

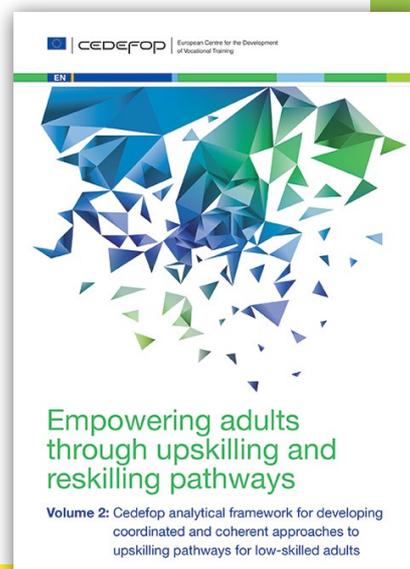


Executive **SUMMARY**

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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The outbreak of the Covid-19 health pandemic is having unprecedented consequences on our economies and societies. Measures of social distancing implemented to curb the spread of the virus, are deeply affecting labour markets, both in terms of job losses and in terms of new organisation of work through new technologies and digital means. Ensuring that every adult has lifelong opportunities to update existing skills and acquire new ones to help them navigate uncertain times and thrive in their life and career is more important than ever.

Upskilling pathways is about pulling together resources and creating the right synergies for supporting 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. This approach should be able to address their needs in a coordinated and coherent way and ensure that they have all the tools and support to embark on sustainable learning pathways leading to their full potential and fulfilment.

The Cedefop analytical framework has been developed to sustain this unique vision of upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. Its value-added aspects involve the development process, its core foundation and its multidisciplinary contents. 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.

Development of the analytical framework was based on an iterative process following four main stages:

- (a) scanning of official sources, relevant literature and policy documents to identify interesting practices for upskilling pathways;
- (b) analysis of good and promising practices aimed at identifying important systemic features for the development of a unique approach to upskilling of low-skilled adults, grounded in lifelong learning and based on the idea of flexible, adaptable and sustainable pathways tailored to individual needs;
- (c) stakeholder consultations aimed at gaining important stakeholder feedback and input to the two draft versions of the analytical framework developed during the research process;
- (d) continuous organic coordination of Cedefop knowledge and resources (Department for learning and employability) in adult learning, early leaving from education and training, financing, guidance and outreach, validation, and work-based learning.

Each of these four stages or processes of framework development is outlined below, beginning with the analysis of good and promising practices.

ANALYSIS OF GOOD AND PROMISING PRACTICES

Taking as a reference point the principles underpinning the *Upskilling pathways* recommendation, 21 good and promising practices in relevant policy fields have been identified across Europe; 13 have been selected for their particular relevance to the development of the analytical framework.

The analysis of good and promising practices is organised along three levels of the policy process: on this basis, the results of the analysis were categorised in three lists of specific elements of lessons learned, corresponding to each of the three levels of the analytical framework.

Decision-making level

Decision-making is about adapting and streamlining existing structures and resources to unlock synergies, paving the way for coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways and for the right support and implementation. Analysis of the practices suggests several important systemic elements at decision-making level, including:

- (a) a shared vision, grounded in political commitment at the highest level and characterised by strategic allocated and/or earmarked funding and coordination of multiple relevant policy domains in a holistic fashion;
- (b) well-defined planning strategy for the definition and identification of target groups and of current and future skills needs;
- (c) inclusive multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms involving efficient coordination and engagement of relevant stakeholders at all levels, in order not only to reach diverse adult beneficiaries/learners, but also to serve their potentially comprehensive needs;
- (d) systematic and sustainable monitoring and evaluation system grounded in an agreed concept of quality.

Support level

Support, continuous and of quality, 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. Several important systemic elements have been identified in the analysis of good and promising practices:

- (a) appropriate level of funding based on a cost sharing mechanism grounded in the idea that investing in upskilling is a shared responsibility;
- (b) well targeted financial instruments, complemented with targeted non-financial support, for both individuals and companies, especially SMEs;
- (c) integration of appropriate strategies to reach out to, motivate, engage and support, low-skilled adults to navigate upskilling pathways opportunities;
- (d) capacity and contribution of community and other non-traditional actors is acknowledged, valued and strengthened.

