



The role and use of apprenticeships in upskilling and reskilling adults

Summary of outcomes ⁽¹⁾

The fourth Cedefop policy learning forum on apprenticeships took place on 20 and 21 October 2022 as a virtual event. It was dedicated to discussing regulatory frameworks, policies and practices in the Member States regarding the role and use of apprenticeships in upskilling and reskilling low-skilled adults.

About 60 participants attended both days of the event, representing governments, employers and unions of 24 Member States ⁽²⁾, Norway and the UK. There were speakers from Finland, France, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Austria, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Spain.

DAY 1

Antonio Ranieri (Head of Department for VET and skills, Cedefop) opened the fourth Cedefop PLF on apprenticeships by saying that it was the first one with its revised composition, including representatives of governments and social partners from all EU-27 countries. Participants in the new PLF cycle have been – and for some countries will continue to be – nominated by Cedefop’s Management Board. He welcomed the new tripartite audience and thanked them for their interest and availability to participate. Mr Ranieri highlighted the purpose of the PLFs, which is promoting peer learning, knowledge sharing and networking opportunities. Cedefop PLFs on apprenticeships are part of [Cedefop activities on apprenticeship](#), which have constituted an intense and extensive area of the Agency’s work since 2014, carried out from different, complementary perspectives and with different methodologies: studies and research, thematic country reviews, the joint symposia with the OECD organised since 2019 ([2019](#), [2021](#), and the forthcoming one in [2023](#)), the [online European database on apprenticeship schemes](#), and last but certainly not least [Cedefop’s Community of apprenticeship experts](#), whose members were also thanked for their contribution. In the future, Cedefop plans to organise a PLF on apprenticeships every 2 years, in a virtual format, around pertinent thematic angles.

Next, **Jürgen Siebel (Cedefop Executive Director)** gave an opening presentation about the policy framework in which the PLF takes place and talked about why the topic of apprenticeship for adults is (still) relevant. Not only is the age of people participating in apprenticeship increasing across Europe, making apprenticeships ever more suitable for young adults and adults; but Europe is also preparing

⁽¹⁾ The notes of the workshop outcomes are based on the contributions of the workshop rapporteurs, members of [Cedefop Community of apprenticeship experts](#):

- Stewart McKinlay, National Manufacturing Institute, Scotland
- Andrea Laczik, Edge Foundation, England
- Kurt Schmidt, ibw, Austria
- Jan Bisgaard, University College Copenhagen, Denmark

⁽²⁾ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK.



for the Year of Skills, 2023, which will focus on skill shortages and skill mismatches, which cause companies to struggle to find the right skills, and for which apprenticeship could be the most suitable form of VET. While information helping us reflect on the conditions for making apprenticeship happen ([Cedefop did a first exploratory study in 2019 on this topic](#)) is already available, the potential of adult apprenticeship is yet to be explored, and empirical evidence of the impact of governmental efforts to encourage the participation of adults in apprenticeships is limited.

Lisa Rustico (expert in the Department for VET and skills, Cedefop) introduced the topic of the PLF by sharing some reflections and evidence gathered from previous Cedefop work. Recalling Cedefop's 2019 study, 'apprenticeship may offer an effective way of increasing adult participation in lifelong learning, improving access to education and training, and retraining and upskilling adults', not only for young people ([Cedefop, 2019](#)). In practice, adult apprenticeship is not a separate type of apprenticeship, nor is it usually considered as a distinct analytical category or concept. Age per se is not a key determining factor in policy-making to set the boundaries of adults' participation in apprenticeship; these may be better identified through criteria other than age, e.g. related to the status of individuals on the labour market or specific life situations. The term 'adults' is often interpreted in a broad sense as persons who have left initial education and entered the labour market as employees or are unemployed; there is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship between these factors and age. Ms Rustico also drew attention to the potential benefits of apprenticeships from different perspectives: beneficiaries (low-skilled adults), companies and society.

