contexts and may support stakeholders in further implementation of the *Upskilling pathways* recommendation and towards developing innovations based on their existing practices, provisions and systems.

The main reflection points identified by participants of the two rounds of stakeholder consultation can be summarised as follows:

- (a) a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways for adults requires a shift in mind-set grounded in a shared vision built around the idea of a joined-up, accessible and flexible learning pathway. According to this shared vision, upskilling and reskilling is a common social value, a public good, shared between public institutions, private sector actors, social partners, civil society and beneficiaries, for empowerment in society and in the labour market;
- (b) this shift in mind-set implies strong political commitment, infused with strong stakeholder engagement, cooperation and partnerships at all levels and in all key areas of the analytical framework. Effective and

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<sup>(13)</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/second-policy-learning-forum-upskilling-pathways-vision-future>

- coordinated governance implies a need for capacity building for the relevant stakeholders, ensuring mutual understanding and common approaches, as well as clear roles and responsibilities and accountability; it also requires strengthening the role and capacity of community-based approaches and integrated governance systems involving both national and local level;
- (c) a coordinated and coherent approach relies on the establishment of an overarching monitoring and evaluation system informed by comprehensive and integrated data collection linked to quality assurance;
  - (d) appropriate funding levels should be secured and appropriate financial instruments based on cost-sharing mechanisms and specific support for SMEs (partnerships, administrative support) should be designed;
  - (e) effective communication and promotion strategies for engagement of individuals and companies and to secure engagement and commitment of all stakeholders. This needs to be accompanied by sustained investment in capacity building both in terms of infrastructure and human capital (such as financing for teachers and trainers, providers, guidance professionals) as well as in terms of engagement and support to employers, particularly small and medium-size enterprises;
  - (f) change in service culture to proactive career guidance service is necessary to move decisively towards a lifelong and life-wide process support logic, able to reach out to people in their own contexts and aid their sustainable, career and life transitions;
  - (g) upskilling pathways should be conceived as inclusive and comprehensive;
  - (h) all training and other forms of learning, including learning and training in non-formal and informal settings, needs to be valued, promoted and made visible. Skills assessment, validation and recognition are a systematic feature in national skills formation systems;
  - (i) provisions for multiple paths require broad, transitional and flexible training offers, both in the formal and non-formal systems and according to individual needs (such as non-linear offer, combination, own pace). They should have clear links to formal qualifications as points of reference for the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning outcomes.

The final analytical framework for upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults incorporates feedback received within the stakeholder consultation process and is presented in Chapter 3 of this report.