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# **Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for adults**

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## Introduction

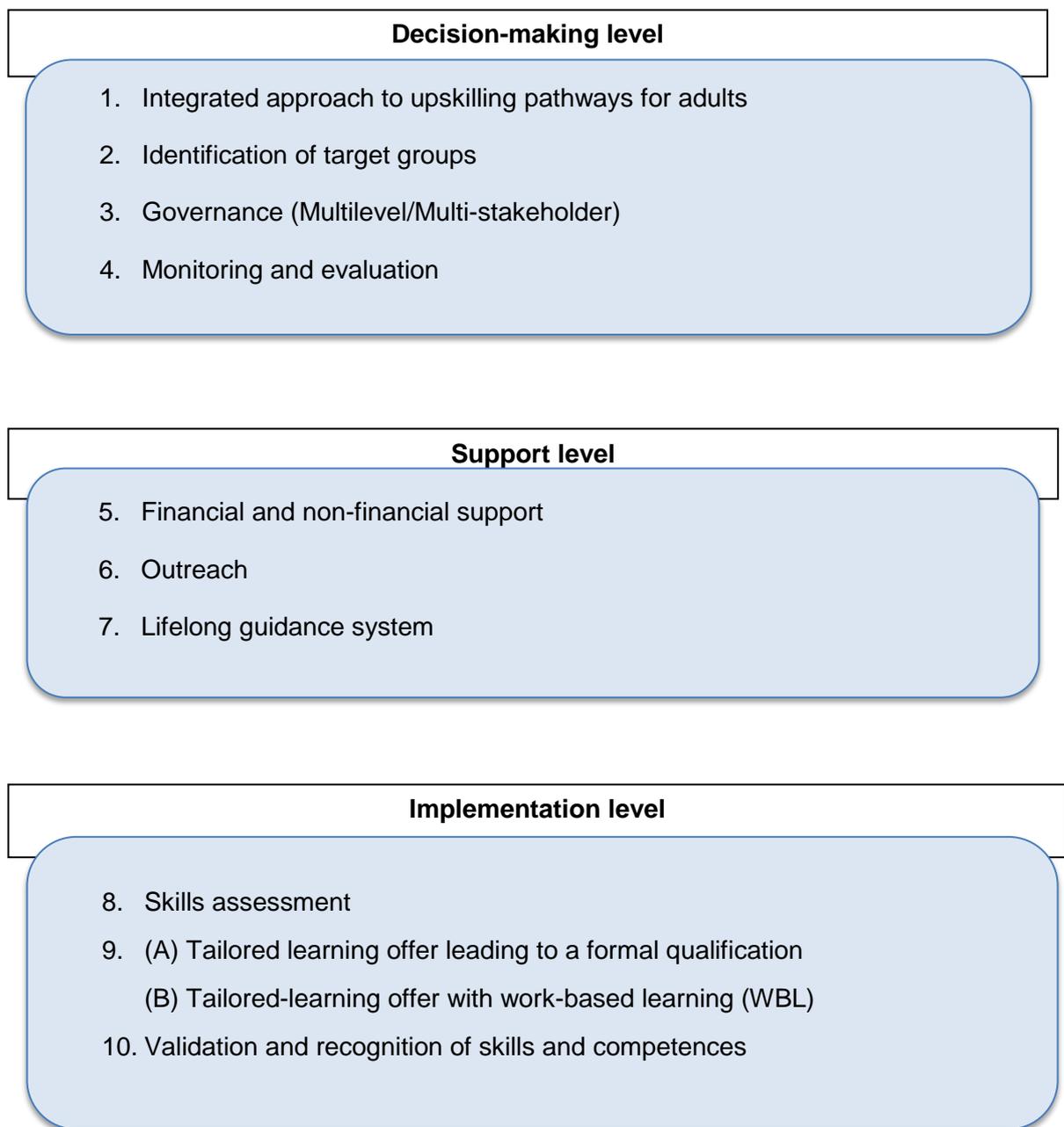
This draft analytical framework is an ongoing working document aimed at supporting key stakeholders to develop strategic and coordinated approaches to upskilling pathways for adults. The framework has been developed by bringing together various resources and knowledge generated within Cedefop at the Department for learning and employability, in the areas of adult learning, early leaving from education and training, financing, guidance, validation, and work-based learning.