- From the perspective of beneficiaries, adults in the labour market and those who are trying to access it tend to prefer work-based learning to update their skills or for their professional re-qualification. Apprenticeship is particularly suitable for the diverse needs of adults: not only because it is a VET option largely based on work-based learning, but also because it relies on a contract and wage. What is more, it is possible to tailor its arrangement and delivery to specific individual needs (for example, by means of skills assessments or RPL leading to shortened duration). The same argument of flexibility applies particularly to low-skilled adults, who may be low-skilled because of different circumstances and socioeconomic factors, such as gender, migrant background or being at risk of energy poverty linked to the current energy-driven inflation. Apprenticeship may also be relevant for adults considering the significant ageing demographic trends; these reveal a need to update and improve adults' educational attainment level, and to activate the inactive and long-term unemployed through updating or upgrading their qualifications.
- From the companies' and sectors' perspective, offering apprenticeship to (young) adults may well respond to the needs – or preferences – of some employers for hiring more mature and motivated workers, while still being able to shape and define the skills they learn. In addition, using apprenticeship for adults' further specialisation may also support companies in responding to labour market changes due to greening, digitalisation and constant innovation, which require continuous upskilling and reskilling of workers. In many cases, these trends require specific or highly specialised skills, which apprenticeship's close links to the labour market and its in-company training component help to develop, by directly exposing learners to changes as they happen at their workplace, by giving them direct access to innovative practices and technologies, and by potentially allowing apprentices to contribute to them by fostering innovation. However, many companies already face – and will increasingly have to do so – the challenges deriving from the energy-driven crisis, and in many cases, closure might



be the only option for them. In this context, long-term investments, such as quality apprenticeships, might not be straightforward for all.

- From the governments' perspective, it is important to devise policies and initiatives facilitating adult participation, including promoting more flexible learning options, not necessarily to create new apprenticeship schemes or programmes. Of course, it is critical to safeguard quality and completeness of learning outcomes, to offer opportunities, but also be careful about requirements, to support teachers and in-company trainers, and put in place incentives for learners and companies.

Finally, Ms Rustico presented an overview of the existing knowledge about apprenticeship for adults in Cedefop and the relevant sources. Most of the EU Member States based on Cedefop's 2019 [explorative study](#), [Cedefop policy reporting](#) and on the [Cedefop Community of apprenticeship experts](#) have either been taking steps towards opening up apprenticeship to adults in one of the directions mentioned, or are exploring these perspectives. She concluded with a reference to the overall idea of the PLF, which is to continue collecting evidence and exchanging learning, thanks to, thorough and for, the tripartite representation in the audience.

Plenary 1

Day 1 approached the topic from a horizontal perspective, looking at how to tailor apprenticeship to low-skilled adults and at companies' motivation and interest in hiring adults through apprenticeship.

Presentations in the first plenary offered two examples of countries where apprenticeships are offered to adults, both in a system which is structurally open to them and built around continuity between IVET and CVET (Finland), and in a system where apprenticeships were initially intended for young people and then opened up to include adults (France).

[Riikka Vakker \(Finnish National Agency for Education\)](#) illustrated the Finnish case. The biggest challenge in Finland is to improve the level of competence and increase participation in education of under-represented population groups (including low-skilled adults), who are actually least likely to access it. This is combined with an increasing mismatch between labour supply and demand. To address such challenges, the reform of continuous learning (2019) developed a number of initiatives and services, mainly offered by the new Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment, including support for the participation of under-represented groups in adult education, including through apprenticeship, developed as a retraining and adult training route. Apprenticeship is indeed not a separate form of education in Finland, but an equal form of acquiring competences inside the vocational education and training system: 76% of apprentices are over 25 years of age; entrepreneurs can also access it. Personalisation makes the apprentice learning pathway individual and flexible, at different stages throughout its course. A discussion about personal goals and career plans takes place between the VET institution and person applying; the skill needs of the labour market are also discussed with the employer. On this basis, a personal competence development plan is drawn up, defining what needs to be learned, how, where and when. Dedicated incentives are in place for adults, including financing for training and skills services especially for restructuring sectors and for under-represented groups, mainly for those who are employed or outside the workforce. Ms Vakker reflected on the main strengths and weaknesses of the Finnish system and underlined that it is built on a comprehensive and systemic approach, and with the cooperation of many policy sectors.