Implementation level

Implementation is about grounding the comprehensive, inclusive and coordinated approach to upskilling pathways on the idea of an adaptable and flexible learning pathway; this should be targeted to individual learner needs and built around skills assessment, tailored learning offer and validation and recognition of skills and competences. Three main systemic elements have been identified in the good and promising practices at implementation level:

- (a) flexible, adaptable and tailored pathways building on prior (formal, non-formal and informal) learning, tailored learning and training opportunities, and allowing for validation and recognition of skills and competences;
- (b) centrality of the individual;
- (c) sustainability is linked to quality assurance and relies on creating the right synergies and promoting stakeholder engagement and cooperation. Success and usefulness depend on the trust of stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

The Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for adults is mostly conceived as a tool for reflection and inspiration for policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders. As such, its development relies on stakeholder engagement and feedback.

Two rounds of stakeholder consultations provided essential stakeholder feedback and input to the two draft versions of the analytical framework developed during the research process:

- (a) the first round of stakeholder consultations involved selected national stakeholders in France, Ireland, Italy, Romania and Sweden

who provided important feedback to the first draft version of the analytical framework developed in December 2018;

- (b) feedback from the first round of stakeholder consultations contributed to the development, in February 2019, of a second draft version of the analytical framework which was thoroughly reviewed by the European and national stakeholders participating in the Second policy learning forum on upskilling pathways for adults: a vision for the future ⁽¹⁾.

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 to facilitate reflection and identification of key areas for action. Among others, participants highlighted that a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways requires a shift in mind-set grounded in a shared vision for inclusive, accessible and flexible learning pathways. The shift in mindset implies:

- (a) strong political commitment, infused with strong stakeholder engagement and buy-in, cooperation and partnerships at all levels and strengthened capacity and role of community-based approaches; strengthened engagement of employers from the private sector, such as SMEs as well as social partners;
- (b) change in service culture to proactive career guidance service, moving decisively towards lifelong and life-wide process support logic able to reach out to people in their own contexts and support them towards sustainable, career and life transitions;
- (c) valuing, promoting and visibility of all learning and training, including learning and training in non-formal and informal settings;
- (d) establishment of an overarching monitoring and evaluation system informed by a comprehensive and integrated data collection linked to quality assurance and sustained by appropriate level of funding;
- (e) secure appropriate level of funding accompanied by appropriate financial instruments based on cost-sharing mechanisms and specific support for SMEs (e.g. partnerships, administrative support);

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/second-policy-learning-forum-upskilling-pathways-vision-future>

- (f) provisions for multiple paths for broad, transitional and flexible training offers both in the formal and non-formal systems and depending on individual needs with clear links to formal qualifications constituting points of reference for the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of learning outcomes.

FINAL REVISED CONTENTS OF THE CEDEFOP ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING UPSKILLING PATHWAYS FOR LOW-SKILLED ADULTS

Building on the systemic features identified in the analysis of good and promising practices in the field of upskilling pathways, and on feedback from national and European stakeholders, the final version of the analytical framework reflects multiple areas of policy related to upskilling, which form an integrated whole:

- (a) it articulates a clear grounding in a lifelong learning perspective and is focused on the empowerment of the individual learner/beneficiary;
- (b) it is articulated around important systemic features needed for a coherent and coordinated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults;
- (c) it contains 10 key areas of the policy process organised according to three levels: decision-making, support, and implementation; and
- (d) 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.

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 relevant stakeholders and to support them in identifying key areas for action. The 10 key areas and essential features of the analytical framework are summarised below.