The methodology applied for developing this first version of the analytical framework included extensive literature review and good practice analysis aimed at identifying important systemic features for developing a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways for adults. These features are organized around ten (10) key areas of the policy process as described in Figure 1.

Although it might appear to present a normative stance, the analytical framework below is intended as an ongoing basis for discussion and a tool for countries to identify key areas for action. It will be thoroughly discussed during the [Second Policy learning forum on upskilling pathways: a vision for the future](#), both in the parallel and plenary sessions. Following the meeting, it will be further refined, enriched and reviewed on the basis of the outcomes and feedback received by stakeholders.



Figure 1: Draft analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for adults:  
10 key areas of the policy process



**KEY AREA 1: Integrated approach to upskilling pathways for adults****DEFINITION**

An integrated approach to upskilling pathways for adults contains various ingredients at the strategic level, including a nationally agreed approach (strategy/framework) and an embedded nationally defined vision (e.g., in the form of guidelines, defining a common shared language) with high stakeholder engagement for inclusive, tailored, accessible, adaptable and flexible upskilling pathways for adults.

Various policy domains are integrated in a holistic manner in order to enhance policy coherence and coordination, ensuring high stakeholder engagement and commitment at both national and local level, as to pave the way for the development of upskilling pathways.

The strategic, coherent and coordinated 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 point and needs, and their association with adult target group(s) who may especially benefit from upskilling.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

The fragmentation and complexity of relevant policy measures often results in a lack of systematic approaches to upskilling the adult population and a lack of awareness of the socioeconomic benefits of doing so. An integrated adult upskilling pathways approach that ties 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 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.



### KEY FEATURES

- 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;
- Multiple relevant policy domains are included in a holistic fashion, especially education and training and employment, and areas that support or provide services to adult learners;
- The nationally agreed approach has earmarked funding 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, in particular at work (Key area: Multilevel/multi-stakeholder governance);
- Plans for institutional coordination are defined. A strong national vision accommodates local and regional cooperation needs and specificities;
- The nationally agreed approach is flexible and responsive to changing skills needs;
- 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;
- A comprehensive, overarching strategy for a monitoring and evaluation system ensures high policy coordination and efficiency. (Key area: Monitoring and evaluation);
- All Key areas are taken into account in the approach to consolidating and creating policies and strategies.



## KEY AREA 2: Identification of target groups

### DEFINITION

Implementation of an integrated approach to upskilling pathways involves the definition and identification of target groups, which depending on the strategy taken can imply a prioritization of specific groups of low-skilled adults or a more overarching approach that targets a diverse set of groups in need.

In order to define and streamline national priorities and their intended socio-economic outcomes, the identification of target groups involves the study of comprehensive and integrated information on the different potential adult populations. Official statistics/datasets and other resources can support the identification process and increase opportunities to analyse data on adult skills and competences of potential target groups.

The need for comprehensive information implies that methods and strategies for involving key stakeholders are in place for compiling data and information for making informed decisions. Within the context of the integrated approach to upskilling, shared decision-making among public and private stakeholders, including potential beneficiaries, facilitates the creation of upskilling pathways.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Low-skilled adults are a very heterogeneous group with different needs and characteristics, in respect to 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. This diversity underlines the need for a clearly defined strategy to identification, and how priority groups will be determined.

Identification of different and specific target groups within the heterogeneous group of adults in potential need of upskilling is a crucial issue to better inform 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.



## KEY FEATURES

- To define national priorities and their intended socio-economic outcomes, the identification of target groups involves the study of comprehensive and integrated information on the different potential adult populations;
- The approach to identification is flexible to adapt to changing target groups;
- Specific target groups are considered according to the barriers/situational obstacles they may face in accessing upskilling pathways;
- The approach to identification and the characteristics of the target groups prioritized will be defined by the available resources and country or regional context as well as existing strategies relevant to upskilling;
- Numerical targets based on scale of the low-skilled population or other important considerations can feature in the process of identification;
- Key public and private stakeholders and social partners are involved in the identification process and nationally organized data collection methods. Methods and strategies are therefore in place, accordingly;
- Labour market and employer needs are taken into consideration during the identification process;
- 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;
- 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;
- Data is collected and utilized on a continuous basis for identifying groups who can benefit from upskilling following data protection regulations (Key area: Monitoring and evaluation);
- 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: 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.



