



Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults

Final Report

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the Council Recommendation of 19
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Executive summary

Learning opportunities that allow adults to up- and re-skill are vital components for economic growth and social equality. The Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways¹ (2016/C 484/01) aims to ensure that everyone in society has a comprehensive set of basic skills, knowledge, and competences to achieve their full potential, play an active part in society and progress on the labour market. The Recommendation sets out a three-step approach to offering low-skilled adults access to upskilling pathways, through a skills assessment, a tailored and flexible learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills and competences. This approach is underpinned by outreach, guidance and support measures for learners, as well as coordination between relevant actors in education, training, employment, and social policy.

This study contributes to the evaluation staff working document of the European Commission. It outlines the change that has occurred between 2016 and 2021 with regards to upskilling pathways in Member States in response to the Recommendation. It then proceeds to assess the extent to which this response has been effective, efficient, relevant, in coherence with other EU and national policies and programmes and has delivered EU added value. On the basis of these findings, it draws key lessons learned.

Key findings

Effectiveness

The evidence shows that Member States have made only **moderate efforts to facilitate access to upskilling pathways since the Recommendation was adopted**. 14 Member States made changes to their upskilling approach to align more with the Recommendation. Member States that had high need for change in 2016² have been more likely to instigate change to implement the Recommendation, as seen in Table 1. The **indicators relevant to upskilling pathways also show moderate progress**, including increased participation in adult learning, increased level of digital skills and a decreased share of low-qualified adults across the EU.

Table 1 Summary of degree of need for change and degree of actual change

Need for change 2016	Degree of change 2016-2021				
	Significant change	Moderate change	Modest change	No change	
High	BE, PL, BG	EL HR, MT	SK, CZ, CY, IT	HU, IE, RO, ES	
Medium	LV		DE	LT, LU, PT, SI	

¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=EN)

² High need for change is defined as high shares of low-qualified, low participation rates, and/or a low degree of implementation of the three-step approach,

Low			EE, DK,	AT, FI, FR, NL, SE
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Source: Ecorys/3s, 2022. Full explanation of the methodology is included in Annex 1 and Annex 9. 'No change' indicates that no significant changes to better align the country's existing approach to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation were identified. It does not mean that no changes took place at all in the country's upskilling approach.

However, **there is limited evidence which shows that this improvement is the result of upskilling pathways** implemented in response to the Recommendation. There has been no noticeable change in the trends of the relevant indicators after 2016, with long-term trends suggesting that higher educational attainment levels are principally due to improvements in initial education. Any direct macro effects of the measures taken in response to the Recommendation are not yet visible and are likely to only become fully apparent in the longer term, given that individual upskilling journeys usually take a number of years to complete.

Even if a causal link between the Recommendation and the improvements in the main indicators cannot be ascertained, evidence shows that the **Recommendation has contributed indirectly to renewing the focus on the low-skilled target group and outlining what is effective in supporting them**. Consultations undertaken for this study confirm that the Recommendation has highlighted the challenges with current provision for the low-skilled, set out a way forward for improving the support available, and stimulated cooperation between actors in the adult learning field. This is particularly the case in Member States that had high need for change in 2016.

Implementation of the three-step approach

In terms of implementation of the **three-step approach**, the study has shown that progress is most noticeable on skills assessment and the provision of tailored learning. Measures for validation and recognition of skills, whilst increasing since 2016, are less prevalent and are still missing in several countries, with evidence that they remain challenging to implement. There is also limited evidence of efforts to ensure integration of the three steps into one comprehensive pathway.

As called for in the Recommendation, all Member States have identified **priority target groups** for upskilling pathways including long-term unemployed, older workers, people with disabilities, and nationals with a migrant background or third country nationals. However, the definition of the target groups of upskilling pathways is often broad, prioritising the low-skilled in general. There is limited evidence of measures that are designed *specifically* for vulnerable groups. Even when marginalised target groups are identified, challenges remain in reaching them, including a lack of awareness of opportunities amongst the groups themselves, financial barriers to participation, and challenges with stigma and low motivation of the individuals.

In line with the Recommendation, Member States have delivered upskilling pathways to a high degree in **cooperation with relevant stakeholders**, including social partners, public employment services and regional and local actors. The study found evidence of outreach and guidance services provided to potential learners, although more holistic, tailored support is less common and guidance is less systematically available for individuals that are in employment. Support to employers is overall piecemeal and inconsistent, and there is also considerable scope to increase the systematic provision of training for staff delivering upskilling programmes for adults.

EU support to implement the Recommendation has included mutual learning activities, research, stocktaking of implementation and financial support through EU funding. The

mutual learning and research activities undertaken have contributed to bringing adult learning to the attention of relevant actors and to stimulating cooperation between them. Furthermore, EU funding has been identified as an important contribution of the Recommendation, with the ESF in particular supporting some structural changes in Member States, particularly those with less developed adult learning systems, even though the **need to upscale ESF-funded upskilling projects and embed them in institutional structures with long-term sufficient funding** remains.

Efficiency

There are challenges to assessing the efficiency of the Recommendation given the difficulty in separating out the costs and benefits that have arisen as a direct result of the Recommendation from those that might have occurred in its absence. Nonetheless, the study has found that the **scale of costs and benefits** is influenced by the extent to which Member States' pre-existing adult education measures aligned already with the Recommendation in 2016. In countries that were implementing measures in line with the Recommendation already, stakeholders confirmed that they incurred no or very limited additional costs as a result of the Recommendation. In countries where adult learning systems were less in line with the Recommendation, costs were higher.

Nonetheless, across both groups of countries, evidence indicates that the **costs are proportionate to the benefits achieved**. This is due to the perceived long-term benefits of implementation: both on the individual level, through increased wages and/or moving into stable employment and, on the societal level, through increased income tax and VAT as a result of increased wages and consumer spending and lowered costs of welfare payments.

The study found that it is unlikely that benefits of the Recommendation could have been achieved at a lower cost, although there some **factors have negatively impacted efficiency**. These include the impact of Covid-19, challenges to delivery such as lack of staff trained specifically for adult learning and their skillset, and the difficulty of reaching more vulnerable target groups.

The extent of support provided for upskilling pathways greatly depends on Member States' willingness and capacity to earmark **funding** for adult learning. Adult learning overall tends to be supported by state budgets, within the education or active labour market policy system, or by employer contributions. There is, however, a lack of concrete data capturing this spending, as funding for the education of adults provided by the state within the education system is often not estimated or recorded, which makes it challenging to assess the degree of national support. **EU funding**, however, has supported the Recommendation through a range of different EU programmes and funding mechanisms. The largest of these was the European Social Fund (ESF), with over EUR 42 billion allocated to investment priority 10.iii (enhancing equal access to lifelong learning) for the period 2016-2020. Funding was also available under a variety of sources including Erasmus+, the Employment and Social Innovation Programme (EaSI), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Horizon 2020, the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) and the Technical Support Instrument (TSI).

The scale of EU funding available suggests that considerable resources were available to meet the needs targeted by the Recommendation. Nonetheless, there is a **risk that an over-reliance on EU funding can hinder the large-scale impact of the measures**, with project-based measures introduced, as opposed to large-scale reform. This is particularly the case for adult learning, also because national funding for this policy area is often included within broader budget lines for education investments as a whole and can thus remain scattered and insufficient.

Relevance

The Recommendation's objectives continue to be **highly relevant to the current EU socio-economic and policy context**. Challenges that existed when the Recommendation was adopted - including high levels of low-qualified adults - have persisted, whilst new challenges resulting from the Covid-19 crisis, the transformation of jobs and work, and the acceleration of the green and digital transitions, have heightened the relevance of the Recommendation. These challenges have even increased the need to focus on basic skills – in particular, digital skills – and low-skilled adults, who remain highly vulnerable to the evolution of the socio-economic context.

The **three-step approach** remains a very useful framework to guide both policy and implementation of upskilling measures. Each step is relevant considering needs of the target group for hands-on, integrated support. The flexible framework provided by the Recommendation also remains relevant as it allows Member States to identify their own priority groups in light of evolving and differing needs.

Coherence

There is overall a **good level of coherence between the objectives, target groups and measures** defined in the Recommendation and relevant policies and strategies at national and regional level. Evidence from the study shows that Member States either already had national and regional policies in line with the Recommendation, adjusted their policies as well as in some cases their legal frameworks governing vocational education and training (VET) following adoption of the Recommendation, or introduced new policies to ensure coherence.

The objectives, target groups and measures of the Recommendation have a **good degree of coherence overall with other related EU level policies** in the fields of training and employment, adult learning, and equalities. These other EU policies are complementary to the Recommendation and do not duplicate it, with limited potential for overlap. The analysis shows a general trend of an increasing specific focus on and acknowledgement of the importance of upskilling under other relevant EU policies over time.

The Recommendation also has a high degree of coherence with relevant EU funding mechanisms, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF) and the ESF+, Erasmus+, the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP), the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation also shows a very good degree of internal coherence.

EU added value

The Recommendation generated **EU added value in four main areas**. It provided a common framework for the design of national upskilling policies; it promoted a focus on basic skills and low-skilled adults and raised awareness of the multiple vulnerable groups among this target group; it provided an impetus for more structured coordination among key stakeholders, contributing to a more joined-up approach; and it offered financial support by leveraging funding at EU level which in turn leveraged some national support through co-financing requirements.

The study indicates that the objectives of the **Recommendation could not have been achieved to the same extent** without the EU level intervention. Nonetheless, EU added value of the Recommendation could be increased by improving its visibility at the national level, further acknowledging the diversity of the target group, and continuing to provide supervision and support at EU level, including increasing mutual learning and knowledge-sharing.

Lessons learned

Based on its findings, the study identifies some key lessons for implementation of the Recommendation moving forward.