DECISION-MAKING: CREATING THE RIGHT SYNERGIES, PAVING THE WAY FOR COORDINATED AND COHERENT APPROACHES TO UPSKILLING PATHWAYS

Key area 1: Integrated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults

- (a) Embedded in a vision of sustainable, inclusive, flexible, adaptable and tailored upskilling pathways grounded in the principle of lifelong learning.
- (b) Political commitment and strategic allocated and/or earmarked funding at all appropriate levels (including for capacity building) ensuring sustainability and efficiency over time. These are necessary preconditions paving the way for a sustainable vision of upskilling pathway.
- (c) Appropriate communication and promotion strategies using a shared and common language, adapted to the local context ensure promotion of the vision and secure the necessary stakeholder engagement.
- (d) Vertical and horizontal policy coordination to maximise policy coherence and effectiveness.
- (e) Centrality of the individual's starting point and needs.

Key area 2: Planning strategy for identification of target groups

- (a) Comprehensive and integrated information on the different potential adult populations supported by effective skills anticipation mechanisms based on labour market intelligence.
- (b) Flexible approach to adapt to changing target groups and needs.
- (c) Key public and private stakeholders and social partners, including civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as employers and beneficiaries are involved in the identification and anticipation process and in the nationally organised data collection methods.

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

- (a) Engagement/participation of stakeholders at all levels, including learners/beneficiaries, with clearly defined and shared goals, responsibility and accountability.
- (b) 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 most hard to reach and vulnerable low-skilled; it also implies the need for capacity-building strategies.

- (c) Effective communication practices, with a shared language, among those involved in governance facilitate dissemination of information, support, and feedback.

Key area 4: Monitoring and evaluation

- (a) Monitoring and evaluation on two levels: across all areas of upskilling pathways to ensure that synergies are in place and sustained, as well as within those individual areas.
- (b) Underpinned and linked with quality assurance systems. This also implies an agreed concept of quality that intersects with all individual areas (including support, implementation, provisions, programmes, initiatives) that have their own dedicated monitoring and evaluation systems and mechanisms.
- (c) Informed by a comprehensive and integrated data collection mechanism and requiring the involvement and engagement of all appropriate stakeholders.
- (d) A good communication strategy may facilitate stakeholder engagement and ownership.

SUPPORT: ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE PATHWAYS

Key area 5: Financial and non-financial support

- (a) Appropriate level of funding is secured and sustained through cost-sharing mechanisms.
- (b) Effective financial support acknowledges the heterogeneity of the low-skilled adult population and is carefully designed (eligibility criteria, level of subsidy) to target diverse groups of low-skilled adults.
- (c) Financing instruments are 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 company capacities. These are particularly relevant for SMEs.
- (d) Existing financial and non-financial support measures for individuals and companies are reviewed; their effectiveness in reaching low-skilled adults and their efficiency are assessed.

Key area 6: Outreach

- (a) Grounded in user centrality and geared to development of individual autonomy and readiness to engage in learning and work; includes the target group voice, their knowledge and understanding in the development of alternative approaches.
- (b) 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 run processes and coordinate the efforts of local stakeholders.
- (c) Guidance and outreach services are well coordinated, are a stable feature of skills development and adult learning policies and are ideally framed by national agreements across political forces (national strategies, budgets). 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.
- (d) Holistic and adapted services, supported by interdisciplinary teams; whenever necessary, providing support with financial, housing and integration issues.

Key area 7: Lifelong guidance system

- (a) Support for a lifelong and life-wide process: integration across support services addressing different life stages and contexts depending on country setting, including employment services, social services, and municipal services.
- (b) Guidance activities are organised around the principle of user centrality. Services aim at long-term individual autonomy in career management, by encouraging the development of career management skills.
- (c) Service is provided in a holistic and networked way, coordinated with outreach strategies and sustained by local and regional cooperation (and coordination); municipalities can play a central role coordinating local efforts, with local cooperation based on partner strengths in specialised areas; local cooperation is also key to sourcing labour market intelligence.
- (d) 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 improvement of individual/social welfare, labour market outcomes and learning results.