### **KEY AREA 3: Governance (Multilevel/Multi-stakeholder)**

#### **DEFINITION**

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

Effective governance will be expressed differently in each country, but an integrated approach involves horizontal and vertical coordination of policy domains and systems. It is constituted by being comprehensive (broad accessible support), cohesive, with clearly defined and shared goals, responsibilities for each actor (e.g., individual, collective or network formation), and involves engagement/participation of relevant stakeholders, including learners/beneficiaries. Effective communication practices with a shared language among those involved in governance facilitate dissemination of information, support, and feedback. Strategic leadership is essential, with the possibility of one or several coordinating bodies.

#### **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

A multilevel/multi-stakeholder, integrated and comprehensive governance approach to implementing upskilling pathways involves the efficient coordination of all relevant stakeholders (spanning education, training and employment and social service sectors) in order to not only reach diverse adult beneficiaries/learners, but also 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, recognized. Including diverse community partners also implies the need for capacity-building strategies.



## KEY FEATURES

- Effective coordination can arise from establishing an umbrella framework/strategy, while adapting to pre-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 areas: Integrated approach to upskilling pathways, Monitoring and evaluation, and Identification of target groups);
- Governance is facilitated by strategic leadership, including one or more coordinating bodies. Roles and responsibilities of key actors (individuals, groups/entities, networks, public and private) at different levels are defined and distributed, accordingly, for example in decision-making, implementation, supervision, advisory, follow-up and monitoring;
- Key stakeholders (including beneficiary representatives) are specifically involved proactively in the upskilling implementation and processes, including but not limited to programming, innovation, measures, assessments, feedback, etc.;
- Governance in the context of upskilling pathways emphasises the strategic role of the local/ community level closest to practice and implementation;
- Strengthened stakeholder and institutional capacity and accountability (in terms of decision making, spending, technical capacity, etc.) as to maximise policy coherence and foster effective partnerships;
- Stakeholders, traditional and non-traditional, are made aware of the importance of upskilling pathways for adults;
- Key tools/resources (e.g., agreements, guidelines, frameworks, evaluation tools, databases, web portals to widen access, prior learning assessments) are developed collaboratively and officially (laws/regulations) approved, where possible;
- All key areas are developed, overseen, coordinated and governed accordingly within the scope of Key area Governance (Multilevel/multi-stakeholder).



## KEY AREA 4: Monitoring and evaluation

### DEFINITION

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

Assessing effectiveness implies the collection and analysis of data through research and other means on the usage and effectiveness of upskilling policies, systems and interventions, and their evaluation. 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), 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.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A systematic and sustainable monitoring and evaluation mechanism is required to bring together and inform an integrated 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 including: the shaping of strategic goals, the planning of services, the development of programmes, the identification of gaps in service delivery, the consistency between services offered, the training needs of professional practitioners and the optimal use of resources and of investment in delivery. It further addresses accountability issues, supports identification and mainstreaming of best practices and allows for the timely identification of potential problems during implementation.



## KEY FEATURES

- 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;
- 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;
- Evaluations are not only on-going, 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;
- Indicators for the evaluation and monitoring system inform the design stage of upskilling policies;
- 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;
- Evaluation of good practices providing evidence on their success identifies key factors in view of transferability and mainstreaming. Knowledge about what works (and under which conditions) can then be properly disseminated and shared via publicly available user-friendly databases;
- The overarching monitoring and evaluation system is underpinned and linked with quality assurance systems;
- A communication strategy is in place to inform and engage those involved in the implementation of the upskilling policies about the principles and process of the evaluation.

**KEY AREA 5: Financial and non-financial support****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 on benefits of learning, tailored training delivery, and/or promoting partnerships to enhance companies capacity, etc.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

One of the most important obstacles to adult participation in education and training is financial cost. According to AES data, in 2015, 28% of adults (aged 25-64) in the EU did not participate in education and training (formal, non-formal and informal learning) due to its high cost. Similarly, high financial cost has been identified as a significant obstacle hindering company provision of continuing vocational training (CVT). According to CVTS data, in 2015, 28% of companies in the EU refrained from training provision due to this reason. 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 most significant 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 economical, social and educational context. Moreover, 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. Thus, financial instruments need to be complemented by non-financial support.



