

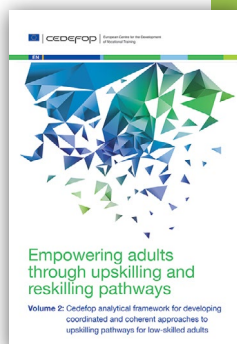


Chapter 3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING UPSKILLING PATHWAYS FOR LOW-SKILLED ADULTS

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 3.

Analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults

This chapter presents the final Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults, the result of the iterative research process described in the previous chapters.

Upskilling pathways is about pulling together resources and creating the right synergies for gearing every (low-skilled) adult towards an individual path to empowerment. It is about creating a comprehensive approach to the upskilling and reskilling of the low-skilled adult population, which is able to address, in a coordinated and coherent manner, their comprehensive needs and ensure that they have all the tools and support to embark on sustainable learning/training pathways leading to their full potential and fulfilment.

Within this context, the analytical framework presented here is developed to support policy-makers and other stakeholders in designing and implementing coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults.

Analytical frameworks are designed to structure logical thinking in a systematic manner: they are models that aim at guiding and facilitating understanding and at underpinning, supporting and guiding analysis. Analytical frameworks are of critical importance to studying the same phenomenon using the same categorisation, and to achieving common insights into aspects of a complex policy problem (such as the upskilling of adults) embedded in different national (and local) contexts without losing coherence and consistency.

Although it may appear to present a normative stance, the Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults is not intended as an exhaustive list of necessary conditions or an assessment tool. It works as a frame of reference for stimulating discussion

and reflection on design and implementation of upskilling pathways. It is intended as a source of inspiration for policy-makers and other stakeholders, to support them in identifying key areas for action.

The framework articulates a clear grounding in a lifelong learning perspective and is focused on empowering the individual learner/beneficiary.

It is articulated around important systemic features needed for a coherent and coordinated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. These features are organised around 10 key areas of the policy process. Within each key area we provide a definition, the rationale and essential features that construct the area, but which are also interconnected with the contents of other areas of the framework.

The framework works horizontally in promoting cooperation across the 10 key areas, unlocking synergies and fostering complementarities, but it also contributes to enriching knowledge and evidence within each key area.

3.1. Analytical framework key areas

3.1.1. Key area 1: Integrated approach to upskilling pathways for adults

3.1.1.1. Definition

An integrated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults has various elements at the strategic level. It includes a nationally agreed approach (strategy/framework) and an embedded nationally defined vision (such as in the form of guidelines, defining a common shared language) built around the idea of a joined-up, inclusive, tailored, accessible, adaptable and flexible upskilling pathway for low-skilled adults. According to this shared vision, upskilling and reskilling is a common social value, a public good, whose responsibility is shared among public institutions, social partners, civil society and beneficiaries, for empowerment in society and in the labour market.

Various policy domains and systems are integrated in a holistic manner to improve policy coherence and coordination horizontally and vertically, ensuring high stakeholder engagement and commitment at both national and local level. This paves the way for the development of upskilling pathways.

The strategic and integrated approach to providing upskilling pathways is grounded in a lifelong learning perspective and built around the idea of easily accessible pathways comprising skills assessment, provision of a tailored, flexible and quality learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills acquired. Guidance and outreach, as well as digital technologies, can be used to facilitate continuous implementation of provisions and services.

Critical to the lifelong learning perspective is the centrality of the individual learners' starting points and needs, and their association with adult target group(s) who may especially benefit from upskilling.

3.1.1.2. *Why is it important?*

The fragmentation and complexity of relevant policy measures often results in a lack of systematic approaches to upskilling the low-skilled adult population and a lack of awareness of the socioeconomic benefits of doing so. An integrated adult upskilling pathways approach, tying together multiple policy domains and stakeholders, improves policy effectiveness, thereby increasing the chances that the highly diverse potential target groups will be reached and that the needs of vulnerable individuals will be addressed.

The combination of flexible, adapted learning with personalised support also allows for recovery of the inactive and long-term unemployed, leading to social and economic gains, as well as long-term welfare savings. 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.

3.1.1.3. *Key features*

- (a) There is a nationally agreed approach (strategy/framework) that incorporates a nationally agreed vision for upskilling pathways based on a lifelong learning perspective. This provides joined-up learning opportunities, built around the concept of an easy to access and flexible pathway comprising, at implementation level, skills assessment, tailored learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills and competences.
- (b) Multiple relevant policy domains are included in a holistic fashion at all levels, especially education and training and employment, and areas that support or provide services to adult learners.
- (c) The nationally agreed approach has strategic earmarked and/or allocated funding at all appropriate levels (including for capacity building) to ensure

its sustainability and efficiency over time, while also involving multiple stakeholders (public, private and civil society) who cooperate to foster a lifelong learning culture, particularly at work (key area 3: multilevel/multi-stakeholder governance).

- (d) Plans for institutional coordination are defined. A strong national vision accommodates local and regional cooperation needs and specificities.
- (e) The nationally agreed approach is flexible and responsive to changing skills needs.
- (f) The nationally agreed approach and vision is made public and promoted using a shared and common language, adapted to the local context, for communication among decision-makers and stakeholders as well as the public at large.
- (g) A comprehensive, overarching strategy for a monitoring and evaluation system ensures high policy coordination and efficiency (key area 4: monitoring and evaluation).
- (h) All key areas are taken into account in the approach to consolidating and creating policies and strategies.

3.1.2. Key area 2: Planning strategy for identification of target groups

3.1.2.1. Definition

Implementation of a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways that supports the agreed vision involves a well-defined planning strategy for the definition and identification of target groups. Depending on the strategy adopted this can imply prioritisation of specific groups of low-skilled adults, a more overarching approach that targets a diverse set of groups in need, or a combination of both.