- There is a need to ensure that the good practices that have been implemented since the Recommendation was adopted to support low-skilled adults are upscaled into system-level reforms **to ensure structural, and long-term improvement** of adult learning systems that can support this target group. Exploring mechanisms to encourage the mainstreaming and transferability of successful approaches developed using EU funding into more permanent national funding mechanisms could help in this regard.
- It is essential to **continue to develop awareness** of the importance of acquiring basic skills and of the need for specific upskilling measures for low-skilled adults. Awareness-raising activities could include targeted communications campaigns, the provision of examples of good practices from across the EU, as well as communication on the benefits of upskilling for all actors.
- There is considerable scope for **improvement in the outreach methods** used to reach low-skilled adults, as well as the effort dedicated to this preliminary step. Working with local actors who have experience with specific groups of low-skilled adults and funding directly earmarked for outreach are key in this regard.
- In these efforts, particular attention is needed to **avoid the stigmatisation of low-skilled adults**. Rather than focusing on deficits of the individual, skills assessments and outreach should focus on the benefits to be achieved and the existing strengths of the individual.
- There is room for improvement in the implementation of tailored learning offers, including **better identifying and adapting the training to the needs of low-skilled adults** facing different forms of additional disadvantage.
- Establishing fully functioning validation systems continues to require a concerted policy effort. Among others, it is important to consider **how transversal competences can be better taken into account in qualifications/learning outcomes**, since these are crucial for low-skilled adults, but not generally well addressed in validation systems.
- A key focus of future action should also be the **smooth integration and improved permeability of the three steps** and accompanying measures into one comprehensive pathway.
- Upskilling pathways would benefit strongly from **integrating a holistic gender and equality perspective** into all steps given the intersectional nature of different disadvantages (e.g., age, disability, migrant status, gender, socio-economic status) often faced by low-skilled adults.
- The emphasis on **encouraging wide-ranging cooperation** with key stakeholders in the implementation of upskilling pathways should continue and be reinforced.
- The implementation of upskilling pathways at national and regional level would benefit from **increased monitoring and evaluation** of the approaches implemented. More disaggregated data would provide important learning for future policy measures. Exploring the **establishment of relevant EU-wide benchmarks** and indicators would be very helpful in order to help understand progress across the EU in implementation.

- There has been a positive impact in terms of using existing EU funds to support implementation of the Recommendation. To avoid the risk that the majority of funding for adult learning/upskilling is directed to target groups which are closer to the labour market, **clear guidelines and targets, to EU funding targeted at upskilling could be developed.**
- The measures defined in the Recommendation have been shown to provide a relevant and comprehensive framework for supporting low-skilled adults effectively. To increase its relevance and future-proof the Recommendation, it could include a **greater transversal emphasis** on upskilling that can help adapt to the green and digital transitions, as well as the impacts of demographic change.
- Other measures could also be further promoted. These include measures which address wider aspects of the lives of low-skilled adults, including skills to foster greater social and financial inclusion (e.g., money management, online banking, etc.), and support measures for attending training (e.g., transport, support for care responsibilities) which, whilst covered by the Recommendation, need further attention in implementation.
- There is scope for **more targeted mutual learning** focusing on basic skills and upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults, for sharing good practice and raising awareness.

Synthèse

Les possibilités de formation qui permettent aux adultes de se perfectionner et de se requalifier sont des éléments essentiels de la croissance économique et de l'égalité sociale. La recommandation du Conseil du 19 décembre 2016 relative aux parcours de renforcement des compétences³ (2016/C 484/01) vise à garantir que chaque membre de la société dispose de l'éventail de savoirs, d'aptitudes et de compétences de base nécessaire pour réaliser tout son potentiel, jouer un rôle actif dans la société et progresser sur le marché du travail. En vue de permettre aux adultes peu qualifiés d'accéder à des parcours de renforcement des compétences, la recommandation définit une approche en trois étapes basée sur l'évaluation des compétences, une offre de formation adaptée et flexible, et la validation et la reconnaissance des qualifications et des compétences. Cette approche s'appuie sur des mesures de communication, d'orientation et de soutien à destination des apprenants, ainsi que sur la coordination des acteurs concernés de l'éducation, de la formation, de l'emploi et de la politique sociale.

L'étude contribue au document de travail du service d'évaluation de la Commission européenne. Elle décrit les changements survenus dans les États membres, entre 2016 et 2021, dans le domaine des parcours de renforcement des compétences en réponse à la recommandation. Elle évalue ensuite dans quelle mesure cette réponse a été efficace, efficiente, pertinente, cohérente avec les autres politiques et programmes des États-membres et de l'UE et a apporté une valeur ajoutée à l'UE. Sur la base de ces constatations, elle en tire des enseignements clés.

Principales constatations

Efficacité

Les données montrent que les États membres n'ont fait que **des efforts modérés pour faciliter l'accès aux parcours de renforcement des compétences depuis l'adoption de la recommandation**. Quatorze États membres ont modifié leur approche du renforcement des compétences afin de mieux l'aligner sur la recommandation. Les États membres qui avaient un besoin élevé de changement en 2016⁴ ont été plus enclins à amorcer les transformations nécessaires à la mise en œuvre la recommandation, comme le montre le tableau 1. Les **indicateurs relatifs aux parcours de renforcement des compétences montrent également des progrès modérés**, notamment une participation accrue à l'éducation et à la formation des adultes, une augmentation du niveau de compétences numériques et une diminution de la proportion d'adultes peu qualifiés dans l'UE.

Tableau 2 Récapitulatif du degré de besoin de changement et du degré de changement effectif

	Degré de changement 2016-2021			
Besoin de changement en 2016	Changement significatif	Changement modéré	Changement modeste	Aucun changement

³ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=FR](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=FR)

⁴ Un besoin élevé de changement est défini comme une forte proportion de personnes peu qualifiées, un faible taux de participation et/ou un faible degré de mise en œuvre de l'approche en trois étapes.

Élevé	BE, PL, BG	EL, HR, MT	SK, CZ, CY, IT	HU, IE, RO, ES
Moyen	LV		DE	LT, LU, PT, SI
Faible			EE, DK,	AT, FI, FR, NL, SE

Source: Ecorys/3s, 2022. Une explication complète de la méthodologie figure à l'annexe 1 et à l'annexe 9. «Aucun changement» indique qu'il n'a été identifié aucun changement significatif visant à mieux aligner l'approche actuelle du pays sur la recommandation relative aux parcours de renforcement des compétences. Cela ne signifie pas que l'approche du renforcement des compétences adoptée par le pays n'a pas du tout évolué.

Toutefois, **les indications tendant à prouver que cette amélioration est la conséquence des parcours de renforcement des compétences** mis en œuvre en réponse à la recommandation sont faibles. Aucune évolution sensible des indicateurs pertinents n'a été constatée après 2016, les tendances à long terme suggérant que l'amélioration de la formation initiale explique en grande partie le fait que les niveaux d'éducation atteints ont été plus élevés. Les éventuels effets macroéconomiques directs des mesures prises en réponse à la recommandation ne sont pas encore visibles et il est probable qu'ils ne se manifesteront pleinement qu'à long terme, étant donné que les parcours individuels de renforcement des compétences durent généralement plusieurs années.

Même s'il n'est pas possible d'établir un lien de causalité entre la recommandation et l'amélioration des principaux indicateurs, les faits montrent que **la recommandation a contribué indirectement à renouveler l'attention portée au groupe cible des personnes peu qualifiées et à déterminer les mesures qui sont efficaces pour les soutenir**. Les consultations menées dans le cadre de cette étude confirment que la recommandation a mis en évidence les problèmes que pose l'offre actuelle à destination des personnes peu qualifiées, a défini une marche à suivre pour améliorer le soutien disponible et a stimulé la coopération entre les acteurs du domaine de l'éducation et de la formation des adultes. C'est notamment le cas dans les États membres qui avaient un besoin élevé de changement en 2016.

Mise en œuvre de l'approche en trois étapes

En ce qui concerne la mise en œuvre de **l'approche en trois étapes**, l'étude montre que l'évaluation des compétences et la fourniture d'une offre de formation adaptée sont les domaines qui ont le plus progressé. Les mesures de validation et de reconnaissance des compétences, bien que plus nombreuses qu'en 2016, sont moins courantes et n'existent toujours pas dans plusieurs pays, ce qui donne à penser qu'elles restent difficiles à mettre en œuvre. Il y a également peu d'éléments qui attestent d'efforts visant à garantir l'intégration des trois étapes dans un parcours unique complet.

Comme demandé dans la recommandation, tous les États membres ont identifié des **groupes cibles prioritaires** pour les parcours de renforcement des compétences, notamment les chômeurs de longue durée, les travailleurs âgés, les personnes handicapées et les ressortissants issus de l'immigration ou de pays tiers. Cependant, la définition des groupes cibles des parcours de renforcement des compétences est souvent large, et donne la priorité aux personnes peu qualifiées en général. Les éléments attestant de mesures conçues *spécifiquement* pour les groupes vulnérables sont peu nombreux. Même lorsque des groupes cibles marginalisés sont identifiés, il reste des difficultés à

surmonter pour les atteindre, notamment une méconnaissance des opportunités parmi les groupes eux-mêmes, les obstacles financiers à la participation, ainsi que les problèmes de stigmatisation et de faible motivation des individus.

Conformément à la recommandation, les États membres ont mis en place des parcours de renforcement des compétences dans une large mesure en **coopération avec les parties prenantes concernées**, notamment les partenaires sociaux, les services publics de l'emploi et les acteurs régionaux et locaux. L'étude a constaté que des services d'information et de conseil sont proposés aux apprenants potentiels, bien qu'un soutien plus holistique et personnalisé soit moins courant et que les personnes qui ont un emploi bénéficient moins systématiquement de conseils. Le soutien aux employeurs est dans l'ensemble fragmentaire et incohérent, et la fourniture systématique d'une formation au personnel chargé de dispenser les programmes de renforcement des compétences pour adultes pourrait être largement accrue.