## KEY FEATURES

- 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;
- Those benefitting from EU funds make best use of these resources while avoiding over-reliance on EU funds. The appropriate financing mechanisms mobilising national resources are in place to ensure sustainability of funding;
- 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;
- 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;
- Suitable financing instruments are used:
  - to target individuals: grants, vouchers/learning accounts; subsidised, income-contingent loans; paid training leave of adequate duration (long enough to allow to acquire higher qualification)
  - to target companies: levy-grant mechanism, tax incentives, grants, payback clauses
- Financing instruments are carefully designed to ensure effective targeting of low-skilled adults:
  - 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;
  - The amount of subsidy is adequate/attractive and considers direct and indirect costs of education and training;
  - Adequate financial support is provided in advance, before education and training takes place (important especially for low-income individuals);
  - Eligibility criteria (in terms of groups and type of education and training) are carefully determined to effectively target diverse groups of low-skilled adults;
  - Complementarity of financing instruments is ensured;
  - Possible drawbacks of financing instruments (such as heavy administrative burden, deadweight losses) are taken into account when designing and implementing financing instruments.



- Financing instruments are combined with suitable non-financial support, e.g. information about the existence of the financing instrument, advice to companies and guidance for learners on the use of the instrument, raising awareness on benefits of learning (e.g. by public relations campaigns and marketing measures), tailored training delivery, consultancy services for companies, quality assurance;
- 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 in place 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 to increase SME training capacity and innovative learning approaches to adapt to specific needs and constraints of SMEs (e.g. using coaches at the workplace to teach new tasks, self regulated learning or distance learning);
- Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are in place (Key area: Monitoring and evaluation). In case of underperformance of support measures, 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.



## KEY AREA 6: Outreach

### 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.

It involves 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 usual features to increase access through outreach.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Young people beyond a certain age threshold (frequently 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 rights and can be deemed “problematic” or unsolvable cases. Fear of refoulement or forced repatriation leads many refugees and third country migrants not to voluntarily search for public support. Frequently these individuals stop being monitored and are not covered by any 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.

### KEY FEATURES

- Trained and dedicated staff, specialised in outreach activities, who can deal with the complexity and demands of dealing with vulnerable and frequently marginalised groups;
- Central administration financing, technical support and monitoring is well coordinated with local/regional operational management and implementation. Municipalities or regional one-stop shops tend to run processes and coordinate the efforts of local stakeholders;
- Outreach activities are monitored and evaluated, identifying success factors and adaptation strategies, to allow for national level generalisation;
- Sharing of beneficiaries’ registries across services such as schools, social security, PES and NGOs, to identify, track and contact individuals in need of support. This requires handling of personal data issues, updating registries and



case management;

- Public calls and online information are usual methods to signpost available services. They are, nevertheless, not sufficient and require complementary measures;
- Developing street work is fundamental, reaching into peer groups, communities and families. It requires trained staff, and is better developed in cooperation with local authorities and NGOs;
- Supported by peer work and community/social economy initiatives;
- Use of role models play in motivating young people to reengage in learning through awareness raising and mentoring;
- Visits to enterprises to raise awareness of workers in illegal situations or who are unaware of available opportunities;
- If activation services are exclusively provided by the PES, the obligation to register should either be waved or outreach should incorporate awareness-raising regarding the need to register;
- Individualised support, with career guidance support, integrating assessments (skills, attitudes, aspirations), clarification of preferences and career planning;
- Holistic processes, with diagnosis and support of physical and mental health, given the vulnerable state of many individuals. Teams should be inter-disciplinary and whenever necessary provide support with financial, housing and integration issues;
- 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;
- Training is normally dynamic, conducted in a simple language, adjusted to learner's characteristics and availability. Readiness to work and learn should be developed before engaging individuals in standard training or employability measures;
- 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.

**KEY AREA 7: Lifelong guidance system****DEFINITION**

Lifelong guidance is officially defined by a European Council Resolution of 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.

**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 increasing self-awareness relative to personal needs, potentials 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:

- Education and training: engagement, retention, performance and transitions;
- Labour market: participation, employability, job retention, average income, labour market adjustments, mobility, lower welfare costs and workforce skills development;
- Social inclusion: socioeconomic integration, reduction in long-term unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and promotes equity (gender, ethnicity and social background);
- Economic development: workforce participation, productivity, lower skills mismatches.