- (e) Integrated information and guidance services involving multi-channel delivery (web, telephone, face-to-face) and adapted to beneficiaries' needs; individuals are provided with an appropriate blend of digital, phone and face-to-face services as well as peer support, as needed.

IMPLEMENTATION: OFFERING TAILORED, ADAPTABLE AND FLEXIBLE UPSKILLING PATHWAYS

Key area 8: Skills assessment

- (a) All learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning is valued.
- (b) Coordinated with guidance and validation, supporting individuals in the discovery of their existing competences. Skills assessment is a potential input to the tailored learning offer and to validation.
- (c) Aligned methods and proof of learning 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.
- (d) The output must be understood and trusted by key third parties (training providers, employers, civil society organisation) so that it is useful for individuals accessing further learning, a validation process or for employment. This relies on quality assurance systems.

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

- (a) 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) Tailoring of the offer does not affect the learning objectives of a given qualification and guarantees comparability and quality of the learning results irrespective of the path taken.
- (c) Adults of different learning profiles benefit from a range of flexible and adaptable pedagogies and methods, course formats, and forms of final assessment.
- (d) Tailored learning offers depend on the capacity of the implementing institutions to make available the paths provided for at the institutional/framework level, and to adapt to the individuals' learning profiles and needs.

Key area 9B: Tailored learning offer with work-based learning

- (a) Providers are aware of, prepared for, and supported to use diverse forms of work-based learning (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. More broadly, there is need for local-level collaboration and networks and ownership among all parties involved.
- (c) Company staff attitudes need to be positive towards adult learners as individuals, and potentially as individuals belonging to a particular group (e.g. refugees). Companies, particularly SMEs, have the pedagogical capacity to work with adults; in-company trainers and staff are informed of adult learners' needs and expectations.
- (d) Apprenticeship training is open to adults, with companies, particularly SMEs, incentivised (financially and non-financially) to offer placements to adults.
- (e) Apprenticeship training provision is tailored to adults' needs/profiles (taking account of prior learning and work experiences, individual constraints).

Key area 10: Validation and recognition of skills and competences

- (a) Centrality of the individual to the objectives and processes undertaken.
- (b) 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.
- (c) 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, aware of and trusting the outputs.
- (d) Tools used are reliable, valid, transparent and adapted to individual needs and circumstances; various assessment and certification methods are used.

THE VALUE AND RELEVANCE OF THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Upskilling pathways is about pulling together resources and creating the right synergies for supporting 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. This approach should be able to address their comprehensive needs in a coordinated and coherent manner and ensure that they have all the tools and support to embark on sustainable learning pathways leading to their full potential and fulfilment.

The Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults has been developed to sustain this unique vision of upskilling pathways.

The framework's value-added aspects involve the development process, its core foundation and its multidisciplinary contents. 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 organic coordination of Cedefop knowledge and expertise in the Department for learning and employability, in the fields of 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) was derived from an analysis of interesting systemic features found in a selection of good and interesting practices collected for the project.

COOPERATING ON A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO EMPOWERING ADULTS THROUGH UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING PATHWAYS

The reference publication accompanying this executive summary is part of Cedefop's research on empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. The purpose of the project is to support the design, diffusion and implementation of VET policies and measures helping adults, especially low-skilled adults, to achieve the knowledge, skills and competences required for work, employability and lifelong learning.

Supporting this general aim, the objective of the report was to describe the conceptual and collaborative development of the analytical framework for upskilling pathways for adults with low skills. In presenting its final contents in detail it aims to support policy-makers and stakeholders in designing and implementing sustainable, coordinated and coherent policy approaches.

The next step will be to apply the analytical framework in a selection of countries who agree to participate in thematic country reviews specifically focused on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. There will also be further follow-up involving the analytical framework during the forthcoming 'Third policy learning forum on upskilling pathways: a new vision for the future' in November 2020. Stakeholders will have an opportunity to share the latest developments in upskilling pathways, including their knowledge, innovative experiences and practices, challenges and inspirations, with a focus on the identification of key areas for action.



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ISBN 978-92-896-2898-3



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