Le **soutien de l'UE** à la mise en œuvre de la recommandation a pris diverses formes: activités d'apprentissage mutuel, recherches, bilan de la mise en œuvre et soutien financier par le biais des fonds de l'UE. Les activités de recherche et d'apprentissage mutuel entreprises ont contribué à attirer l'attention des acteurs concernés sur l'éducation et la formation des adultes et à stimuler la coopération entre eux. En outre, le financement de l'UE a été identifié comme une contribution importante de la recommandation, notamment par le biais du FSE qui soutient des changements structurels dans les États membres, principalement ceux dont les systèmes d'éducation et de formation des adultes sont moins développés, même si la **nécessité de développer des projets de renforcement des compétences financés par le FSE et de les intégrer dans des structures institutionnelles disposant d'un financement suffisant à long terme** subsiste.

Efficiency

Il est difficile d'évaluer l'efficacité de la recommandation en raison de la difficulté à distinguer les coûts et les avantages qui en résultent directement de ceux qui auraient pu se produire en son absence. Néanmoins, l'étude établit que **l'ampleur des coûts et des avantages** dépend de la mesure dans laquelle les dispositifs préexistants des États membres en matière de formation des adultes s'alignaient déjà sur la recommandation en 2016. Dans les pays qui appliquaient déjà des mesures conformes à la recommandation, les parties prenantes ont confirmé que les coûts supplémentaires engendrés par la recommandation avaient été très limités, voire nuls. Dans les pays où les systèmes d'éducation et de formation des adultes étaient moins conformes à la recommandation, ces coûts ont été plus élevés.

Néanmoins, dans les deux groupes de pays, les données indiquent que **les coûts sont proportionnels aux avantages obtenus**. Cela est dû aux avantages à long terme découlant de la mise en œuvre: à la fois au niveau individuel, par l'augmentation des salaires et/ou l'obtention d'un emploi stable et, au niveau sociétal, par l'augmentation de l'impôt sur le revenu et de la TVA, due à la hausse des salaires et des dépenses de consommation, et la réduction du coût des prestations sociales.

L'étude montre qu'il est peu probable que les avantages apportés par la recommandation aient pu être obtenus à un coût moindre, bien que certains **facteurs aient négativement affecté son efficacité**. Il s'agit notamment des conséquences de la Covid-19, des difficultés d'exécution telles que le manque de personnel compétent dans le domaine de la formation des adultes et la pénurie de compétences, et de la difficulté à atteindre les groupes cibles plus vulnérables.

L'ampleur du soutien apporté aux parcours de renforcement des compétences dépend largement de la volonté et de la capacité des États membres à affecter des **fonds** à l'éducation et à la formation des adultes. Ces dernières sont généralement financées par les budgets de l'État, dans le cadre du système d'éducation ou de la politique active du

marché du travail, ou par les contributions des employeurs. Toutefois, il manque des données concrètes sur ces dépenses, car le financement de la formation des adultes par l'État dans le cadre du système éducatif n'est souvent pas estimé ou comptabilisé, d'où la difficulté d'évaluer le degré de soutien national. En revanche, les **fonds de l'UE** ont soutenu la recommandation par le biais d'une série de programmes et de mécanismes de financement. Le plus important d'entre eux était le Fonds social européen (FSE), avec plus de 42 milliards EUR alloués à la priorité d'investissement 10.iii (une meilleure égalité d'accès à l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie) sur la période 2016-2020. Des fonds étaient également mis à disposition au titre de diverses sources, notamment Erasmus+, le programme pour l'emploi et l'innovation sociale (EaSI), le Fonds européen de développement régional (FEDER), Horizon 2020, le programme d'appui aux réformes structurelles (PASR) et l'instrument d'appui technique (TSI).

Le niveau de financement de l'UE suggère que des ressources considérables étaient accessibles pour répondre aux besoins visés par la recommandation. Néanmoins, il existe **le risque qu'une dépendance excessive à l'égard des fonds de l'UE entrave l'incidence à grande échelle des mesures**, avec l'introduction de mesures basées sur des projets, par opposition à une réforme à grande échelle. C'est notamment le cas pour l'éducation et la formation des adultes, également parce que le financement national de ce domaine d'action est souvent inclus dans des lignes budgétaires plus larges affectées aux investissements généraux dans l'éducation et peut donc rester dispersé et insuffisant.

Pertinence

Les objectifs de la recommandation restent **très pertinents dans le contexte socio-économique et politique actuel de l'UE**. Les défis qui existaient au moment de l'adoption de la recommandation, notamment un nombre élevé d'adultes peu qualifiés, persistent, tandis que les nouveaux défis résultant de la crise liée à la Covid-19, de la transformation des emplois et du travail, et de l'accélération des transitions verte et numérique, ont accru la pertinence de la recommandation. Ces défis ont même renforcé la nécessité de se concentrer sur les compétences de base, en particulier numériques, et sur les adultes peu qualifiés, qui restent très vulnérables à l'évolution du contexte socio-économique.

L'**approche en trois étapes** demeure un cadre très utile pour guider à la fois la politique et la mise en œuvre des mesures de renforcement des compétences. Chaque étape est pertinente compte tenu des besoins du groupe cible en matière de soutien pratique et intégré. Le cadre flexible fourni par la recommandation reste également pertinent, car il permet aux États membres d'identifier leurs propres groupes prioritaires en fonction de l'évolution et de la diversité des besoins.

Cohérence

Il existe globalement un **bon niveau de cohérence entre les objectifs, les groupes cibles et les mesures** définis dans la recommandation et les politiques et stratégies pertinentes aux niveaux national et régional. D'après l'étude, soit les États membres disposaient déjà de politiques nationales et régionales conformes à la recommandation, soit ils ont adapté leurs politiques et, dans certains cas, leurs cadres juridiques régissant l'éducation et la formation professionnelles (EFP) après l'adoption de la recommandation, soit ils ont introduit de nouvelles politiques pour assurer la cohérence.

Les objectifs, les groupes cibles et les mesures de la recommandation présentent **globalement un bon degré de cohérence avec les autres politiques connexes de l'UE** dans les domaines de la formation et de l'emploi, de l'éducation et de la formation des adultes ainsi que de l'égalité des chances. Ces autres politiques de l'UE sont complémentaires de la recommandation et ne font pas double emploi avec elle, le risque de chevauchement étant limité. L'analyse montre que, dans le cadre d'autres politiques de l'UE pertinentes, l'attention spécifique portée au renforcement des compétences a tendance à augmenter au fil du temps, de même que la reconnaissance de son importance.

La recommandation présente également un degré élevé de cohérence avec les mécanismes de financement pertinents de l'UE, en particulier le Fonds social européen (FSE) et le FSE+, Erasmus+, le programme pour l'emploi et l'innovation sociale (EaSI), le Fonds européen de développement régional (FEDER), le Fonds pour la transition juste (FTC), le programme d'appui aux réformes structurelles (PASR), l'instrument d'appui technique (TSI) et la facilité pour la reprise et la résilience (FRR). La recommandation relative aux parcours de renforcement des compétences présente également un très bon degré de cohérence interne.

Valeur ajoutée pour l'UE

La recommandation a généré une **valeur ajoutée pour l'UE dans quatre principaux domaines**. Elle a fourni un cadre commun pour l'élaboration des politiques nationales de renforcement des compétences; elle a encouragé à mettre l'accent sur les compétences de base et les adultes peu qualifiés et a sensibilisé aux multiples groupes vulnérables de ce groupe cible; elle a donné l'impulsion à une coordination plus structurée entre les principales parties prenantes, contribuant ainsi à une approche plus concertée; et elle a offert un soutien financier en mobilisant des fonds au niveau de l'UE qui, à leur tour, ont suscité un certain soutien national par le biais d'exigences de cofinancement.

L'étude indique que les objectifs de la **recommandation n'auraient pas pu être atteints dans la même mesure** sans l'intervention de l'UE. Néanmoins, la valeur ajoutée de la recommandation pour l'UE pourrait être accrue en améliorant sa visibilité au niveau national, en reconnaissant davantage la diversité du groupe cible et en continuant à fournir une supervision et un soutien au niveau de l'UE, notamment en renforçant l'apprentissage mutuel et le partage des connaissances.

Enseignements tirés

Sur la base de ses constatations, l'étude identifie des enseignements clés pour la suite de la mise en œuvre de la recommandation.

- Il est nécessaire de veiller à ce que les bonnes pratiques mises en œuvre depuis l'adoption de la recommandation pour soutenir les adultes peu qualifiés soient transposées en réformes systémiques **afin de garantir l'amélioration structurelle et à long terme** des systèmes d'éducation et de formation des adultes qui peuvent soutenir ce groupe cible. L'exploration de mécanismes visant à encourager l'intégration et la transférabilité des approches réussies développées à l'aide de fonds de l'UE dans des mécanismes de financement nationaux plus permanents pourrait être utile à cet égard.
- Il est essentiel de **poursuivre la sensibilisation** à l'importance d'acquérir des compétences de base et à la nécessité de prendre des mesures de renforcement des compétences ciblant spécifiquement les adultes peu qualifiés. Les activités de sensibilisation pourraient inclure des campagnes de communication ciblées, la fourniture d'exemples de bonnes pratiques provenant de toute l'UE, ainsi qu'une communication sur les avantages que le renforcement des compétences apporte à tous les acteurs.
- Il est possible d'**améliorer** considérablement **les méthodes de communication** utilisées pour atteindre les adultes peu qualifiés, ainsi que l'effort consacré à cette étape préliminaire. À cet égard, il est essentiel de collaborer avec des acteurs locaux qui ont de l'expérience avec des groupes spécifiques d'adultes peu qualifiés et d'affecter directement des fonds à la communication.
- Dans le cadre de ces efforts, il convient de veiller tout particulièrement à **éviter toute stigmatisation des adultes peu qualifiés**. Plutôt que de se concentrer sur

les lacunes de l'individu, les évaluations des compétences et la communication devraient insister sur les avantages qu'il peut en retirer et sur ses atouts actuels.