To define and streamline national priorities and their intended socioeconomic outcomes, the identification of target groups involves the study of comprehensive and integrated information on the different potential adult populations and their needs. Official statistics/data sets and other resources can support the identification process and increase opportunities to analyse data on adult skills and competences of potential target groups. Analysis of information on potential target population needs is complemented with effective skill anticipation mechanisms on current and future labour market needs.

The need for comprehensive information requires methods and strategies for involving key stakeholders in compiling data and information for making

informed decisions. Within the context of the coherent and coordinated approach, shared decision-making among public and private stakeholders, including potential beneficiaries, facilitates and enables the creation of upskilling pathways.

3.1.2.2. *Why is it important?*

The diversity of the low-skilled adult population underlines the need for a clearly defined identification strategy, including how priority groups will be determined. Low-skilled adults are a very heterogeneous group with different needs and characteristics in respect of labour market status (employed, unemployed, at-risk of redundancy and/or inactive), socio-demographic characteristics (age group, gender, nationality/citizenship/country of birth, residency or migration status) skills needs (basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills) or level of educational attainment.

Identification of different and specific target groups within the heterogeneous group of adults in potential need of upskilling is a crucial issue in better informing the design and implementation of effective upskilling pathways. It is important that these target groups, with their distinct needs, are identified so that dedicated policies can address equitable access to upskilling pathways. Sustainable learning pathways also need to ensure that low-skilled adults are provided with relevant skills for progression in society and in the labour market.

3.1.2.3. *Key features*

- (a) To define national priorities and their intended socioeconomic outcomes, the identification of target groups involves the study of comprehensive and integrated information on the different potential adult populations supported by effective skills anticipation mechanisms based on labour market intelligence.
- (b) The approach to identification is flexible, to adapt to changing target groups.
- (c) Specific target groups are considered according to the barriers/situational obstacles they may face in accessing upskilling pathways.
- (d) The approach to identification and the characteristics of the target groups prioritised will be defined by the available resources and country or regional context, as well as existing strategies relevant to upskilling.
- (e) Numerical targets based on the scale of the low-skilled population or other important considerations can feature in the process of identification;

however, appropriate counter measures shall be considered to avoid distortions.

- (f) Labour market and employer needs are taken into consideration during the identification process.
- (g) There are adequate, reliable and comprehensive tools/technologies/databases at national and other levels for compiling and accessing information on potential groups of adults who can benefit from upskilling, particularly those most in need.
- (h) Adequate screening methods and documentation are put into place and supported by national guidelines and harmonised formats to ensure tailoring of services to individual needs.
- (i) Data is continuously collected, shared, disseminated and utilised for identifying groups who can benefit from upskilling following data protection regulations (key area 4: monitoring and evaluation).
- (j) Key public and private stakeholders and social partners, including civil society organisations and NGOs, are involved in the identification and anticipation process and nationally organised data collection methods. 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 stakeholder interaction and policy reaction based on reliable labour market information signals are in place.
- (k) A national upskilling approach, depending on country context, implies that identification and outreach are activated and further refined at regional and/or local levels (key area 6: outreach). In a long-term perspective, the design can be adapted to changing target groups over time, and as adults move through linked upskilling pathways.

3.1.3. Key area 3: Governance (multilevel/multi-stakeholder)

3.1.3.1. Definition

Effective governance mechanisms are at the core of a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways. They derive from having a shared vision in which ensuring sustainable learning pathways for all is regarded as a public value whose responsibility is shared between public institutions, social partners, civil society and also individuals themselves, as those who can benefit from an effective strategy.

Multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance in upskilling pathways can be defined holistically in terms of key and potentially relevant actors in different sectors, tools and provisions (such as legislation/policy), at national/ regional/ local and community levels (for action, decision-making, follow-up, quality assessment), practices (such as procedures, measures, schemes, learning opportunities) and processes (such as coordination mechanisms).

Effective governance will be expressed differently in each country but a strategic approach involves engagement/participation of all stakeholders, including learners/beneficiaries, with clearly defined and shared goals, responsibility and accountability. Effective communication practices with a shared language among those involved in governance aid dissemination of information, support, and feedback. Strategic leadership is essential, with the possibility of one or several coordinating bodies.

3.1.3.2. *Why is it important?*

A multilevel/multi-stakeholder coordinated and coherent governance approach to implementing upskilling pathways involves efficient coordination of stakeholders (spanning education, training and employment and social service sectors) in order to reach diverse adult beneficiaries/learners and to serve their potentially comprehensive needs.

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 system domains can demonstrate that all stakeholders are valued and their contributions, recognised. Including diverse community partners also implies the need for capacity-building strategies.

3.1.3.3. *Key features*

- (a) Effective coordination can arise from establishing an umbrella framework/ strategy, while adapting to existing roles, exploiting existing strengths in the system and integrated complementary efforts. Clear links are made to other areas at strategy/decision-making level (key area 1: integrated approach to upskilling pathways; 4: monitoring and evaluation; and 2: planning strategy for identification of target groups).