The presentation by Ms [Christine Schmitt \(Ministry of Labour\), France](#), focused on the professionalisation contract, which is an apprenticeship scheme also open to unemployed adults. The purpose of the scheme is the integration or reintegration into employment of young people from 16 to 25, jobseekers aged 26+, and income support beneficiaries. In 2020, more than one third of participants was aged from 26 to 44. In practice, the scheme targets categories of adults generally low-skilled, such as jobseekers registered for more than a year and those receiving 'social minima'. Specific incentives are in place for beneficiaries aged 45 and over, for jobseeker 26+, and for long-term jobseekers older than 30 years. Among the strengths of the scheme, Ms Schmitt mentioned its contribution to the reintegration into employment through long periods of training (average 12 months) and meeting the short-term needs of businesses in a context of labour shortage.

Workshop A: How is the training provision adjusted to accommodate the offer of apprenticeship training to low-skilled adults? (training providers' perspective)

[The Danish system](#) was presented by **Torben Schusten (Ministry of Children and Education)**. He explained that adults have multiple offers to join apprenticeship, all embedded in the general IVET system and with the same structure; the training programmes are adjusted to individuals' (adults') previous experience, learning, and employment, and are based on an individual assessment. This usually results in shortened duration of the school-based component (normally one third of the programme), depending on the length of prior employment. Employers receive compensation for the time apprentices spend at school from a national fund, in some cases complemented by active labour market policies.

Rita Kask (Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia) discussed the Danish case by contrasting the Estonian reality. There, 91% of apprentices are 25+ and the average age is 42. But the common theme in Estonia and in many other countries across Europe is that there is still a significant share of the adult population which is low-skilled and without a VET or higher education qualification or job. Rita then outlined some questions about the recognition of prior experience, its consequence, and if there are data about the impact of these programmes in Denmark. To the last question, Mr Schusten replied that 89% of adults participating in the programme find employment within 6 months from graduation, providing evidence for a very successful system.

The main outcome of the workshop discussion was about the importance of outreach: one of the critical steps to make this policy work is to **build low-skilled adults' confidence**, to engage them in VET, apprenticeships and the labour market. There is a compelling case for finding ways of doing this around three key areas:

- (a) consistently linking programmes to recognised vocational qualifications (link with EQF);
- (b) injecting elements of flexibility (including in the duration) without losing the essential quality;
- (c) the importance of 'shorter bites', that is micro-qualifications, to support the recognition of prior learning and experience.

Workshop B: How do companies see and use apprenticeship training for low-skilled adults? (employers' perspective)

The focus of the workshop discussions was around the potential interest of companies in hiring adults through apprenticeship, as an attractive tool for training motivated workers who know what they want, and already have workplace experience.



[Marius Ablačinskas](#) reported the views of the **Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists** about apprenticeship for adults being an interesting opportunity for companies, because adults who already have professional or higher education qualifications tend to adapt and learn faster and make fewer mistakes. He also argued that adult apprentices are better motivated, eager to learn and free from prejudices or false/inaccurate knowledge. This results in gains in terms of time and quality, and lower costs for the company. Lithuanian employers are reluctant to hire young apprentices and prefer those who have already completed their vocational training. Lithuania is dominated by small and medium-sized companies, which, due to narrow specialisation and/or limited resources, cannot contribute to the full scope of the formal training programme. The challenge is therefore to support SMEs in delivering training and making sure that all competences linked to a qualification are developed in the context of an apprenticeship, for young adults and adults.

Duco Hoep, Dutch employers' representative, acted as discussant. After presenting the apprenticeship system in the Netherlands, he discussed some of the key enabling factors for companies for offering apprenticeship places, among which are access to funding and sectoral partnerships. Mr Hoep also confirmed the relatively higher cost of hiring adult apprentices due to higher wages. Finally, he offered a reflection about the need to attract apprentices in high-demand sectors, such as ICT and healthcare services.

Discussions with the audience about the **challenges** revolved around three main points:

- (a) the need to provide more information and communication about apprenticeships and their benefits to adults and companies;
- (b) the lack of financial resources that could support incentives for companies (to motivate and compensate employers) and learners;
- (c) the need to ensure that the content and occupational value of the apprenticeship programme is broad enough, not too company-specific.