- Il est possible d'améliorer la mise en œuvre d'offres de formation adaptées, notamment en **identifiant mieux et en adaptant la formation aux besoins des adultes peu qualifiés** qui connaissent des difficultés supplémentaires.
- La mise en place de systèmes de validation pleinement opérationnels nécessite toujours un effort politique concerté. Entre autres, il est important d'examiner **comment les compétences transversales peuvent être mieux prises en compte dans les qualifications/acquis d'éducation et de formation**, car bien que cruciales pour les adultes peu qualifiés, elles ne sont généralement pas bien intégrées dans les systèmes de validation.
- L'**intégration harmonieuse et l'amélioration de la perméabilité des trois étapes** et des mesures d'accompagnement en un parcours global devraient également constituer un axe majeur de l'action future.
- Les parcours de renforcement des compétences bénéficieraient fortement de l'**intégration d'une perspective holistique de genre et d'égalité** à toutes les étapes, étant donné la nature intersectionnelle des différents désavantages (par exemple, âge, handicap, statut de migrant, genre, statut socio-économique) auxquels sont souvent confrontés les adultes peu qualifiés.
- L'accent mis sur l'**encouragement d'une large coopération** avec les principales parties prenantes dans la mise en œuvre des parcours de renforcement des compétences devrait être maintenu et renforcé.
- La mise en œuvre de parcours de renforcement des compétences au niveau national et régional bénéficierait **du renforcement du suivi et de l'évaluation** des approches mises en œuvre. Une plus importante ventilation des données permettrait de tirer des enseignements importants pour les futures mesures politiques. Il serait très utile d'envisager l'**établissement de référentiels et d'indicateurs pertinents à l'échelle de l'UE** afin d'aider à comprendre les progrès réalisés dans l'UE en matière de mise en œuvre.
- L'utilisation des fonds de l'UE existants a eu un effet positif sur la mise en œuvre de la recommandation. Pour éviter le risque que la majorité des fonds destinés à l'éducation et à la formation ou au renforcement des compétences des adultes ne soient dirigés vers des groupes cibles plus proches du marché du travail, **des lignes directrices et des objectifs clairs pour les fonds de l'UE destinés au renforcement des compétences pourraient être élaborés**.
- Il a été démontré que les mesures définies dans la recommandation constituent un cadre pertinent et complet pour soutenir efficacement les adultes peu qualifiés. Afin d'accroître la pertinence de la recommandation et d'assurer sa pérennité, il faudrait **d'avantage mettre l'accent, de manière transversale**, sur le renforcement des compétences qui permettent de s'adapter aux transitions verte et numérique, ainsi qu'aux conséquences de l'évolution démographique.
- D'autres mesures pourraient également être encouragées. Il s'agit notamment de mesures portant sur des aspects plus larges de la vie des adultes peu qualifiés, y compris les compétences visant à favoriser une plus grande inclusion sociale et financière (par exemple, la gestion de l'argent, les services bancaires en ligne, etc.) et les mesures de soutien à la participation à des formations (par exemple, le transport, le soutien aux responsabilités familiales) qui, bien que couvertes par la

recommandation, doivent faire l'objet d'une attention accrue au niveau de la mise en œuvre.

- Il est possible de **cibler davantage l'apprentissage mutuel** en le concentrant sur les compétences de base et les parcours de renforcement des compétences destinés aux adultes peu qualifiés, afin de partager les bonnes pratiques et d'accroître la sensibilisation.

Zusammenfassung

Lernmöglichkeiten, welche Erwachsenen die Gelegenheit bieten, sich weiterzubilden und umzuschulen, sind unerlässliche Bestandteile von Wirtschaftswachstum und sozialer Gleichstellung. Die Empfehlung des Rates vom 19. Dezember 2016 für Weiterbildungspfade⁵ (2016/C 484/01) soll sicherstellen, dass alle Menschen in der Gesellschaft über ein umfassendes Spektrum von Grundfertigkeiten, Kenntnissen und Kompetenzen verfügen, um ihr volles Potenzial entfalten, aktiv an der Gesellschaft teilnehmen und im Beruf vorankommen zu können. In der Empfehlung wird ein dreistufiger Ansatz vorgestellt, um geringqualifizierten Erwachsenen den Zugang zu Weiterbildungspfaden über eine Bewertung der Kompetenzen, ein maßgeschneidertes und flexibles Lernangebot sowie die Validierung und Anerkennung von Fertigkeiten und Kompetenzen zu ermöglichen. Dieser Ansatz wird sowohl durch Sensibilisierungs-, Orientierungs- und Unterstützungsmaßnahmen für Lernende als auch die Koordinierung der entsprechenden Akteure in den Bereichen Schul- und Berufsausbildung, Beschäftigung und Sozialpolitik untermauert.

Diese Studie trägt zur Evaluierung der Europäischen Kommission bei. Sie befasst sich mit dem Wandel, welcher zwischen 2016 und 2021 im Hinblick auf die Weiterbildungspfade in den Mitgliedsstaaten als Antwort auf die Empfehlung stattfand. Sie bewertet anschließend, inwieweit diese Antwort sich wirksam, effizient, zweckdienlich sowie in Einklang mit anderen europäischen und einzelstaatlichen Maßnahmen und Programmen gestaltete und einen EU-Mehrwert beisteuerte. Sie gelangt zu maßgeblichen Schlussfolgerungen auf der Grundlage dieser Ergebnisse.

Wesentliche Ergebnisse

Wirksamkeit

Die Erkenntnisse weisen darauf hin, dass die Mitgliedsstaaten sich **in nur überschaubarem Maße bemüht haben, den Zugang zu Weiterbildungspfaden seit der Verabschiedung der Empfehlung zu erleichtern**. 14 Mitgliedsstaaten nahmen Änderungen an ihrem Weiterbildungsansatz vor, um sich der Empfehlung in umfangreicherem Maße anzupassen. Bei Mitgliedsstaaten, in denen im Jahr 2016⁶ ein großer Veränderungsbedarf vorlag, bestand eine höhere Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass sie, wie in Tabelle 1 erkennbar, Veränderungen zwecks Umsetzung der Empfehlung fördern. Die **für Weiterbildungspfade maßgeblichen Indikatoren verzeichnen ebenfalls mäßige Fortschritte**, einschließlich einer verstärkten Beteiligung an der Erwachsenenbildung, eines höheren Niveaus an digitalen Kompetenzen und eines EU-weit niedrigeren Anteils geringqualifizierter Erwachsener.

Tabelle 3 Zusammenfassung des Grades an Veränderungsbedarf und des Grades an tatsächlichen Veränderungen

	Veränderungsgrad 2016-2021			
Veränderungsbedarf im Jahr 2016	Deutliche Veränderungen	Geringe Veränderungen	Unbedeutende Veränderungen	Keine Veränderungen

⁵ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=DE](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=DE)

⁶ Ein hoher Veränderungsbedarf wird als hohe Anteile Geringqualifizierter, niedrige Beteiligungsraten und/oder ein geringer Umsetzungsgrad des dreistufigen Ansatzes definiert.

Hoch	BE, PL, BG	EL, HR, MT	SK, CZ, CY, IT	HU, IE, RO, ES
Mittel	LV		DE	LT, LU, PT, SI
Niedrig			EE, DK,	AT, FI, FR, NL, SE

Quelle: Ecorys/3s, 2022. Eine umfassende Erläuterung der Methodik ist in Anhang 1 und Anhang 9 enthalten. „Keine Veränderungen“ zeigt an, dass keine wesentlichen Veränderungen zur besseren Anpassung des bestehenden Ansatzes des Landes an die Empfehlung für Weiterbildungspfade ermittelt wurden. Dies bedeutet nicht, dass überhaupt keine Veränderungen beim Weiterbildungsansatz des Landes erfolgten.

Allerdings gibt es nur begrenzte Anzeichen, dass diese Verbesserung auf Weiterbildungspfaden beruht, welche als Antwort auf die Empfehlung eingerichtet wurden. Nach 2016 war keine auffällige Veränderung bei den Tendenzen der entsprechenden Indikatoren erkennbar, wobei die langfristigen Tendenzen nahelegen, dass die erzielten höheren Bildungsniveaus hauptsächlich auf Verbesserungen der Anfangsbildung beruhen. Unmittelbare Makro-Effekte der als Antwort auf die Empfehlung ergriffenen Maßnahmen sind noch nicht sichtbar und werden wahrscheinlich erst langfristig in vollem Umfang deutlich, und zwar angesichts der Tatsache, dass individuelle Weiterbildungsprojekte üblicherweise mehrere Jahre dauern.

Selbst wenn ein Kausalzusammenhang zwischen der Empfehlung und den Verbesserungen bei den Hauptindikatoren nicht einwandfrei festgestellt werden kann, liegt es dennoch auf der Hand, dass die **Empfehlung indirekt dazu beigetragen hat, den Schwerpunkt erneut auf die geringqualifizierte Zielgruppe zu legen und zu umreißen, welche Schritte sich bei ihrer Unterstützung als wirksam erweisen**. Konsultationen, welche für diese Studie durchgeführt wurden, bestätigen, dass die Empfehlung die Herausforderungen im Rahmen der derzeitigen Vorkehrungen für Geringqualifizierte hervorgehoben, einen Weg nach vorn zur Verbesserung der vorhandenen Unterstützung dargelegt und die Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Akteuren im Bereich der Erwachsenenbildung gefördert hat. Dies gilt insbesondere für Mitgliedsstaaten, welche einen hohen Veränderungsbedarf im Jahr 2016 aufwiesen.