- (b) Governance structures should reflect the institutional setting of the country. In some cases it may be appropriate to establish certain governance mechanisms for policy-making and specific governance mechanisms for implementation; this will vary according to national and local contexts.
- (c) Roles and responsibilities of key actors (individuals, groups/entities, networks, public and private) at different levels are defined and distributed across decision-making, implementation, supervision, advisory, follow-up and monitoring; strategic leadership is established and one or more coordinating bodies.
- (d) Key stakeholders (including beneficiary representatives) are specifically involved proactively in the upskilling implementation and processes, including programming, innovation, measures, assessments, feedback; (key area 2: planning strategy for target group identification).
- (e) Effective communication practices with a shared language among those involved in governance aid dissemination of information, support, and feedback. Strategic leadership is essential, with the possibility of one or several coordinating bodies.
- (f) Strengthened stakeholder and institutional capacity, and accountability (such as in terms of decision-making, spending, technical capacity) facilitating mutual understanding and common approaches to maximise policy coherence and foster effective partnerships.
- (g) Stakeholders, traditional and non-traditional, are made aware of the importance of upskilling pathways for adults.
- (h) Governance in the context of upskilling pathways emphasises the strategic role of the local/community level and efforts should be made to ensure that the agreed strategy can be transferred at the local/community level.
- (i) Key tools/resources (such as agreements, guidelines, frameworks, evaluation tools, databases, web portals to widen access, prior learning assessments) are developed collaboratively and officially (laws/regulations) approved, where possible.
- (j) All key areas are developed, overseen, coordinated and governed accordingly within the scope of key area 3: governance (multilevel/multi-stakeholder).

3.1.4. Key area 4: Monitoring and evaluation

3.1.4.1. Definition

Monitoring and evaluation is a systematic measuring of progress in establishing and implementing an upskilling pathways strategy. Thanks to monitoring and evaluation, potential problems can be identified in a timely manner and corrective action taken, when necessary, to improve policy implementation and its effectiveness.

In this context, monitoring and evaluation operates on two main levels. It intersects with all individual areas (such as support, implementation, provisions, programmes, initiatives) that should have dedicated monitoring and evaluation. It is also overarching, related to planning and designing strategies for identification of target groups, and is a key component of an integrated upskilling pathways approach. Without monitoring and evaluation there can be no consistent and continuous feedback to improve systems and make them accountable to stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Assessing effectiveness involves the collection, analysis and evaluation of data on the usage and effectiveness of upskilling policies, systems and interventions. Such data collection includes information on inputs (resources invested), process/activities (what the programme does), outputs (what is directly produced/delivered and who takes part), results (what concrete changes can be identified at the level of individuals or institutions), and impacts (to what extent the programme produced the expected outcomes).

Monitoring should go hand-in-hand with the establishment of an evaluation system which may serve a broader purpose, including planning, accountability, implementation, and institutional strengthening.

3.1.4.2. Why is it important?

Systematic and sustainable monitoring and evaluation is required to bring together and inform a coordinated and coherent upskilling pathways policy approach that ties together multiple policy domains and stakeholders to guarantee effectiveness.

Monitoring and evaluation contribute to the improvement of many aspects of policy and strategies for upskilling pathways: shaping of strategic goals; planning of services; development of programmes; identification of gaps in service delivery; consistency between services offered; training needs of professional practitioners; and optimal use of resources and of investment in delivery. It further addresses accountability issues, supports identification

and mainstreaming of best practices and allows for the timely identification of potential problems during implementation.

3.1.4.3. *Key features*

- (a) Establishing an overarching monitoring and evaluation system requires taking into account the main characteristics of the integrated upskilling policy designed and implemented in a country. For example, the data to be analysed for evaluation purposes needs to be interpreted according to the context in question (labour market dynamics in different regions).
- (b) 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 is indispensable. A fully comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system should also collect the users' perspectives, including information on their characteristics and their needs, and it should inform and anticipate future trends and needs.
- (c) Evaluations are not only continuous but also *ex-post* to provide data and information on both social and economic impacts. Time is allowed for evaluations to ensure that they can capture intermediary and ultimate results, not only short-term outputs.
- (d) Indicators for the evaluation and monitoring system inform the design stage of upskilling policies.
- (e) Indicators assess both direct and indirect effects of upskilling policies across the education, training, employment and social fields in terms of cost-benefits to individuals and governments.
- (f) Evaluation of good practices providing evidence on their success identifies key factors for transferability and mainstreaming. Knowledge about what works (and under which conditions) can then be properly disseminated and shared via publicly available user-friendly databases. A clear approach is needed to identify and collect good practices.
- (g) The overarching monitoring and evaluation system is underpinned and linked with quality assurance systems; it also requires consideration of the system and the stakeholders involved. Involving the appropriate stakeholders can facilitate effective data collection and can help address some of the challenges, such as low response rates and data sensitivity. A good communication strategy can inform and engage those involved in the implementation of the upskilling policies about the principles and

process of the evaluation. 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 engender stakeholder engagement and ownership.

- (h) Effective and sustainable monitoring and evaluation systems are underpinned by resources mobilisation, both human and financial. This may include investment in capacity building and providing the right training and support to professionals in monitoring and evaluation, as well as to policy-makers, including support on how to interpret data. Professionalising monitoring and evaluation and using independent, external bodies to gather data and evaluate may also be considered in appropriate contexts/cases.

3.1.5. Key area 5: Financial and non-financial support

3.1.5.1. *Definition*

In the context of upskilling pathways, financial support measures aim at increasing participation of low-skilled adults in education and training by reducing the cost of education and training either directly for individuals or for companies providing training to their low-skilled employees. Countries implement various financing instruments such as levy-grant mechanisms, tax incentives, grants/vouchers/learning accounts, loans and paid training leave to increase participation in, and provision of, education and training.

Financing instruments may be accompanied by non-financial support such as information, advice and guidance, raising awareness of benefits of learning, tailored training delivery, and/or promoting partnerships to enhance companies' capacities (see also key area 7: lifelong guidance system).