There was also a discussion about the **cost** of adults and young apprentices: the former cost more although the cost of a young person in the city is comparable to that of an adult in rural areas, so it is worth considering geographical differences. In any case, employers seem to prefer adults for their motivation and previous experience.

In terms of **solutions**, the role of companies' collaboration – including with a partnership approach – was highlighted, although involving SMEs may be challenging.



DAY 2

Day 2 approached the PLF topic from a thematic perspective, looking at how to tailor apprenticeship to low-skilled adults and at companies' motivation and interest in hiring adults with apprenticeship.

Plenary 2

The second plenary was dedicated to two thematic approaches: apprenticeship for the integration of low-skilled adult migrants and refugees; and the role of apprenticeship for low-skilled adults in the green transition.

[Oliver Gruber, AK Wien](#), presented how apprenticeship supports the inclusion of low-skilled adult migrants and refugees in the labour market in Austria. After presenting the figures of asylum seekers and of apprenticeship beneficiaries by nationality in Austria, and having illustrated the general regulations and recent developments in relation to access to apprenticeship for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, Mr Gruber discussed the factors that prevent refugees from using apprenticeship as an ideal career path or, in other words, what still impede apprenticeship's potential for this target group. On the individual side, these factors for adults include: the negative consequences on individual career paths from exclusion of asylum seekers; the lack of knowledge of the education and apprenticeship system, often leading to an undervaluation of apprenticeship; the lack of networks providing opportunities to apply for apprenticeship positions; the willingness to start working after years of waiting in the asylum procedure; the costs, insecurity and isolation leading in many cases to refusal of relocation to another province for an apprenticeship position. On the employers' side, the factors that might still limit apprenticeship's potential for adult migrants and refugees include employers tending to be more critical with refugees compared to domestic apprentices, including due to resentments linked to cultural/religious differences; companies might not have established specific application tracks modelled to the situation of refugees; media and politics as influential factors for the overall conditions. To conclude, Mr Gruber offered some suggestions to make apprenticeship a real possibility for refugees: working on language competences; spreading knowledge of career perspectives, access, application rules, etc.; providing individual support with bureaucracy; systematic preparation (application, company information, excursions, practice, etc.); targeted financial support for companies and apprentices to compensate for the cost of risks.

Next, [Brian Nolan, Connect Trade Union](#), presented the Irish perspective about apprenticeships adapting for a green economy. In Ireland there is currently no separate track for adults, while apprenticeship has traditionally been promoted by Connect Trade Union to Irish employers irrespective of age. Mr Nolan provided data to explain that the traditional profile of apprentices is slowly changing: apprentices tend to be older, more socially mobile, renters or home owners, and they have a family. Against this background, he explained what the 'green challenges' are to moving to education, engineering and craft training to reskill/upskill workers in traditional industries and adapt existing apprenticeships or create new ones. Thanks to an industry-led approach (the 'consortium model'), some changes have been proposed to align existing craft apprenticeships with skills for the green transition needs. Some of the apprenticeship programmes concerned are: new 'Wind turbine maintenance technician' apprenticeship; 'Motor mechanic' to include electric vehicle maintenance; 'Heavy vehicle mechanic' to include electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles; 'Electrical' to include modules on heat pumps, solar, domestic wind turbines; 'Plumbing' to include modules on heat pumps, and solar; 'Carpentry' to include modules on retro-fitting; 'Industrial insulation' to include modules on domestic insulation.