Umsetzung des dreistufigen Ansatzes

Die Studie zeigte im Hinblick auf die Umsetzung des **dreistufigen Ansatzes** auf, dass Fortschritte bei der Bewertung der Fertigkeiten und der Bereitstellung maßgeschneiderter Lernangebote am auffälligsten sind. Obwohl Maßnahmen zur Validierung und Anerkennung von Fertigkeiten eine Zunahme seit 2016 verzeichnen, sind sie weniger verbreitet und fehlen noch in einigen Ländern, mit Anzeichen dafür, dass ihre Umsetzung sich auch weiterhin schwierig gestaltet. Es liegen ebenfalls nur begrenzte Anzeichen für Bemühungen vor, die Einbeziehung der drei Stufen in einen einzigen übergreifenden Pfad zu gewährleisten.

Wie in der Empfehlung gefordert, ermittelten alle Mitgliedsstaaten **vorrangige Zielgruppen** für Weiterbildungspfade, einschließlich Langzeitarbeitsloser, älterer Arbeitnehmer, Behinderter und Personen mit Migrationshintergrund bzw. Drittstaatsangehöriger. Die Definition der Zielgruppen für Weiterbildungspfade ist jedoch häufig weitgesteckt und räumt Geringqualifizierten allgemein den Vorrang ein. Es liegen begrenzte Anzeichen für Maßnahmen vor, welche *eigens* für gefährdete Gruppen entwickelt wurden. Auch wenn marginalisierte Zielgruppen ermittelt wurden, gestaltet es sich auch weiterhin schwierig, sie

zu erreichen, einschließlich einer mangelnden Sensibilisierung dieser Gruppen im Hinblick auf die bestehenden Möglichkeiten, finanzieller Hindernisse für eine Teilnahme und Probleme in Verbindung mit dem Stigma und der geringen Motivation der Einzelnen.

Die Mitgliedsstaaten stellten in Einklang mit der Empfehlung Weiterbildungspfade in hohem Maße in **Zusammenarbeit mit den entsprechenden Akteuren**, einschließlich der Sozialpartner, staatlichen Arbeitsvermittlungen und regionalen sowie örtlichen Akteure bereit. Die Studie fand Ansatzpunkte für Sensibilisierungs- und Orientierungsleistungen zugunsten potenzieller Lernender, obwohl eine gesamtheitliche, maßgeschneiderte Unterstützung weniger häufig anzutreffen ist und Orientierungsleistungen für Personen, welche bereits in einem Beschäftigungsverhältnis stehen, weniger systematisch verfügbar sind. Die Unterstützung der Arbeitgeber gestaltet sich insgesamt fragmentiert und uneinheitlich, wobei ebenfalls noch beträchtlicher Spielraum für den Ausbau der systematischen Schulung des Personals besteht, von dem Weiterbildungsprogramme für Erwachsene geleitet werden.

Die Unterstützung der EU im Rahmen der Umsetzung der Empfehlung umfasste gegenseitige Lernveranstaltungen, Forschungsmaßnahmen, die Bestandsaufnahme der Umsetzungsmaßnahmen und die finanzielle Unterstützung über EU-Mittel. Die eingeleiteten gegenseitigen Lern- und Forschungsveranstaltungen trugen dazu bei, die entsprechenden Akteure auf die Erwachsenenbildung aufmerksam zu machen und ihre Zusammenarbeit zu fördern. Die EU-Mittel wurden außerdem als wichtiger Beitrag der Empfehlung eingestuft, insbesondere mit der vom ESF erbrachten Unterstützung einiger struktureller Veränderungen in den Mitgliedsstaaten, und zwar besonders in jenen mit weniger gut entwickelten Systemen der Erwachsenenbildung, wenngleich auch weiterhin die **Notwendigkeit besteht, vom ESF finanzierte Weiterbildungsprojekte auszubauen und in institutionelle Strukturen mit langfristig ausreichenden Mitteln einzubetten**.

Effizienz

Bei der Bewertung der Effizienz der Empfehlung liegen Herausforderungen in Anbetracht der Schwierigkeit vor, die als unmittelbares Ergebnis der Empfehlung entstandenen Kosten und Nutzen von jenen abzugrenzen, zu denen es möglicherweise ohne sie gekommen wäre. Die Studie gelangte dennoch zu dem Schluss, dass der **Umfang der Kosten und Nutzen** davon beeinflusst wird, inwieweit die bereits vorhandenen Maßnahmen der Erwachsenenbildung der Mitgliedsstaaten im Jahr 2016 ohnehin mit der Empfehlung in Einklang standen. In Ländern, in denen Maßnahmen in Einklang mit der Empfehlung bereits umgesetzt wurden, bestätigten die Akteure, dass ihnen keine bzw. nur äußerst begrenzte zusätzliche Kosten aufgrund der Empfehlung entstanden. In Ländern, in denen die Systeme der Erwachsenenbildung mit der Empfehlung in geringerem Maße in Einklang standen, waren die Kosten höher.

Die Erfahrung zeigt jedoch in beiden Ländergruppen, dass die **Kosten im Verhältnis zu den erzielten Nutzen stehen**. Dies beruht auf den mutmaßlichen langfristigen Nutzen der Umsetzung: sowohl auf individueller Ebene, über höhere Löhne und/oder die Erzielung eines festen Arbeitsverhältnisses, als auch auf gesellschaftlicher Ebene, über höhere Einkommensteuer- und MwSt.-Einnahmen aufgrund höherer Löhne, höherer Verbraucherausgaben sowie geringerer Kosten der Sozialleistungen.

Die Studie fand heraus, dass es unwahrscheinlich ist, dass die Nutzen der Empfehlung zu niedrigeren Kosten hätten erzielt werden können, obwohl einige **Faktoren die Effizienz negativ beeinflusst haben**. Sie beinhalten die Auswirkungen der Covid-19-Pandemie, Schwierigkeiten bei der Leistungserbringung, wie zum Beispiel der Mangel an eigens für die Erwachsenenbildung geschultem Personal und dessen Kompetenz sowie die Schwierigkeit, gefährdetere Zielgruppen zu erreichen.

Der Umfang der bereitgestellten Unterstützung für Weiterbildungspfade hängt stark vom Willen und von der Fähigkeit der Mitgliedsstaaten ab, **Mittel** für die Erwachsenenbildung

einzuplanen. Die Erwachsenenbildung wird allgemein tendenziell über die Staatshaushalte, im Rahmen des Bildungssystems oder der aktiven Arbeitsmarktpolitik, bzw. über Arbeitgeberbeiträge unterstützt. Es fehlen jedoch konkrete Daten, in deren Rahmen diese Ausgaben erfasst werden, da die Finanzierung der vom Staat erbrachten Erwachsenenbildung im Rahmen des Bildungssystems oft nicht berechnet oder erfasst wird, wodurch es sich schwierig gestaltet, den Grad an staatlicher Unterstützung zu bewerten. Die **EU-Mittel** unterstützten die Empfehlung jedoch über eine Palette verschiedener EU-Programme und Finanzierungsmechanismen. Den größten Anteil trug der Europäische Sozialfonds (ESF) mit mehr als 42 Milliarden Euro bei, welche für die Investitionspriorität 10.iii (Förderung des gleichen Zugangs zum lebenslangen Lernen) für den Zeitraum 2016-2020 verwendet wurden. Mittel standen ebenfalls über vielfältige Quellen zur Verfügung, einschließlich Erasmus+, des Programms für Beschäftigung und soziale Innovation (EaSI), des Europäischen Fonds für regionale Entwicklung (ERDF), Horizon 2020, des Programms zur Unterstützung von Strukturreformen (SRSP) und des Instruments für die Technische Unterstützung (TSI).

Der Umfang der zur Verfügung stehenden EU-Mittel legt nahe, dass beträchtliche Ressourcen zur Verfügung standen, um den von der Empfehlung ins Visier genommenen Anforderungen gerecht zu werden. Es besteht dennoch die **Gefahr, dass eine übermäßige Abhängigkeit von EU-Mitteln die weitreichende Wirkung der Maßnahmen behindern kann**, mit eingeleiteten projektbezogenen Maßnahmen im Gegensatz zu einer weitreichenden Reform. Dies gilt insbesondere für die Erwachsenenbildung, auch weil die einzelstaatliche Finanzierung für diesen Bereich der Politik oft in weitergesteckten Haushaltslinien für Bildungsinvestitionen insgesamt inbegriffen ist und sich dadurch auch weiterhin unregelmäßig verteilt und unzureichend gestalten kann.

Zweckdienlichkeit

Die Ziele der Empfehlung gestalten sich **für den aktuellen sozioökonomischen und politischen Kontext der EU auch weiterhin äußerst zweckdienlich**. Herausforderungen, welche bei Verabschiedung der Empfehlung bereits vorlagen – einschließlich hoher Niveaus geringqualifizierter Erwachsener – bestanden fort, während neue Herausforderungen aufgrund der Covid-19-Krise, des Wandels im Bereich Arbeitsplätze und Arbeit sowie der beschleunigten ökologischen und digitalen Wende die Zweckdienlichkeit der Empfehlung erhöhten. Diese Herausforderungen verstärkten sogar die Notwendigkeit, den Schwerpunkt auf Grundfertigkeiten – insbesondere auf digitale Kompetenzen – und geringqualifizierte Erwachsene zu legen, die hinsichtlich der Entwicklung des sozioökonomischen Kontexts auch weiterhin äußerst gefährdet sind.