3.1.5.2. *Why is it important?*

As Eurostat Adult education survey (AES) data shows, one of the most important obstacles to adult participation in education and training is financial. High financial cost has also been identified as a significant obstacle hindering company provision of continuing vocational training (CVTS data). Well-targeted financing support may help to reduce the financial 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.

AES also indicates that the key barrier to adult participation in education and training is lack of time because of family responsibilities and conflicting training and work schedules. Well-designed paid training leave may help to overcome both time and financial constraints and encourage low-skilled adults to undertake education and training.

Financing instruments may work or fail depending on the broader economic, social and educational context. However, they might not be successful in the absence of a more comprehensive approach addressing different obstacles (on top of the financial barrier) to participation in/provision of CVT/adult learning. Financial instruments need to be complemented by non-financial support.

3.1.5.3. *Key features*

- (a) Appropriate level of funding is secured. The costs related to upskilling pathways are adequately shared between public authorities, employers, individuals and other relevant stakeholders (such as social partners, NGOs). Governments/public authorities demonstrate a high level of commitment and play an important role in supporting those who face difficulties in paying for education and training.
- (b) Those benefitting from EU funds make best use of these resources while avoiding over-reliance on them. Appropriate financing mechanisms mobilising national resources are in place to ensure sustainability of funding.
- (c) Existing financial and non-financial support measures for individuals and companies are reviewed and their effectiveness in reaching low-skilled adults and efficiency is assessed.
- (d) Based on the above, what is assessed is whether or not there is a need for introducing new financial and non-financial support measures and/or modifying the existing ones.
- (e) Suitable financing instruments are used:
 - (i) to target individuals: grants, vouchers/learning accounts; subsidised, income-contingent loans; paid training leave of adequate duration (long enough to allow to acquire a higher qualification);
 - (ii) to target companies: levy-grant mechanism, tax incentives, grants, payback clauses.
- (f) Financing instruments are carefully designed to ensure effective targeting of low-skilled adults:

- (i) preferential treatment towards low-skilled adults and employers providing training to their low-skilled employees is in-built in financing mechanisms, e.g. granting these groups higher levels of subsidy or priority for funding;
 - (ii) the amount of subsidy is adequate/attractive and considers direct and indirect costs of education and training;
 - (iii) adequate financial support is provided up front to those that face significant liquidity constraints (important especially for low-income individuals);
 - (iv) eligibility criteria (in terms of groups and type of education and training) are carefully determined to target diverse groups of low-skilled adults;
 - (v) complementarity of financing instruments is ensured;
 - (vi) possible drawbacks of financing instruments (such as heavy administrative burden, dead-weight losses) are taken into account when designing and implementing financing instruments.
- (g) Financing instruments are combined with suitable non-financial support, e.g. information about the existence of the financing instrument, advice to companies and support for learners on the use of the instrument, raising awareness of benefits of learning (such as by public relations campaigns and marketing measures), tailored training delivery, consultancy services for companies, quality assurance; (see also key area 7: lifelong guidance system).
- (h) Companies' direct involvement in the design of financing instruments and accompanying non-financial support is ensured to identify what would motivate them to provide training to their low-skilled employees. Employer engagement could be facilitated through raising their awareness of the benefits of investing in employee skills.
- (i) SMEs are given particular attention and assistance as they are less likely to benefit from the financing support. There is a support system for SMEs which includes information and guidance in relation to funding opportunities, consulting services in relation to defining SME training needs, administrative support in applying for funding, promoting partnerships/networks/pooling resources to increase SME training capacity, and innovative learning approaches to adapt to specific needs and constraints of SMEs (such as using coaches at the workplace to teach new tasks, self-regulated learning or distance learning).
- (j) Coordination between funding sources/bodies allocating the funding for various learning purposes is ensured to allow for more efficient use of

the funds. Coordination between the actors involved in strategic planning and implementation of financial support measures is safeguarded to avoid long time gaps between committing the funds and granting the financial support to the final beneficiary.

- (k) Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are in place (key area 4: monitoring and evaluation). In-depth, systematic monitoring and evaluation studies (not only short questionnaires and satisfaction surveys), underpinned by the right indicators and thorough analysis of good practices may support understanding of the most effective and efficient allocation/use of financial resources. In cases of support measure underperformance, corrective actions are taken. Successful, effective practices are identified and funding is ensured for encouraging their expansion. Good practice and innovation resulting from short-term projects is sustained through mainstream funding mechanisms.

3.1.6. Key area 6: Outreach

3.1.6.1. Definition

Outreach consists of measures developed to offer services to individuals who have no knowledge about them or have reduced access to standard provision. In upskilling this encompasses tracking, contacting and engaging individuals out of the reach/scope of standard services in education, training, employment and welfare measures, supporting learning and labour market (re)integration.

The measures central to upskilling adults involve flexible guidance services and adjusted learning activities, relying on specially trained staff. Awareness-raising campaigns, community embeddedness, dedicated distance tools, intensive guidance and adapted learning methodologies are common features for increasing access to provisions through outreach.

3.1.6.2. Why is it important?

Young people beyond a certain age threshold (usually 25) tend to fall outside the scope of education and youth policies. If inactive for a long period, they will also not be covered by public employment services measures. Unemployed adults after a certain period exhaust their social support and can be deemed 'problematic' or unsolvable cases. Fear of refoulement or forced repatriation prevents many refugees and third-country migrants voluntarily searching for public support. Frequently these individuals stop being monitored and

are not covered by existing activation policies and standard passive welfare support. Due to lack of information and demotivation, many do not voluntarily search for recognition, validation and learning solutions. To address these and other vulnerable cases, public authorities need to track, reengage and support these individuals with effective outreach services.