Workshop A: Apprenticeship to support the inclusion of adult migrants or refugees in the labour market (Government and trade union perspectives)

[Isabelle Le Mouillour \(Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, BIBB\)](#) gave a presentation about the place of apprenticeship within the German integration policy at the Federal, State and local levels. She provided data about migrants and refugee participation in apprenticeship: 30% of the applicants have a migration (not refugee) background, while 26% are refugees. Among the governmental initiatives, BOF ('Vocational Orientation for Refugees') is particularly relevant. As part of a joint initiative with the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), BOF aimed to introduce (young) refugees to the dual training system and explicitly to in-company training in the skilled trades by means of an integrated qualification and support system through intensive language teaching, specialist vocational orientation and vocational preparation. With the BOF program (running since 2016) refugees who are no longer required to attend school and immigrants with special support needs are supported on their way to an apprenticeship in a 26-week BOF course. Regarding initiatives to support apprenticeships for adults in general, age or the recognition of prior learning and acquired skills are taken into account when it comes to individual counselling. Germany has introduced subsidies directed at employers to encourage intake of adults in regular apprenticeship training programs. In 2016, a new law introduced the financing for companies and learners (upon graduation) of vocational qualification for young adults (25 to 35) that have no or low-level qualifications. As part of the strategies to help adults get an apprenticeship qualification in alternative ways to participation in full apprenticeship programs, the system offers the following possibilities: access to external examinations, courses that prepare participants for external examinations, and use of part-time vocational training contracts. Ms Le Mouillour concluded with some reflections on the future, in relation to the need to improve the framework for managing integration and the cooperation among stakeholders. She also mentioned the need to develop more targeted support offers for refugees and increase guidance and information on integration measures, including recognition procedures. Finally, she underlined the importance to ensure that labour market integration is not hindered or impeded by legal requirements, and to continue relying on civil society for integration.

Ornella Cilona (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro) discussed the role that trade union representatives can play at the workplace in better integrating adult migrants and refugees with apprenticeship contracts. Ms Cilona gave the example of the 3-year tripartite Memorandum of understanding that the construction sector trade unions, employers' association, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of the Interior signed in May 2022, aimed at providing training to refugees and other vulnerable migrants in the sector. At least 3 000 refugees and migrants will first attend courses organised by the Inter-professional Fund Formedil, and then gain experience in the sector through a dedicated apprenticeship programme. This memorandum of understanding is also relevant because it is a tool for fighting illegal work in the construction sector, of which migrants and refugees are often victims. She also mentioned the plan of the Ministry of Labour to implement some measures to boost apprenticeships for adult migrants and refugees during the 2021-27 cycle of the FSE+ Fund, in cooperation with social partners and civil society organisations. To conclude, she pointed out that the integration of migrants and refugees through employment should go hand in hand with initiatives to provide them with a secure livelihood. Integration initiatives are more likely to be successful if the adult migrants and the refugees can count on housing and unemployment benefits while waiting to find work. In Italy, the National Programme 'Inclusion and Fight against Poverty', managed by the



Ministry of Labour and financed by EU Funds, aims at guaranteeing a safety net for more disadvantaged groups of people, such as migrants and refugees, while finding a job.

Discussions in the workshop focused on the importance of the **recognition of prior learning and assessing skills and competences**. Participants also reflected particularly on the different needs of **different subgroups of migrants/refugees** (e.g. Ukrainian refugees), which should be tackled with appropriate measures, although complex questions arise with respect to the scope, meaningfulness and practicality of differentiating among subgroups of migrants and refugees. For example, Ukrainian refugees have a distinct status because of the high probability of returning to their home country. They are also comparatively better educated (higher level of qualifications), and women and children are overrepresented in the population. Targeted measures are therefore needed, such as short-term qualifications to foster fast labour market integration, or childcare support.

Workshop B: How is apprenticeship used to upskill and reskill adults for the green transition? (employers' perspective)

[Pär Lundström \(Swedish Confederation of Enterprises\)](#) presented the scheme 'Yrkeshögskolan' (Higher VET), which is used for adults' skill development in the Swedish solar energy sector. The market for solar energy doubles every year but companies struggle to find qualified workers. 'Yrkeshögskolan' Higher VET curriculum of Solar Energy manager offers knowledge and competences in the electrical system, solar technology, legal framework, construction standards, energy production and storage, and smart systems. The training, which is half-time and partly web-based, can be combined with employment. It is used both for existing employees and for new hires, such as people in transition, or in need to upskill/reskill to find a new job. The types and levels of qualification that may be more relevant for adult students in the context of the green transition are at EQF levels 5 and 6. Employers show a preference for this scheme because they can shape the educational content according to their needs. Since workplace learning is included, the scheme also leads to a quick transition to a new position. The scheme is gradually expanding all over Sweden: there are currently 10 similar training offers with different education providers spread geographically. In terms of participation, in August 2022, 91 adults applied and 40 were accepted.