Der **dreistufige Ansatz** ist auch weiterhin ein äußerst nützlicher Bezugsrahmen zur Lenkung sowohl der Politik als auch der Umsetzung von Weiterbildungsmaßnahmen. Jeder Schritt gestaltet sich zweckdienlich in Anbetracht der von der Zielgruppe benötigten praktischen, integrierten Unterstützung. Der über die Empfehlung vorgestellte flexible Bezugsrahmen gestaltet sich auch weiterhin zweckdienlich, da er den Mitgliedsstaaten die Möglichkeit bietet, ihre eigenen vorrangigen Gruppen im Lichte sich ständig weiter entwickelnder, unterschiedlicher Anforderungen zu ermitteln.

Kohärenz

Ein insgesamt **gutes Kohärenzniveau zwischen den in der Empfehlung definierten Zielen, Zielgruppen und Maßnahmen** sowie den entsprechenden politischen Schritten und Strategien auf landesweiter und regionaler Ebene liegt vor. Daten aus der Studie weisen darauf hin, dass die Mitgliedsstaaten entweder bereits über eine landesweite und regionale Politik in Einklang mit der Empfehlung verfügten, ihre Politik sowie in einigen Fällen ihren für die berufliche Aus- und Weiterbildung (BAW) geltenden gesetzlichen Rahmen im Anschluss an die Verabschiedung der Empfehlung anpassten bzw. eine neue Politik einführten, um die Kohärenz zu gewährleisten.

Die Ziele, Zielgruppen und Maßnahmen der Empfehlung zeichnen sich durch einen **insgesamt guten Kohärenzgrad im Hinblick auf ähnliche politische Maßnahmen auf der Ebene der EU** in den Bereichen Weiterbildung und Beschäftigung, Erwachsenenbildung und Chancengleichheit aus. Diese anderen politischen Maßnahmen der EU ergänzen die Empfehlung und kopieren sie nicht, mit begrenztem Potenzial für Überschneidungen. Diese Analyse stellt eine allgemeine Tendenz hin zu einem mit der Zeit zunehmend spezifischen Schwerpunkt auf der Bedeutung der Weiterbildung im Rahmen anderer entsprechender politischer Maßnahmen der EU sowie deren Anerkennung unter Beweis.

Die Empfehlung zeichnet sich ebenfalls durch einen hohen Kohärenzgrad im Hinblick auf die entsprechenden EU-Finanzierungsmechanismen aus, insbesondere den Europäischen Sozialfonds (ESF) sowie das Programm ESF+, Erasmus+, Beschäftigung und soziale Innovation (EaSI), den Europäischen Fonds für regionale Entwicklung (ERDF), den Fonds für einen gerechten Übergang (JTF), das Programm zur Unterstützung von Strukturreformen (SRSP), das Instrument für die technische Unterstützung (TSI) und die Aufbau- und Resilienzfazilität (ARF). Die Empfehlung für Weiterbildungspfade zeichnet sich ebenfalls durch einen sehr hohen Grad an interner Kohärenz aus.

EU-Mehrwert

Die Empfehlung trug **in vier Hauptbereichen zu einem EU-Mehrwert** bei. Sie bot einen gemeinsamen Bezugsrahmen für die Gestaltung der einzelstaatlichen Weiterbildungspolitik; sie förderte das Hauptaugenmerk auf den Grundfertigkeiten und geringqualifizierten Erwachsenen und schärfte das Bewusstsein für die vielfältigen gefährdeten Gruppen innerhalb dieser Zielgruppe; sie gab den Impuls zu einer besser strukturierten Koordinierung der wichtigsten Akteure und trug gleichzeitig zu einem besser integrierten Ansatz bei; und sie bot eine finanzielle Unterstützung durch Bereitstellung von Mitteln auf der EU-Ebene, welche im Gegenzug zur Bereitstellung einer gewissen einzelstaatlichen Unterstützung über Mitfinanzierungsvorgaben führte.

Diese Studie weist darauf hin, dass die Ziele der **Empfehlung** ohne das Einschreiten auf Ebene der EU **nicht in gleichem Maße hätten erreicht werden können**. Der EU-Mehrwert der Empfehlung könnte jedoch durch eine Verbesserung ihrer Sichtbarkeit auf einzelstaatlicher Ebene, eine weitere Anerkennung der Vielfalt der Zielgruppe und eine fortgesetzte Überwachung und Unterstützung auf EU-Ebene, einschließlich des Ausbaus der gegenseitigen Wissensvermittlung und des Wissensaustauschs erhöht werden.

Maßgebliche Schlussfolgerungen

Ausgehend von ihren Ergebnissen, ermittelt die Studie einige maßgebliche Schlussfolgerungen, um die Umsetzung der Empfehlung voranzubringen.

- Es muss sichergestellt werden, dass die bewährten Verfahren, welche seit Verabschiedung der Empfehlung umgesetzt wurden, um geringqualifizierte Erwachsene zu unterstützen, in Reformen auf Systemebene ausgeweitet werden, **um die strukturelle und langfristige Verbesserung der Erwachsenenbildungssysteme zu gewährleisten**, welche diese Zielgruppe unterstützen können. Die Auslotung von Mechanismen zur Förderung des Mainstreamings und der Übertragbarkeit erfolgreicher Ansätze, deren Entwicklung mit Hilfe von EU-Mitteln erfolgte, in dauerhafte einzelstaatliche Finanzierungsmechanismen könnte in dieser Hinsicht hilfreich sein.
- Es ist von maßgeblicher Bedeutung, **das Bewusstsein** der Bedeutung des Erwerbs von Grundfertigkeiten sowie der Notwendigkeit spezifischer Weiterbildungsmaßnahmen für geringqualifizierte Erwachsene **auch weiterhin auszubauen**. Bewusstseinsbildende Maßnahmen könnten zielgerichtete

Kommunikationskampagnen, Beispiele für bewährte Verfahren innerhalb der EU sowie die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit über den Nutzen der Weiterbildung für alle Akteure umfassen.

- Beträchtlicher Spielraum für **die Verbesserung besteht bei den Sensibilisierungsmethoden** welche genutzt werden, um geringqualifizierte Erwachsene zu erreichen, sowie bei den Bemühungen für diesen vorbereitenden Schritt. Die Arbeit mit lokalen Akteuren, welche Erfahrung mit spezifischen Gruppen geringqualifizierter Erwachsener haben, sowie unmittelbar für die Sensibilisierung bereitgestellte Mittel sind diesbezüglich von maßgeblicher Bedeutung.
- Bei diesen Bemühungen ist besondere Aufmerksamkeit notwendig, um **die Stigmatisierung geringqualifizierter Erwachsener zu vermeiden**. Anstatt den Schwerpunkt auf die Defizite des Einzelnen zu legen, sollten sich die Bewertungen der Kompetenzen und die Sensibilisierung auf den zu erzielenden Nutzen und die vorhandenen Stärken des Einzelnen konzentrieren.
- Raum für Verbesserung besteht bei der Umsetzung maßgeschneiderter Lernangebote, einschließlich **der besseren Ermittlung und Anpassung der Weiterbildung an die Anforderungen geringqualifizierter Erwachsener**, welche mit verschiedenen Formen der zusätzlichen Benachteiligung konfrontiert sind.
- Die Einrichtung voll funktionsfähiger Validierungssysteme macht auch weiterhin konzertierte politische Bemühungen erforderlich. Unter anderem kommt es darauf an, zu prüfen, **wie transversale Kompetenzen im Rahmen der Qualifikationen/Lernergebnisse besser berücksichtigt werden können**, da sie für geringqualifizierte Erwachsene zwar ausschlaggebend sind, die Validierungssysteme sich jedoch allgemein nicht ausreichend mit ihnen befassen.
- Ein maßgeblicher Schwerpunkt für das zukünftige Handeln sollte ebenfalls die **reibungslose Einbeziehung der drei Schritte** und der Begleitmaßnahmen in einen übergreifenden Pfad **sowie deren verbesserte Durchlässigkeit** sein.
- Die **Einbeziehung einer umfassenden Diversitäts- und Gleichbehandlungsperspektive** in alle Schritte würde den Weiterbildungspfaden in umfangreichem Maße zugute kommen in Anbetracht der intersektionalen Beschaffenheit verschiedener Benachteiligungen (z.B. Alter, Behinderung, Migrantensstatus, Gender, sozioökonomischer Status), mit denen geringqualifizierte Erwachsene oft konfrontiert sind.
- Der Nachdruck auf die **Förderung einer weitreichenden Zusammenarbeit** mit den wichtigsten Akteuren im Rahmen der Umsetzung von Weiterbildungspfaden sollte weiterhin erfolgen und verstärkt werden.
- Eine **verstärkte Überwachung und Bewertung** der zum Tragen gelangenden Ansätze würde der Umsetzung von Weiterbildungspfaden auf landesweiter und regionaler Ebene zugute kommen. Stärker aufgeschlüsselte Daten würden wichtige Erkenntnisse für zukünftige politische Maßnahmen bieten. Die Untersuchung einer **Einsetzung entsprechender EU-weiter Bezugswerte** und Indikatoren wäre äußerst hilfreich, um die Fortschritte bei der Umsetzung innerhalb der EU zu verstehen.
- Positive Auswirkungen bei der Verwendung der bestehenden EU-Mittel zur Unterstützung der Umsetzung der Empfehlung liegen vor. **Klare Richtlinien und Ziele für die zur Weiterbildung bestimmten EU-Mittel könnten entwickelt**

werden, um die Gefahr zu vermeiden, dass ein Großteil der Mittel für die Erwachsenenbildung/Weiterbildung an Zielgruppen geht, für die der Zugang zum Arbeitsmarkt sich einfacher gestaltet.