3.1.6.3. *Key features*

- (a) Trained and dedicated staff, specialised in outreach activities, who can address the complex needs of vulnerable and frequently marginalised groups.
- (b) Key decision-makers raise awareness of the role of outreach and their importance for individuals and society.
- (c) Guidance and outreach services are well coordinated and a stable feature of skills development and adult learning policies, ideally framed by national agreements across political forces (national strategies, budgets).
- (d) Central administration financing, technical support and monitoring is well coordinated with local/regional operational management and implementation. Municipalities, local employment offices or regional one-stop shops may manage processes and coordinate the efforts of local stakeholders.
- (e) Outreach activities are monitored and evaluated, identifying success factors and adaptation strategies, to allow for national level generalisation.
- (f) Outreach is based on user centrality and geared to development of individual autonomy and readiness to engage in learning and work.
- (g) Services observe ethical standards, with personal information ultimately owned and controlled by users.
- (h) Sharing of beneficiaries' registrations across services such as schools, social security, PES and NGOs exists to identify, track and contact individuals in need of support. This requires ethical handling of personal data issues, updating registries and case management.
- (i) Public calls and online information are generally used to signpost available services but they are not sufficient and require complementary measures.
- (j) Developing street work is fundamental, reaching into peer groups, communities and families. This requires trained staff and is better developed in cooperation with local authorities and NGOs.
- (k) Supported by peer work and community/social economy initiatives.
- (l) Use of role models in motivating young people to reengage in learning through awareness-raising and mentoring.

- (m) Field visits to raise awareness of workers in illegal situations or who are unaware of available opportunities are developed with the help of civic associations and social partners.
- (n) If activation services are exclusively provided by the PES, the obligation to register should either be waived, or outreach should incorporate awareness-raising regarding the need to register.
- (o) Individualised career support is available, including career guidance and counselling. This includes assessments (skills, attitudes, aspirations), motivational work, tutoring/mentoring and clarification of preferences and career planning.
- (p) Holistic processes, with diagnosis and support of physical and mental health, given the vulnerable state of many individuals. Teams should be interdisciplinary and, whenever necessary, provide support with financial, housing and integration issues.
- (q) Effectiveness is enhanced if coordinated with validation/recognition systems, as well as flexible learning options. Individual portfolios can document and support the progress of beneficiaries.
- (r) Training is normally dynamic, conducted in an accessible language, adjusted to the learner's characteristics and availability. Readiness to work and learn should be developed before engaging individuals in standard training or employability measures.
- (s) Including the target group voice, their knowledge and understanding in the development of alternative approaches, which increases the effectiveness and quality of learning offers, as well as their credibility to potential beneficiaries.

3.1.7. Key area 7: Lifelong guidance system

3.1.7.1. Definition

Lifelong guidance is officially defined by a European Council resolution of 2008 (Council of the European Union, 2008) as a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and situation to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions, and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings. It includes activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support in work and learning environments, as well as the teaching of decision-making and career management skills. It can be provided in schools, by training providers, at job centres, workplaces/

enterprises, community centres or in other settings. Guidance services can provide referrals to other services and specialists.

3.1.7.2. *Why is it important?*

The European guidelines for policies and systems development for lifelong guidance (ELGPN, 2015) highlight that lifelong guidance develops individuals' capacities to make career-related decisions, identify career opportunities, manage transitions in work and learning and generally increase self-awareness relative to personal needs, potential and aspirations. It impacts on individual human capital formation, engagement in learning, networking capacity, job searching effectiveness, and adaptability to work environments. It also contributes to a range of public policy goals and outcomes in:

- (a) education and training: engagement, retention, performance and transitions;
- (b) labour market: participation, employability, job retention, average income, labour market adjustments, mobility, lower welfare costs and workforce skills development;
- (c) social inclusion: socioeconomic integration, reduction in long-term unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and promoting equity (gender, ethnicity, special educational needs, and social background).
- (d) economic development: workforce participation, productivity, lower skills mismatches;
- (e) guideline 13 concretely addresses its importance in adult learning and upskilling, underlining how guidance:
 - (i) is central to lifelong learning, stimulating demand for adult learning, providing information and counselling, enabling outreach strategies, raising awareness and motivation of adults;
 - (ii) informs about validation, recognition and flexible learning opportunities, and supports application processes, also advocating client rights before relevant stakeholders;
 - (iii) provides specialist support for many adults to find their way in new learning environments and in a rapidly evolving world of work;
 - (iv) addresses the non-homogeneity of adult learners, who may have had negative experiences with education. It helps diverse vulnerable groups of adults engage and overcome barriers in learning, clarify their targets and achieve them;

- (v) helps adults deal with more complex roles and responsibilities related to family, work and economic situation to find balanced options and support mechanisms for upskilling and learning;
- (vi) directly influences active citizenship and personal development.

3.1.7.3. *Key features*

- (a) Career guidance services move decisively towards a lifelong and life-wide process support. There is greater integration across support services addressing different life stages and contexts (school counselling, employment services, social services, municipal services).
- (b) Career guidance support is professionalised in all relevant areas (education, training, employment), follows clear standards of service and has an outcome-oriented approach based on improving individual/social welfare, labour market outcomes and learning results.
- (c) Foundation and continuing training of staff exists in line with high standards of service, providing access to professional qualifications; continuing training ensures compliance with growing work requirements including intercultural training, legislation, labour market intelligence and digital skills.
- (d) There is local and regional cooperation (and coordination); municipalities can play a central role coordinating local efforts and local cooperation should be based on partner strengths in specialised areas; local cooperation also provides labour market intelligence and information on emerging vacancies, mobility, changes in occupational profiles and conditions for work. Guidance is consolidated as an individual right and choice within the scope of economic and social rights; this is affirmed in education, training, social and employment policies and the development of digital citizenship.
- (e) Career guidance is an integral part of national upskilling strategies, adult learning programmes, publicly funded education and training, as well as labour market policies.
- (f) Key decision-makers raise their awareness of the role of career guidance and outreach and their importance, for individuals and policy; ideally, guidance is framed by national agreements across political forces, consolidated in national strategies with stable budgetary items; guidance activities are organised around the principle of user centrality and adult learners are provided the opportunity for personalised, individual guidance.