Sandra Miso Guajardo (CEOE Empresas españolas, Departamento de Educación y Formación) explained that a new Organic Law for the organisation and integration of vocational education and training has recently been published in Spain. The new law establishes a flexible offer of formal vocational training in the direction of a 'dual VET' system, from a lifelong perspective. As a result of this reform, almost all formal VET will be on a dual basis (alternating between VET schools and companies), while the upper age limits to apprenticeship participation was lifted so that adults can now also become apprentices. One of the objectives of the reform is addressing the skill mismatches between the education and vocational training programmes and the skills that the labour market requires, especially from a sectoral perspective, including those related to the green transition. By bringing companies closer to the VET system, the reform hopes that companies' joint responsibility will have a highly positive impact on matching skills to labour market needs by being more involved in apprenticeships. In this context of rapid and significant change, she stressed the importance for companies and their representatives of understanding their role in developing and updating occupational standards and training profiles with skills relevant to the green transition accordingly. In Spain, there is unfortunately no systematic evidence at this moment about the role of apprenticeships



for adults in the green transition. There are, however, programmes at regional and local levels. We can see that the whole VET system is shifting towards becoming greener. The Employment Authority for VET also intends to offer new training on green transition to employees and to the unemployed at the beginning of the next year through the State foundation for training in employment.

Discussions focused on companies' use of apprenticeships when they want to move into new green areas of business. Participants reflected on the need for **flexible and dynamic programmes**, which are attractive for both enterprises and workers. Another topic for discussion were the **competences that teachers and trainers need**, especially when the apprentice is employed at cutting-edge companies. These do not only include large firms, as small and medium-size companies – though being hard to reach – are often where innovation and experiments take place. There was agreement on the importance of raising awareness of lifelong learning for adults, especially low-skilled workers and employers. To reach this objective, the involvement of social partners is key.

Concluding panel

The event concluded with a panel where representatives of the European social partners, the European Commission and Cedefop exchanged their views about how apprenticeship can be a quality and sustainable opportunity for low-skilled adults, including in relation to the twin transitions.

Agnes Roman (ETUC) suggested that the discussion on apprenticeship for adults should focus on the final qualification to be achieved, i.e. in IVET or not, instead of using the age criterion, and consider the specific national contexts. In any case, she clarified that the quality criteria of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships should apply to both, the young and adults. Ms Roman stressed the importance of creating the conditions to guarantee equitable access to employee quality training, including apprenticeship, no matter the company size, contractual relationship, geographical differences, or workers' individual characteristics (with particular attention to gender). Of equal importance, talking about requalification of adults, is the possibility to access validation, guidance and information, in countries with sustainable public investment for their training systems. She underlined that the impact of the upcoming economic crisis may reduce companies' training expenditure and warned that this may also occur along with decreasing levels of social dialogue and unionisation. Ms Roman reflected on the role of apprenticeship for adults in the context of 2023 being the Year of Skills: the European trade unions welcome this initiative but they call for more attention to the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, which is essential to tackling poverty and inequality. In the Year of Skills, a discussion about skill shortages and skill mismatch should also take place, but considering the presence of decent jobs and quality working conditions. Attention should also focus more on opening up labour markets to migrants and refugees, but this should happen by avoiding social dumping. Trade unions record that low-skilled people have less access to training, with their skills deteriorating while technology is still developing. The main point is to guarantee and reinforce the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights concerning job creation and access to quality training. She concluded with a remark on the importance of including social partners in countries' national upskilling strategies.

