



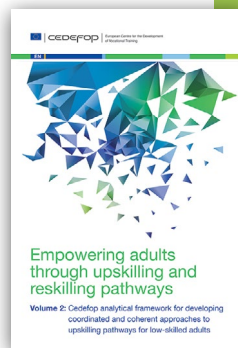
Chapter 4. CONCLUSIONS

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 4.

Conclusions

Accompanying some of the challenges that European countries currently face, there are also opportunities for learning, progress and innovation, as well as the integration of new talent and expertise into the workforce and in our societies. Europe needs to improve and maintain a high level of skills, knowledge and competences to remain competitive and innovative. Individual knowledge, skills and competences – along with their recognition, validation and activation – are both essential to access and progress in the labour market and to fulfilling one’s potential and playing an active role in society. Individual empowerment through a platform providing upskilling opportunities, such as adult learning or even the recognition of prior learning, can lead to greater participation in society, increasing the chances that Europe will be more adaptable to each new challenge we face, expected and unexpected. This is even more urgent now, as our societies and economies are confronted with the unprecedented consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak.

Building on the knowledge presented in Volume 1 of this series, *Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways* (Cedefop, 2020), as well as the previous related Cedefop study on the economic and social cost associated with low skills (Cedefop, 2017), this second publication responds to the call for a renewed policy approach to upskilling low-skilled adults. This renewed approach, as realised in the analytical framework, is both comprehensive and strategic, coordinated and coherent, allowing countries to pull together various resources, creating synergies from different arrangements, measures and policies already in place across European countries. Given the experience of national stakeholders in addressing the needs of their own target groups for upskilling, as well as evidence presented in Volume 1 (Cedefop, 2020), systems need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the low-skilled population and the diverse needs and characteristics of adults with potential for upskilling. More than this, systems designed to increase access and support for low-skilled adults need to be transparent and responsive to adult needs, through engagement, feedback and different forms of participation.

In ensuring access for all low-skilled adults, upskilling pathways is about creating and sustaining optimal conditions, structures and comprehensive provisions, pulling together resources and creating the right synergies between key policy areas. Individuals should, as a consequence, be able to access, construct and steer their own individual pathways to empowerment, based on their own complex needs and taking full advantage of the tools, opportunities and resources provided through upskilling pathways.

The overall aim of Cedefop work in this area is to support the development of coordinated and coherent approaches – especially ones that are comprehensive – to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. Given this general aim, the objective of this report is to describe the conceptual and collaborative development of the analytical framework for upskilling pathways for adults as a tool for national policy-makers, social partners and other relevant stakeholders in designing and implementing sustainable, coordinated and coherent policy approaches.

Participants in the stakeholder consultations, including the second PLF on upskilling pathways and national stakeholder focus groups in the five selected countries (Chapter 2), largely acknowledged that Cedefop’s analytical framework is a useful source of inspiration and a tool to facilitate reflection on and identification of key areas for action.

The framework’s value-added aspects involve the collaborative development process, its core foundation and its multidisciplinary contents. Accordingly, the development of the framework:

- (a) is based on an iterative process integrating both qualitative research and two rounds of stakeholder consultations;
- (b) is grounded in a lifelong learning perspective and focused on the empowerment of the individual learner/beneficiary;
- (c) is in line with the principles and frame of reference provided by the *Upskilling pathways* recommendation;
- (d) involved the continuous coordination of Cedefop’s Department for learning and employability knowledge and expertise in the in adult learning, early leaving from education and training, financing adult learning, lifelong guidance and outreach, validation and recognition of prior learning, and work-based learning;
- (e) derived from an analysis of systemic features found in a selection of good and interesting practices collected for the project, for a unique approach to upskilling pathways for adults with low skills.

The framework reflects multiple areas of policy related to upskilling, which form an integrated whole:

- (a) it is articulated around important systemic features needed for a coherent and coordinated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults;
- (b) it has 10 key areas of the policy process organised according to three levels: decision-making, focused on creating the right synergies, paving the way for coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways; support, which involves ensuring that pathways are inclusive and accessible; and implementation, offering tailored, adaptable and flexible upskilling pathways;
- (c) it is articulated horizontally, in promoting coordination and cooperation across the 10 key areas, particularly within the decision-making level: it unlocks synergies and fosters complementarities, but it also contributes to the enrichment of knowledge and evidence within each key area.

This reference publication is presented in connection with Cedefop's continuing policy support and knowledge development in upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. To date, knowledge and experience in adult learning and continuing vocational training, and particularly on adult empowerment, has been gained in several ways: investigating adult populations with potential for upskilling and reskilling; documenting examples of existing country provisions and arrangements for upskilling pathways; and through conducting research and generating policy-relevant knowledge on fields critical to creating comprehensive, coherent, coordinated upskilling pathways, in the areas of decision-making, support and implementation, realised in the analytical framework. In order to focus the current report on the development and presentation of the final analytical framework, not all these results and the knowledge generated have been presented here; however, this work forms the basis for future work and outputs, and positions Cedefop as a knowledge broker in the area of upskilling pathways.

The next step will be to apply the final analytical framework presented in this report in a selection of countries that agree to participate in thematic country reviews specifically focused on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults.

There will also be further follow-up on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults, involving the analytical framework, during the forthcoming third peer learning forum on upskilling pathways: a vision for the future, in November

2020. Stakeholders will have an opportunity to share the latest developments in upskilling pathways, including their knowledge, experiences and innovative practices, challenges and inspirations toward the identification and implementation of key areas for action.