Services aim at long-term individual autonomy in career management, by encouraging the development of career management skills.

- (g) Individual information produced by the services, including assessments, portfolios, referrals and other relevant outputs, are owned by the individual users.
- (h) Integrated information and guidance services involving multi-channel delivery (web, telephone, face-to-face) are available for adult learners and are adapted to beneficiaries' needs; individuals are provided with an adequate blend of digital, phone and face-to-face services, as well as peer support.
- (i) There is sensitivity and adaptation of methods and tools to the needs of diverse adult groups and individuals (such as NEETs, long-term unemployed (LTU), refugees, those with learning disabilities and difficulties).
- (j) Career guidance is available prior, during and after learning engagement, to support choice, learning and transition to employment/further learning.
- (k) Impartial information and support in accessing flexible learning solutions are available, including work-based learning and open educational resources.
- (l) Information and support in obtaining validation and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning is available.
- (m) Employed adults are supported through steady improvement in staff management and human resource practices. Employment and growth strategies provide incentives and technical support to micro and small and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs) through funds, grants, local employment offices and consultancy.
- (n) There is cooperation between guidance services, enterprises and employer associations (e.g. production of local labour market information and intelligence, tasters, shadowing, work-based, learning, internships).
- (o) Service is provided in a holistic and networked way, coordinated with outreach strategies, local administration, social partners, social services, health services, civil organisations, facilitating access and success of vulnerable adults in learning; individual needs are addressed by services in their specific area of expertise, in a coordinated way.
- (p) Assessment and promotion of key skills is supported in guidance services.
- (q) Entrepreneurial skills and attitudes are supported.

3.1.8. Key area 8: Skills assessment

3.1.8.1. Definition

A skills assessment (also ‘skills audit’ or ‘skill profiling’) is a process in which an individual’s learning outcomes are checked against specific reference points or standards. In some instances, it is closely linked to guidance services (key area 7: lifelong guidance system), while in others it is part of the validation and recognition of competences leading to certification (key area 10: validation and recognition of skills and competences).

In the context of upskilling pathways, skills assessment is focused on the identification and documentation of an individual’s learning in any context (formal, non-formal and informal) and of any gaps in relation to their desired level of skills. Skills assessment will result in a statement of the individual’s learning outcomes, which will be the basis for planning the next steps in training (key area 9: tailored learning offer(s) leading to a formal qualification and/or with work-based learning) or for the validation and recognition of skills (key area 10: validation and recognition of skills).

3.1.8.2. Why is it important?

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improved knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications, is crucial to easing progression opportunities, transition to employment, job retention and mobility, staying up to date with knowledge and technical developments, career advancement and further study. Skills assessment will contribute to these goals by making visible the learning acquired that has not been previously documented.

The skills assessment process will:

- (a) help individuals reflect on and become conscious of their actual capabilities;
- (b) provide users with a means of making visible and marketing their skills and competences;
- (c) help develop careers and increase employability, especially for the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups;
- (d) map needs for further training, considering the importance of matching individual competences with labour market needs.

Inactive and long-term unemployed individuals might have been involved in domestic work or voluntary activities that provided a source of learning.

Immigrants might have undocumented sets of skills valuable for host-country labour markets. Particularly with low-skilled adults, identification of previously acquired skills and competences will facilitate their engagement and motivation for further learning. For some, the discovery and increased awareness of their own capabilities will be a valuable outcome.

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, helping in overcoming the so-called situational obstacles such as family responsibility, conflicting time schedule, financial costs, lack of employer support or proximity concerns.

3.1.8.3. *Key features*

- (a) The definition and purpose of skills assessment and its relationship with the overall validation and recognition process (key area 10: validation and recognition of skills and competences) are made clear conceptually but also as applied to relevant (national, regional) legal foundations/frameworks and in relation to the different services and providers (as in use of assessment by training institutions versus in guidance services).
- (b) Skills assessment is a systematic feature of the system enabling upskilling. It is carried out in combination with guidance and counselling, supporting the individual in the discovery of their existing competences. The integration of validation and skills assessment creates a continuum the individual can easily navigate. Skills assessment is an input to the tailored learning offer and to validation.
- (c) All formal, non-formal and informal learning are considered. The methods used and the proof of learning required need to be aligned with the type of learning assessed/identified. Tools need to be adapted to the individual's characteristics and needs while remaining coherent with the overall process of upskilling. A combination of ICT-based tools, group and individual sessions is used.
- (d) Individual plans for next steps in training/learning and support are based on the skills assessment. Individual portfolios can be initiated in the early stages providing the basis for cumulative documentation of referrals, assessments, personal plans and certificates.
- (e) The documentation formats and outputs of the process support transferability and portability of the identified skills by clearly stating learning outcomes. Transparent methods and standards (whether

national, occupational, sectoral or defined at European level) must be clearly communicated to, and agreed with, the relevant stakeholders. Assessment and certification, where relevant, are in line with European and national qualification frameworks and systems.