Guideline 13 concretely addresses its importance in adult learning and upskilling, underlining how guidance:

- Is key in LLL, stimulating demand for adult learning, providing information and counselling, enabling outreach strategies, raising awareness and motivation of adults;
- Informs about validation, recognition and flexible learning opportunities, and



supports application processes, also advocating client rights before relevant stakeholders;

- Provides specialist support for many adults to find their way in new learning environments and in a rapidly evolving world of work;
- 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;
- Helps adults deal with more complex roles and responsibilities related to family, work and economic situation so to find balanced options and support mechanisms for upskilling and learning;
- Directly influences active citizenship and personal development.

### KEY FEATURES

- Career guidance is an integral part of national upskilling strategies and adult learning programmes in publicly funded education and training providers;
- Adult learners are provided the opportunity of personalised, individual guidance;
- Integrated information and guidance services involving multi-channel delivery (web, telephone, face-to-face) are available for adult learners and are scalable according to clients' needs (i.e. clients with higher needs get more support);
- There is sensitivity and adaptation of methods and tools to the needs of diverse adult groups and individuals (e.g. NEETs, LTU, refugees);
- Career guidance is available prior, during and after learning engagement, to support choice, learning and transition to employment/further learning;
- Impartial information and support in accessing flexible learning solutions are available, including work-based learning and open educational resources;
- Information and support in obtaining validation and recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning is available;
- Support to adults is geared towards the development of career management skills in a lifelong perspective;
- Co-operation of guidance services with enterprises, employer associations exists (e.g. production of local LMI, tasters, shadowing, work-based, learning, internships);
- Coordination with outreach strategies and cooperation with community organisations. facilitating access of vulnerable adults to adult learning;



- Assessment and promotion of key skills is supported in guidance services;
- Entrepreneurial skills and attitudes are supported;
- Updated training and professionalisation of relevant staff is assured.



## KEY AREA 8: Skills assessment

### 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. It is usually referred to as a “skills audit” or “skill profiling”.

In the context of upskilling pathways, skills assessment is focused on the identification and documentation of skills, knowledge and competences that a person has acquired 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 skills of an individual, which can be the basis for planning the next steps in training (Key areas: Tailored learning offer(s) leading to a formal qualification and/or with work-based learning) or for the validation and recognition of skills.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improved knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications, is crucial in order to open up progression opportunities, including transition to employment, career advancement and further study. Skills identification can be used:

- to help individuals reflect on and become conscious of their actual capabilities;
- to help the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups develop their careers and increase their employability;
- to provide users with a means of making visible and marketing their skills and competences;
- to map needs for further training, considering the importance of matching individual competences with labour market needs (Cedefop and European Commission, 2015).

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 the host-country labour markets. Particularly for low-skilled adults, identification of previous 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 of the process.

Identification and documentation of skills is also crucial for designing a targeted training approach based on an individual’s point of departure. It should reduce the length of training and increase efficiency of the system, helping in overcoming the so-called situational obstacles such as family responsibility, conflicting time schedule,



financial costs, lack of employer support or proximity concerns.

### KEY FEATURES

- Skills assessment should be a systematic feature of the system for upskilling. It is carried out in combination with guidance and counselling and links to validation and recognition practices. Guidance and counselling is an embedded feature of skills identification, supporting the individual in the discovery of their existing competences. Identification of skills constitutes an input to the Key area Tailored learning offer and that of Validation;
- Formal, non-formal and informal learning are taken into account. 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 upskilling approach. This implies a combination of ICT-based tools, group and individual sessions;
- Individual plans for next steps in training/learning and support offered are defined 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 certifications;
- The documentation formats and outputs of the process support transferability and portability of the identified skills. Transparent methods and standards have to be communicated and agreed with the relevant stakeholders;
- 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 certification process or employment. This necessitates quality assurance systems for the skills assessment, through reliable and valid assessment methods as well as well-trained practitioners.



## KEY AREA 9A: Tailored learning offer leading to a formal qualification

### 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 a full formal qualification (valid diploma); this is identical or equivalent to qualifications available for young people in the IVET or CVET system. The offer may consist of more than one path, all of which rely on assessment, validation and/or recognition of prior learning<sup>1</sup>. At an individual level, a tailored learning offer addresses an individual's – or group's – basic learning needs (e.g. language, numeracy, digital skills, etc.) and builds the foundation for pursuing a full formal qualification. Finally, tailored learning offers depend on the capacity of the implementing institutions to (a) make the paths provided for at the institutional/framework level available, and (b) to adapt to the individuals' learning profile and needs.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Adults are a highly heterogeneous group<sup>2</sup>; 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 adults' participation in learning. Linking learning offers to the prospect of valid qualifications 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.

