

Policy learning forum
Upskilling pathways: a vision for the future
6 and 7 February 2024
Venue: European Economic and Social Committee (EESC),
Rue Belliard 99-101, 1040 Brussels

Concept note

The Cedefop and EESC policy learning fora (PLFs) on upskilling pathways are a series of policy learning events on the topic of upskilling, reskilling and lifelong skill development, aimed at providing a platform for countries to learn from one another, explore common challenges and discuss potential ways forward.

The fifth policy learning forum on upskilling pathways: a vision for the future is aimed at discussing support to lifelong upskilling pathways for all adults, and is part of Cedefop's and the EESC's European Year of Skills programme of activities.

All adults, regardless of socioeconomic background, labour market status and qualifications, deserve an opportunity to update and acquire new skills regularly so they can keep up with rapidly changing work realities, manage ever more frequent transitions in the labour market, and thrive in their personal lives and careers. A workforce with the right skills is important for long-term sustainable growth and competitiveness. It also ensures that the green and digital transitions are socially fair and just for everyone and that no one is left behind ⁽¹⁾.

Despite ambitious targets, however, participation in CVET and lifelong learning in the EU remains far too low, leading to the paradox that those who need upskilling and reskilling the most (e.g. those with low qualifications, from poorer backgrounds, in vulnerable labour market positions, migrants, older adults, etc.) are the ones engaged the least, and are more at risk of social exclusion.

⁽¹⁾ See also EESC opinion on *Competence and skill development in a context of the green and digital transition*, April 2023 ([SOC/755](#)); EESC opinion on *Digital skills and education package*, October 2023 ([SOC/774](#)).

#UpskillingPathways

Previous editions of the [joint Cedefop – EESC PLF on upskilling pathways](#) have stressed the need for a new vision of lifelong skill development, where low-skilled adults are comprehensively supported and empowered to update and upgrade their skills systematically. This is what upskilling pathways is about: a systematic approach to upskilling and reskilling of low-skilled adults, which brings together tailored training offers and support systems/structures that provide financing, guidance and opportunities for validation and recognition of prior learning, in a coordinated manner and as part of a coherent strategy.

Starting with insights from France, Italy and Croatia, which took part in Cedefop's *Thematic country reviews (TCRs) on upskilling pathways*, PLF participants will have an opportunity to discuss their respective experiences, successes and challenges on how to engage and support low-skilled adults to avail themselves of upskilling pathway opportunities. During highly interactive sessions participants will also discuss and share ideas on how to develop a comprehensive approach to upskilling and reskilling of the low-skilled adult population, with the involvement of social partners and civil society organisations. This approach should be able to address low-skilled adults' needs in a coordinated and coherent way, ensuring that they have all the tools and support to embark on sustainable learning pathways leading to personal and professional fulfilment, while making use of their full potential.

Efforts to increase individuals' participation in upskilling pathways will not reach the desired results if the value of lifelong skill development is not acknowledged and recognised by all stakeholders. As megatrends are changing the way we work, learn, and live, all adults will need to update and upgrade their skills regularly to navigate ever frequent transitions in life and the labour market, and contribute to economic and social prosperity. This implies that upskilling and reskilling concerns all adults in Europe.

On the second day of the PLF, focus will shift towards lifelong skill development for all adults, and future strategies and approaches leading – in the long term – to CVET systems underpinned by learning-conducive work environments and learning-intensive working lives. Participants will also discuss the role of social partners and social dialogue in strengthening CVET systems. A systematic and strategic approach to lifelong skill development for all adults embedded in well-functioning CVET systems and grounded on a new learning culture in CVET, calls for a paradigm shift from understanding CVET mainly as training delivery addressing short-term skill needs to a systematic strategy for CVET to become the 'new norm' for all adults. This paradigm shift also requires engaging workplaces and enterprises on a large scale, supporting them to become learning-conducive work environments that

#UpskillingPathways systematically demand and supply training, act collectively, and share responsibility. Offering CVET opportunities should therefore become an integrated part of enterprise work organisation and innovation strategies. But enterprises, especially SMEs ⁽²⁾, cannot do this alone; they will need special support and tailored approaches that fit their specific needs. Multi-stakeholder cooperation is essential, as well as devising the right incentives to facilitate a shift in enterprise behaviour from short-term, individualistic behaviours towards a more strategic and long-term vision that acknowledges that there are better opportunities for individual enterprises within healthier and stronger sectors, economies and societies.

Cedefop thematic country reviews (TCRs) are in-depth reviews, carried out in close cooperation with Member States, of a country's approach to the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.

Their objective is two-fold:

- at national level, to support the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation by identifying country-specific strengths and challenges, presenting a set of policy options for ensuring systematic, coherent and coordinated approaches to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults, and supporting reforms at national and/or regional levels;
- at European level, to increase the evidence base which can support policy- and decision-makers in European countries, at different levels, in designing and implementing upskilling pathways approaches.

Full engagement and cooperation are maintained with the countries throughout the review process: TCRs are country-owned and country-driven review processes of their approach to upskilling pathways. The national ministries in charge of implementing upskilling pathways appoint, by formal mandate, a steering group of national stakeholders, which is involved in all strategic TCR activities. TCRs result in identification of country-specific strengths and challenges, and a set of policy recommendations to support reform. The first round of TCRs started in 2021 with [France](#) and [Italy](#). A second round of TCRs on upskilling pathways was launched at the end of 2022 with Croatia.

⁽²⁾ See also EESC opinion on *Supporting labour market developments: how to maintain employability, boost productivity and develop skills, especially in SMEs*, February 2023 ([SOC/722](#)).