- (f) The output must be understood and trusted by key third-parties (training providers, employers, civil society organisation) so that it is useful for individuals for accessing further learning, a validation process or for employment. This necessitates skills assessment quality assurance systems, through reliable and valid assessment methods as well as well-trained practitioners who can engage beneficiaries who are low-skilled.
- (g) SMEs are recognised as important actors who benefit from, and contribute to, skills assessment.

3.1.9. Key area 9A: Tailored learning offer leading to a formal qualification

3.1.9.1. Definition

A tailored learning offer leading to a formal qualification refers primarily to the learning paths available to adults, at an institutional/framework level, for acquiring the formal qualifications (valid diplomas) available in IVET or adult education and/or accumulating credits leading to them. The offer may consist of more than one path, all of which rely on assessment, validation and/or recognition of prior learning ⁽¹⁴⁾. At an individual level, a tailored learning offer addresses an individual's – or group's – basic learning needs (including language, numeracy, digital skills) and builds the foundation for pursuing a full formal qualification. Tailored learning offers depend on the capacity of the implementing institutions to make the paths provided for available at the institutional/framework level, and to adapt to the individuals' learning profile and needs.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Examples of such paths may include:

- full or shortened programmes (school-based or apprenticeships) for adults, in the non-formal and formal VET system;
- individually certified modules leading to a full diploma;
- access to a final assessment based on minimum years of professional experience in the relevant profession, with possible short/integrative training modules;
- recognition of prior knowledge based on a portfolio, with possible short/integrative training modules.

3.1.9.2. *Why is it important?*

Adults are a highly heterogeneous group ⁽¹⁵⁾; tailoring addresses this heterogeneity by acknowledging and building on prior learning and removing obstacles (institutional, as well as those linked to shared individual characteristics, experiences, knowledge), easing participation in learning. Linking learning offers to the prospect of qualifications with exchange value on the labour market and in education and training may motivate individuals 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. Further, 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. This tailored approach may be more appealing to an individual than attending separate literacy or numeracy courses that do not provide credits toward a qualification. Acquisition of initial qualifications can motivate the transition to higher education and higher vocational education and training.

3.1.9.3. *Key features*

- (a) There is more than one path in IVET/CVET for an adult to acquire a formal qualification; all paths are able to make use of skills assessment, validation and/or recognition of prior knowledge.
- (b) There is a clear link between the offers, paths and qualifications, enabling support services to provide clear and consistent information which allows an individual to make informed choices based on his/her needs, ambitions and goals, among other factors.
- (c) Although there is an emphasis on diversification of paths and individualisation, based on single learner's needs, a tailored offer does not affect the learning objectives of a given qualification; these remain the same and guarantee comparability and quality of the learning results irrespective of the path taken.
- (d) Education and training providers and other types of operator have the capacity (pedagogic, financial and human resources) to work with adults, for example through relevant networks and in cooperation with support

⁽¹⁵⁾ Different life, learning and working experiences, various age groups, different family status and obligations and socioeconomic characteristics and needs.

- services. Providers can be encouraged to work with employers through local level collaboration to encourage adults to participate in training.
- (e) Employers are able and willing to support their employees with no or low qualifications, or with outdated qualifications, to engage in education and training by offering training leave, apprenticeship opportunities or otherwise facilitating continuing training, possibly with financial support of by sectoral or professional organisations.
 - (f) While addressing individuals' (or homogeneous groups') specific learning needs, the learning journey also includes: preparatory/foundation courses/programmes to address basic skill gaps in pursuing a qualification, as needed; and an offer which takes into account prior knowledge and skills relevant for the specific qualification.
 - (g) Broader transversal skills/key competences related to professional training are integrated into formal pathways, such as by embedding them into the teaching of professional skills and linking occupation to acquisition of qualifications.
 - (h) Adults of different learning profiles benefit from a range of pedagogies and methods (such as phone learning), flexible course formats (non-linear offer, combination, own pace) and forms of final assessment available (fear of failure, often linked to the high expectations associated with learning and high investment, may be mitigated with this approach).
 - (i) Adults' specific constraints (such as family obligations, financial, time, work, distance) and/or needs (such as disability) are addressed individually or as a homogeneous group, through financial and non-financial support.
 - (j) The opportunity to acquire a certificate or qualification through training should not be an obligation; in the same way, traditional examinations should not be compulsory due to fear of failure among adults with negative previous experiences or any special educational needs. Alternative and flexible forms of assessment should be available.

3.1.10. Key area 9B: Tailored learning offer with work-based learning (WBL) ⁽¹⁶⁾

3.1.10.1. Definition

WBL is applied/practical learning that may or may not involve learning at a company. The first type may include project-based learning, learning

⁽¹⁶⁾ Key area 9B needs to be read together with 9A.

in simulated work environments and workshops. The second (also called workplace learning) may include internships, traineeships and apprenticeships. Of all forms of WBL, apprenticeships need to be supported by a legal framework and be open to adult participation. All other forms of WBL may be implemented as part of individual providers' pedagogical approaches. Tailoring 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 (particularly relevant for apprenticeships).

3.1.10.2. *Why is it important?*

WBL offers adults the possibility to apply immediately what they have learned, understand the relevance and impact of their learning on their job and personal life, and focus on problems and tasks rather than on subjects; these are all central elements in andragogy. Adults are remunerated while learning in apprenticeships and learn predominantly in a company: they are integrated into a working environment and are able to identify more with being workers than learners.