### KEY FEATURES

- There is more than one path in IVET/CVET for an adult to acquire a formal qualification; all paths make use of assessment, validation and/or recognition of prior knowledge;
- There is a clear link between the offers, paths and qualifications, enabling support

<sup>1</sup> 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 up to a full diploma;
- Access to 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, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Different life, learning and working experiences, various age groups, different family status and obligations and socioeconomic characteristics.



services to promote them and allowing an individual to make informed choices based on his/her needs, ambitions, goals, etc.;

- 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;
- Education and training providers and other types of operators have the capacity (pedagogic, financial and human resources) to work with adults, for example through networks and in cooperation with support services;
- 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;
- Adults of different learning profiles benefit from a range of pedagogies 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);
- Adults' specific constraints (family obligations, financial, time, work, distance, etc.) are addressed individually or as a homogeneous group, through financial and non-financial support.



## KEY AREA 9B: Tailored learning offer with work-based learning (WBL)<sup>3</sup>

### 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 in simulated work environments and workshops, etc. The second (also called work-place-based learning) may include, for example, 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 work-place-based learning is involved, tailoring also refers to addressing the needs and expectations of companies (particularly relevant for apprenticeships).

### 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 – all central elements in andragogy. In addition, in apprenticeships adults are remunerated while learning and learn predominantly in a company: they are thus integrated into a working environment and are able to identify more with being workers than learners.

### KEY FEATURES

- Providers are aware of, prepared for, and supported to use diverse forms of WBL (not only work-place-based learning) to tailor their learning offer to adults' needs; innovative approaches are encouraged and shared;
- Apprenticeships are clearly distinguished from other forms of WBL, in particular work-place-based learning;
- Apprenticeship training is open to adults, with companies – in particular SMEs – incentivised (financially and non-financially) to offer placements to adults;
- Apprenticeship training provision is tailored to adults' needs/profile (taking account of prior learning and work experiences, individual constraints, etc.);
- Employers have the possibility to offer apprenticeship to their employees to help them qualify for better/higher-skilled positions;
- Socioeconomic partners are involved, in particular in apprenticeship design, strategy and provision.
- There are national, regional and local partnerships involving companies – in

<sup>3</sup> Key area 9B needs to be read together with 9A.



particular SMEs – in work-place-based learning for their own employees or other potential beneficiaries;

- Adults' skills depend on company expectations (minimum foundation level, as well as technical education and training level); basic training is combined with integration in the workplace.
- Companies – in particular SMEs – have the pedagogical capacity to work with adults; in-company trainers and staff are informed of adult learners' needs and expectations;
- Company staff attitude needs to be positive towards adult learners as individuals, and potentially as individuals belonging to a particular group (e.g., refugee).
- 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.



## KEY AREA 10: Validation and recognition of skills and competences

### DEFINITION

Validation is defined 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, the emphasis is placed on the last stages of the validation process (assessment and certification). In addition, the third step in an upskilling pathway includes the validation and recognition of skills acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings. The individual is certified as having acquired certain skills or key competences which are particularly relevant in progressing towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4, depending on national circumstances.

### 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 the learning acquired, thereby making it possible for the individual to use this documentation to continue to further education or for 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.

The issue of 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.

### KEY FEATURES

- Systems are in place for the validation and recognition of skills acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. These systems assure that skills are being properly assessed and certified in line with national or regional guidelines and regulations;
- The individual is at the centre of the validation process, wherein methods and tools are adapted to his/her specific needs;
- The purpose of the validation and recognition process is clearly defined and communicated to individuals and society. Multiple stakeholders are involved, aware of and trust the outputs. Individuals can use these outputs to access



further education or employment;

- 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;
- Standards used for the validation of learning leading to formal qualifications should also apply to validation of non-formal and informal learning, 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;
- The tools used are reliable, valid and transparent and adapted to individual needs and circumstances, while a variety of methods are used, in line with the Key area: Skills assessment;
- Career guidance support is available before, during and after the validation procedure (Key area: Lifelong guidance system);
- A clear framework for quality assurance is in place, in order to provide credibility and trust to the outputs of the process, while also assuring validity and reliability of assessment methods;
- Practitioners are adequately trained for their specific role in the validation process as assessors, counsellors or managers;
- A system is in place for monitoring and evaluation of validation and recognition practices (Key area: Monitoring and evaluation).



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