Robert Plummer (BusinessEurope) framed his discussion recalling the current difficult economic times, characterised by pronounced labour and skill shortages in all Member States and in all economic activities. He acknowledged the increasing use of apprenticeship to up- and reskill adults, including in the context of the green and digital transitions. Apprenticeship could be used not only for



adults in employment but also to support labour market transitions between jobs and sectors, to alleviate skill mismatches. For low-skilled people, it is critical to increase the share of time spent at the workplace, focusing on the practical, hands-on element of the training in a company, which has a long-lasting impact on workers and employers. For this specific target group – but also for adults in general – it is critical to focus on the low level of their digital skills to ensure that they are not left behind in the digital transition. Mr Plummer stressed the importance of active labour market policies and individual and targeted support, including in the form of guidance, to identify the best apprenticeship opportunity provided by public employment services for the sustainable integration of the unemployed into work. He underlined the importance of more interaction, cooperation and collaboration between public and private employment services, so that training may be structured to respond better to labour market needs. There is clearly a role here for some EU funding and programmes, especially the ESF+. In this respect, it is crucial to engage national, regional and local actors, including social partners. Companies' role in engaging adults outside the job market through apprenticeship is still an unexplored area. What is important is to remember that apprenticeship is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and that there are still issues of image and attractiveness of apprenticeships that would need to be addressed also in relation to adults, both employed and unemployed, high- and low-skilled.

Tamas Varnai (DG Employment) acknowledged the new development of adults' participation in apprenticeship and the potential of this option for their upskilling and reskilling, including in the context of the green and digital transition, by adapting them to their specific needs. He offered a reflection on the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships as a point of reference for adults as well. The first paragraph acknowledges indeed that 'quality and effective apprenticeships [...] facilitate young people's entry in the labour market, as well as adults' career progression and transition into employment'. All the EFQEA criteria are indeed valid for both IVET and CVET but there are some nuances: when we talk about implementation, there are differences to be considered, as some criteria may have slightly different relevance for adults. For example, the distribution of the time between school and workplace, which might be higher for adults; the criterion of pay or compensation: for adult apprentices, compensation would not be sufficient, while they would need to receive a proper wage. Another example is the criterion of social security, which, for example in the case of refugees, is even more important. The criterion of flexible pathways and the recognition of prior learning is also very important for adults, while it may be less so for young people. Finally, the criterion of international mobility has a different impact on the young and adults, considering that the related challenges are different. Mr Varnai added that next year, 5 years since the adoption of the EFQEA, the Commission is thinking of organising an event to take stock of the implementation of the framework. He concluded with a reflection on what the Commission can do to tap into the potential of apprenticeship for adults, by mentioning the European Alliance for Apprenticeship, which has already addressed this topic on different occasions, and the Pact for Skills and the Year of Skills as opportunities to promote apprenticeship for adults as a pathway for their upskilling and reskilling.

Mara Brugia, Cedefop Deputy Director, started from acknowledging that when it comes to making apprenticeships suitable for adults, particularly low-skilled ones, work-based learning formats fit their needs, sometimes even better than classroom learning formats. The fact that an apprenticeship is built on a contract and remuneration makes it an attractive option for adults who want (or need) to obtain a formal VET qualification. She then elaborated on the conditions that could make apprenticeship more suitable for adults, starting from: removing legal or institutional barriers to



access, increasing financial and non-financial incentives for companies and learners, putting in place outreach and guidance mechanisms to help adults to understand the benefits, and injecting flexibility to respond to the distinctive characteristics of adults. Ms Brugia added that to engage even more learners and companies in apprenticeship for adults, it is essential to look into the motivation of adults and companies in using this tool for up- and reskilling. It is also essential to work on the basis of a systematic identification of the real needs which apprenticeship may tackle. Finally, it is crucial to continue strengthening the systematic engagement of trade unions and employers together with the public authorities, at different policy-making stages. Social partners can play a powerful role in reaching out and convincing workers – particularly low-skilled ones – to engage in upskilling and reskilling, which is a necessity today accelerated by the twin transition and the consequences of the energy-driven crisis. Through social dialogue, apprenticeship is in a better position to keep up with the rapid changes of the labour market and maintain its relevance and attractiveness, against any potential transitions. A ‘multi-level participatory approach to lifelong learning’ is indeed a promising starting point to designing apprenticeships that can also respond to the twin transition. She concluded by saying that apprenticeship, thanks to the involvement of social partners it entails and the potential benefits it can bring about, can be an enabler to build together the future that is ahead.