- Die in der Empfehlung definierten Maßnahmen lieferten nachweislich einen zweckdienlichen und umfassenden Bezugsrahmen für die effektive Unterstützung geringqualifizierter Erwachsener. Damit ihre Zweckdienlichkeit erhöht und die Empfehlung zukunftssicher gemacht werden kann, könnte sie sich durch **eine größere transversale Gewichtung** der Weiterbildung auszeichnen, welche zur Anpassung an den ökologischen und digitalen Wandel sowie die Auswirkungen des demographischen Wandels beitragen kann.
- Weitere Maßnahmen könnten ferner ebenfalls gefördert werden. Sie umfassen Maßnahmen, welche sich mit weitergesteckten Aspekten des Lebens geringqualifizierter Erwachsener befassen, einschließlich der Fertigkeiten zur Förderung einer besseren gesellschaftlichen und finanziellen Einbindung (z.B. Umgang mit Geld, Online banking, usw.), sowie unterstützende Maßnahmen für die Teilnahme an Weiterbildungsveranstaltungen (z.B. Transport, Unterstützung für Betreuungsaufgaben), welche – obwohl von der Empfehlung angesprochen – weitere Aufmerksamkeit bei der Umsetzung erforderlich machen.
- Spielraum ist noch bei der **zielgerichteten gegenseitigen Wissensvermittlung** mit dem Schwerpunkt auf den Grundfertigkeiten und den Weiterbildungspfaden für geringqualifizierte Erwachsene, dem Austausch bewährter Verfahren und der Sensibilisierung vorhanden.

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Abbreviations

Term or acronym	Meaning or definition
ACVT	Advisory Committee for Vocational Training
ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
CVET	Continuous Vocational Education and Training
DGVT	Directors General for Vocational Training
EaSI	EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ICT	Information and communications technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
LTU	Long-term Unemployed
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PES	Public Employment Service
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czechia
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EU	European Union
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
EL	Greece
HR	Croatia
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia

Glossary

Term or acronym	Meaning or definition
Adult education and learning	General or vocational education provided for adults after initial education and training for professional and/or personal purposes, and which aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ provide general education for adults in topics of particular interest to them (e. g. in open universities); ▶ provide compensatory learning in basic skills which individuals may not have acquired earlier in their initial education or training (such as literacy, numeracy) and thus to; ▶ give access to qualifications not gained, for various reasons, in the initial education and training system; ▶ acquire, improve or update knowledge, skills or competences in a specific field: this is continuing education and training⁷
Adult learner	An individual of working age who is participating in education activities (formal, non-formal and informal learning)
Basic skills	The skills needed to live in contemporary society, e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing, mathematics and ICT ⁸
Career guidance	Services which help people of any age to manage their careers and to make the educational, training and occupational choices that are meaningful for them ⁹
Certification of learning outcomes	The process of formally validating knowledge, skills and/or competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies ¹⁰
Competence	The ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development) ¹¹
Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET)	A training process or activity which has as its primary objective the acquisition of new competences or the development and improvement of existing ones, and which is financed at least partly by the enterprises for their employees, who either have a working contract or who benefit directly from their work for the enterprise, such as unpaid family workers and casual workers. ¹²
European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an eight-level, learning outcomes-based framework for all types of qualifications that serves as a translation tool between different national qualifications frameworks. ¹³
Formal education	Structured education system that runs from primary (and in some countries from nursery) school to university. This includes specialised programmes for vocational, technical, and professional training ¹⁴
Informal learning	Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It may be unintentional from the learner's perspective. Examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and

⁷ See: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf

⁸ See: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf

⁹ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/career-guidance-spotlight#:~:text=Effective%20career%20guidance%20helps%20individuals,efficient%20and%20societies%20become%20airer.&text=Career%20guidance%20describes%20the%20services,that%20are%20meaningful%20for%20them.>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#C>

¹¹ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#C>

¹² See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/themes/vet-knowledge-centre>

¹³ See: <https://europa.eu/europass/en/european-qualifications-framework-efq>

¹⁴ See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation/definitions>

	work experiences, languages learned during a stay in another country, skills acquired through volunteering, youth work, sport or family life ¹⁵
International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)	ISCED is the reference international classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields. For the purpose of this study the ISCED 2011 (levels) are classified to: (Pre)primary and lower secondary (ISCED 0-2) Upper and post-secondary (ISCED 3-4), and Tertiary education (ISCED 5-8). ¹⁶
Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET)	A work-based training process or activity for apprentices/trainees. It leads to a formal qualification. The activities are often financed (partly or wholly) by the enterprise, but this is not a mandatory condition ¹⁷
Lifelong guidance	career development support for individuals of all ages, at all career stages. It includes careers information, advice, counselling, assessment of skills and mentoring ¹⁸
Lifelong learning	All learning activity undertaken throughout life which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social or professional reasons ¹⁹
Low-qualified	Having qualifications at ISCED 0-2 level (equivalent of a level 1 of the European qualifications framework (EQF) for lifelong learning), that is: basic general knowledge, basic skills required to carry out simple tasks, and competence to work or study under direct supervision in a structured context ²⁰
Low-skilled	low-skilled are considered as people with low educational attainment, low computer and digital skills and low cognitive skills (numeracy and literacy). ²¹
Modularisation	A building blocks approach to education and training programmes / qualifications in which the content is broken down into smaller units. These smaller units – modules – may be taken on their own or combined with other modules. Modular programmes often do not have clearly defined sequencing ²²
Non-formal learning	Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships). It may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; examples include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills; structured on-line learning; courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the public at large ²³
National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society ²⁴
Reskilling	Short-term targeted training typically provided to an employee to learn a new set of skills to perform a different job

¹⁵ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0121&rid=5>

¹⁶ See: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Table_III_Qualifications.pdf

¹⁷ See: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/european-adult-learning-glossary-level-2>

¹⁸ See: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/european-adult-learning-glossary-level-2>

¹⁹ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#R>

²⁰ See: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/european-adult-learning-glossary-level-2>

²¹ Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling, Cedefop

²² See: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021. Adult education and training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

²³ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0121&rid=5>

²⁴ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0121&rid=5>

Skill	The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems ²⁵
Skill obsolescence	Situation in which knowledge and skills of individuals are out of date or out of use ²⁶
Skills assessment	Analysis of knowledge, skills and competences of individuals, including their aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and/or plan professional reorientation or a training project ²⁷
Social dialogue	Process of exchange between social partners to promote consultation, and collective bargaining ²⁸
Social partners	At national level, employers' and workers' organisations in conformity with national laws and/or practices and, at Community level, employers' and workers' organisations taking part in the social dialogue at Community level ²⁹
Tailored and flexible learning offer	An offer of education and training that meets the needs of an individual as identified by a skills assessment, considering as far as possible local, regional and national labour market needs ³⁰
Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)	Technical and vocational education and training that comprise education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods ³¹
Upskilling	Short-term targeted training typically provided following initial education and training, and aimed at supplementing, improving or updating knowledge, skills and/or competences acquired during previous training ³²
Validation of learning outcomes	Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification ³³
Vocational education and training (VET)	Education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly in the labour market ³⁴

²⁵ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#S>

²⁶ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#S>

²⁷ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#S>

²⁸ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#S>

²⁹ See: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/european-adult-learning-glossary-level-2>

³⁰ See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_484_R_0001

³¹ See: <https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/TVETipedia+Glossary/filt=all/id=474>

³² See: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/european-adult-learning-glossary-level-2>

³³ See: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#R>

³⁴ See: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/european-adult-learning-glossary-level-2>

1. Introduction

We are pleased to present the Final report of the study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults³⁵. This study contributes to the evaluation staff working document of the European Commission which aims to investigate how EU Member States have responded to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and the extent to which this response has been effective, efficient, relevant, and in coherence with other EU and national policies and programme.

1.1. Purpose and objectives of the study

This study comes at an important time for EU education, training and skills policy. Education systems, labour markets and welfare state systems across the EU are changing rapidly to keep up with the demands of the digital and green transitions, globalisation, and shifts in demography. The Covid-19 pandemic has further accelerated these changes, drastically altering the way we learn, work and connect.

Lifelong learning opportunities that allow people to up- and re-skill are vital components for economic growth and a tool for social equality. The 2020 European Skills Agenda³⁶ is testament to the crucial role that upskilling pathways hold in strengthening sustainable European competitiveness, ensuring social fairness and building resilient societies and economies. The European Pillar of Social Rights³⁷ outlines the right of everyone to inclusive education, training and lifelong learning (principle 1) as well as to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment and employment prospects (principle 4). The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan³⁸ has two goals related to upskilling: increasing adult participation in training to at least 60% every year by 2030³⁹ and ensuring at least 80% of those aged 16-74 have basic digital skills⁴⁰. The first target was welcomed by EU leaders in the 2021 [Porto Declaration](#)⁴¹, and then by the European Council in its [2021 conclusions](#)⁴². In June 2021, Member States defined [national targets](#)⁴³. The Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for adult learning 2021-2030 also contributes to reinforcing the importance of upskilling and reskilling adults in the EU.⁴⁴

The Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways (2016/C 484/01) aims to ensure that everyone in society has a comprehensive set of skills, knowledge, and competences to achieve their full potential, play an active part in society and progress on the labour market. The Recommendation sets out a three-step approach to offering low-skilled adults access to upskilling pathways, through a skills assessment, a tailored and flexible learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills and competences. This approach is underpinned by outreach, guidance and support measures for learners, as well as coordination between relevant actors in education, training, employment, and social policy.