3.1.10.3. *Key features*

- (a) Providers are aware of, prepared for, and supported to use diverse forms of WBL (not only workplace learning) to tailor their learning offer to adults' needs; innovative approaches are encouraged and shared.
- (b) Employers need to buy into employee training and also to assume responsibility. At the least, providers and employers should work together to convince employees to take up training. More broadly, there is need for local collaboration and networks, and ownership for those involved.
- (c) There are national, regional and local partnerships involving companies – particularly SMEs – in workplace learning for their own employees or other potential beneficiaries.
- (d) Adults' skills must relate to company expectations (minimum foundation level, as well as technical education and training level); basic training is combined with integration in the workplace.
- (e) Companies – particularly SMEs – have the pedagogical capacity to work with adults; in-company trainers and staff are informed of adult learner needs and expectations; (key area 5: financial and non-financial support).

- (f) Company staff attitudes need to be positive towards adult learners as individuals, and potentially as individuals belonging to a particular group (such as refugees).
- (g) Apprenticeships are clearly distinguished from other forms of WBL, in particular workplace-based learning.
- (h) Apprenticeship training is open to adults, with companies – particularly SMEs – incentivised (financially and non-financially) to offer placements to adults; (key area 5: financial and non-financial support).
- (i) Apprenticeship training provision is tailored to adults' needs/profiles (taking account of aspects such as prior learning and work experiences, individual constraints); particular groups of low-skilled adults may need further initial preparation: for example, some migrants may be unprepared for certain workplace environments in terms of their awareness of expectations and company culture).
- (j) Employers should have the potential, and be willing, to offer apprenticeship to their employees to help them qualify for better/higher-skilled positions.
- (k) Socioeconomic partners are involved in design, strategy and provision, particularly in apprenticeship. Adult apprentices are financially motivated to enrol in and complete their apprenticeship learning (when they rely only on their apprentice remuneration): companies may offer increased remuneration for adult apprentices; adults may also receive a top-up subsidy while in apprenticeship training.

3.1.11. Key area 10: Validation and recognition of skills and competences

3.1.11.1. Definition

The European Council defines validation of non-formal and informal learning as a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. It consists of four phases: identification, documentation, assessment and certification (European Council, 2012). These phases are combined and balanced in different ways, reflecting the particular purpose of each validation arrangement.

In the context of upskilling pathways, validation is combined with recognition, broadening 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 emphasis of validation in upskilling pathways is on the last stage of the process, certification, while identification, documentation and different degrees of assessment are at the centre in key area 8: skills assessment. Key areas 8 and 10 are deeply interwoven. The *Upskilling pathway* recommendation indicates that the individual is certified as having acquired skills or key competences which are particularly relevant in progressing towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4, depending on national circumstances. Validation can also be considered as a point of access in upskilling pathways and a form of upskilling itself, in cases where it leads directly to employment or continuing learning.

3.1.11.2. *Why is it important?*

The outputs of a validation process can take many different forms, ranging from formal qualifications to certificates issued by different institutions (companies, NGOs, chambers of commerce). These aim to increase the visibility and value of all acquired learning, thereby making it possible for the individual to use this documentation to continue to further education, for maintaining employment or entering the labour market.

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.

Recognition of foreign qualifications and validation of skills may be particularly pertinent to migrants, many of whom hold qualifications gained in other countries, which are not yet recognised in their host country.

3.1.11.3. *Key features*

- (a) The definition and purpose of the validation and recognition are made clear conceptually (particularly in relation to skills assessment, key area 8) but also as applied to relevant (national, regional) legal foundations/ frameworks and in relation to the different services and providers (such as use of assessment by training institutions versus in guidance services).
- (b) Systems are in place for the validation and recognition of skills acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. These systems ensure that skills are being properly assessed and certified in line with national or regional guidelines and regulations.

- (c) The individual is at the centre of the validation process, in respect of methods and tools, while objectives are also adapted to his/her specific needs; this is particularly effective for those who are hard to reach (links to key area 6: outreach). There is a clear connection between guidance, skills assessment, training provision and validation. Regardless of the different forms of validation and skills assessment, their integration creates a continuum that the individual can easily navigate.
- (d) The purpose of the validation and recognition process is clearly defined and communicated to individuals and society. Multiple stakeholders with clearly defined roles are informed and involved in different aspects they are aware of and trust the outputs. Buy-in by companies, trade unions and civil society organisations is assured, so individuals can use these outputs to access employment, further education or to maintain employment. SMEs are recognised as important actors who benefit from and contribute to the validation process.
- (e) Validation arrangements across different contexts - education and training, employment and civil society - are coherent and have common grounds to allow for connections among the different outputs and contexts.
- (f) Standards used in formal qualifications apply to validation of non-formal and informal learning where relevant, so the outputs are of equal value. This also holds for the recognition of foreign qualifications. Assessment and certification are in line with European and national qualification frameworks and systems. Where the aim of the validation process is not to obtain a formal qualification, the standards used need to be clearly communicated and written in a way that the learning outcomes are portable and usable for further learning or work. Stakeholders accept (formally and informally) the agreed standards, whether they are national or other standards (occupational, sectoral defined or even at European level).
- (g) The tools used are reliable, valid and transparent and adapted to individual needs and circumstances; various methods for assessment and certification are used, in line with existing services (and supports), to integrate skills assessment and validation.
- (h) Career guidance support is available before, during and after the validation procedure (key area 7: lifelong guidance system).
- (i) A clear framework for quality assurance is in place, to provide credibility and trust to the outputs of the process, while also ensuring validity and reliability of assessment methods.

- (j) Practitioners are adequately trained and qualified for their specific validation role as assessors, counsellors or managers. Creation of training and reference frameworks can provide professional standards.
- (k) A system is in place for monitoring and evaluation of validation and recognition practices (key area 4: monitoring and evaluation).