³⁵ [EUR-Lex - 32016H1224\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

³⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

³⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

³⁹ For monitoring of the EU target, participation in education and training during the previous 12 months will be measured, in comparison to the current indicator which looks at participation in the previous 4 weeks. The current indicator (four weeks) has been used throughout this study as the first publication of the 12-month participation is scheduled for May 2023. The age range used in this study also differs from the age range used in the EU target and is 20-64.

⁴⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

⁴¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=10004&furtherNews=yes>

⁴² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50763/2425-06-21-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

⁴³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_3782

⁴⁴ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14485-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

The overall purpose of this study is to provide the Commission with an external and independent study to support its evaluation. The study has two specific objectives:

- To assess the extent to which the general and specific objectives of the Recommendation have been met from 2016 until November 2021.
- To assess the effectiveness of the actions taken in response to the Recommendation by Member States and the European Commission, the Recommendation’s relevance, efficiency, coherence, added value

The evidence and analysis aim to provide conclusions and lessons learned to guide the development of EU and national policies on upskilling pathways in the future. The geographical scope of the study is the European Union in its present composition of 27 Member States.

1.2. Limitations of the research

There were a number of limitations associated with the scope and coverage of the research, the quality of available data and the methodology that was developed, given the constraints of the available resources for the study. These limitations were taken into account in the design and implementation of the study, with mitigation measures introduced, as outlined in the Table below.

Table 4 Key limitations of the research

Limitation	Explanation	Mitigation measures
Lack of clearly identifiable policies that were implemented in response to the recommendation	Member States’ adult learning systems differ greatly in their organisation, scope and infrastructure and the same is true for the overall support provided for upskilling. In many Member States, actions which correspond to the Recommendation existed prior to its adoption in 2016. There is therefore no ‘easy access’ single repository (at EU or Member State level) of actions implemented by Member States in response to the Recommendation.	To establish a list of relevant measures to assess and analyse for the study, in particular for the mapping task (Task 1), we identified the measures that collectively are considered by national authorities of each Member State to be the most relevant and representative of their country’s response to the Recommendation based on key EU policy documents on adult learning and the Recommendation, including the 2019 Staff Working Document ‘Taking Stock of implementation measures’ ⁴⁵ . We then consulted Member State representatives on the completeness of this sample of measures and asked them to validate the sample. Representatives were able to remove or add other measures in order to come to a validated list of measures that best represent a Member States’ response to the Recommendation.
Limitations of the mapping methodology	The analysis of the situation in 2016 and the evolution since then is based on a sample of measures (as explained above) and therefore cannot be seen as a fully comprehensive analysis of all relevant policies in place.	We have ensured that the major measures that have been put in place in response to the Recommendation or that are related to the Recommendation are captured in the analysis, have verified this with national authorities to ensure completeness and have further cross-checked with findings from the interviews and views of national experts. Whilst this does not provide the full overview of <i>all</i> measures related to upskilling pathways, it has enabled us to assess the expected impact of the Recommendation in 2016 and the degree of implementation since then.

⁴⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf

<p>Limited data that directly links to the Recommendation and can be used for monitoring its results.</p>	<p>As a result of the lack of clearly identifiable policies implemented in response to the Recommendation (explained above) there is also a lack of data that is directly linked to the Recommendation. The implementation of the Recommendation is not monitored uniformly or systematically in each Member State meaning that a comprehensive monitoring data is not widely available.</p>	<p>Our study methodology has allowed us to identify existing studies and evaluations of measures that Member States deem representative of their upskilling pathways response (as detailed above). We have used these along with the rich data gathered from consultation activities, the surveys and the case studies to understand and analyse the results of upskilling initiatives linked to the Recommendation, in order to assess its effectiveness in particular.</p>
<p>Lack of data on specific target groups, sectors and on specific skills</p>	<p>The low-skilled adults targeted by the Recommendation encompass a wide range of different groups, including for example migrants, older adults, low-skilled workers, unemployed adults and adults at risk of or experiencing poverty. However, granular and comparable data on both the size of and the impact of upskilling measures on specific target groups is not readily available. In particular, data on participation in education and training for subgroups such as migrants, those at risk of poverty is not available. Furthermore, data on specific skills' levels is also limited with the latest comparative data on numeracy and literacy skills being the OECD PIAAC survey from 2017.</p>	<p>We have examined data available for foreign-born populations, the unemployed, long-term unemployed and inactive as well as data disaggregated by gender where relevant. We have also directly targeted beneficiaries of upskilling pathways and organisations representing or working with low-skilled individuals through the surveys conducted which has allowed us to understand how the Recommendation has impacted specific target groups, as far as possible. In addition to this, all quantitative data has been triangulated with primary data collected through the consultation Tasks.</p>
<p>Lack of causal impact evaluation of policies due to data availability</p>	<p>To perform rigorous causal analysis of Upskilling Pathways initiatives and their effectiveness, it is crucial to have data on the basic units targeted by the policy (i.e., the so-called target group, low-skilled adults) and people belonging to target groups and economic sectors participating in Upskilling Pathways initiatives. Similar data need to be available for the comparison group, meaning access to microdata (i.e., data at the level of individuals, households or businesses or communities). As this has not been available, causal impact evaluation has not been fully undertaken for this evaluation study.</p>	<p>Despite this limitation, we have explored other ways to try and assess the causal impact of the Recommendation. We have formally tested how key outcomes/indicators have changed since the Recommendation was published and, drawing on the mapping exercise, the extent to which any changes are associated with different levels of adoption/implementation of the Recommendation, through an interrupted time series analysis, included in Annex 9. The case studies also include evidence from evaluation reports/findings of specific interventions (aligned to the Recommendation) which were subject to a robust counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE). Whilst these findings must be treated with caution (as they do not account for other factors) they provide a useful insight that has been triangulated with other data sources.</p>
<p>Capturing the long-term impacts of participation in upskilling pathways</p>	<p>The full benefits of the participation of individuals (and organisations) in upskilling activities cannot be captured in the short-term, where the focus is on measuring immediate results. Assessing the full outcomes of participation ideally requires longitudinal research involving follow-up after several years to assess the long-term impact of participation e.g., in terms of labour market outcomes, access to further education and training, health and wellbeing, etc. The full range of benefits for individuals and</p>	<p>Several important impacts from the initial five-year period of implementation, have been captured including through the case studies where existing evaluations of specific measures have been analysed and drawn from to provide sound estimates for the expected long-term effects of completed upskilling pathways in adulthood).</p>

	organisations of the 2016 Recommendation will not yet be apparent in some cases.	
Capturing the views of beneficiaries including adults with low levels of skills, competences and knowledge	There are clear challenges with consulting beneficiaries of upskilling measures, not least in identifying and gaining access due to data privacy (GDPR) and similar issues (national/regional authorities and upskilling providers cannot provide – and sometimes do not hold – contact details for previous participants).	To capture the views of adult learners as far as possible, we have worked with representative organisations of relevant target groups such as EU and national level NGOs working closely with the target groups. The surveys targeting adult learners and organisations representing the low-skilled have allowed us gain insights into the views of beneficiaries.
Lack of representativeness of the public consultation results	The public consultation received 60 responses. The recoding of variables to disaggregate the analysis and allow differentiation between all response options was therefore not possible	The research team has analysed relevant differences between sub-groups based on disaggregation by type of organisation and groups of respondents where this was possible. However, when results are disaggregated, inferences should be made with caution with regards to the results. Results from the public consultation have been triangulated with all other data sources and have been primarily used to illustrate or confirm findings that have emerged from the triangulation of data.
Impact of external shocks	Data and evidence on adult learning (as other domains) from 2020 have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.	In terms of measuring progress over time, data for 2020 has been examined through the lens of the pandemic, considering any major changes in outcomes as outliers in response to a major external shock. We have explicitly addressed the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of upskilling pathways in the evaluation sub questions and have also examined data from 2019 and 2021 to identify any trends in the indicators that may have been halted due to the onset of the pandemic.

Source: *Ecorys/3s, 2022*

2. What was the expected outcome of the intervention?

This section outlines the rationale for the Council Recommendation at the time it was adopted in 2016, highlighting the needs the EU was trying to address, what the Recommendation was expected to achieve and how that achievement was to be assessed (the intervention logic). This analysis forms the point of comparison against which the Recommendation will be assessed in subsequent sections of the report.

2.1. Description of the intervention and its objectives

The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways aimed to reinvigorate a key area of lifelong learning. As outlined in the Proposal for the Council Recommendation⁴⁶, the Recommendation aimed to address the challenge of low basic skills across the European workforce. This challenge was evidenced by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), which showed that one in five adults aged 16 to 65 in the EU had only a rudimentary level of literacy, while one in four had only the lowest level of skill in numeracy and could only solve very simple tasks using ICT. Around one quarter of people in the EU in the 25-64 age group did not have an upper secondary education qualification.

New challenges emerging at the time in the world of work made the need to upskill Europe's workforce all the more pressing. These included new ways of working, such as collaborative economy models, increased contract-based work and more frequent job changes, as well as demographic trends leading to a shrinking workforce. These trends were all projected to exacerbate skills mismatches and shortages, hampering investment, innovation and growth⁴⁷.

Adult learning was identified as clear tool through which to address these broader issues. However, ensuring access to and effectiveness of adult learning opportunities remained challenging. **Structural obstacles** such as limited guidance available to ensure low-skilled adults were aware of the benefits of upskilling and of the available learning opportunities, as well as, in some cases, limited availability of learning opportunities adapted and tailored to adults, were identified.⁴⁸ **Situational obstacles** included other family responsibilities, conflicting time schedules, costs for learning, lack of employer support, distance, lack of motivation, lack of awareness of the need to upskill and of the benefits of investing in skills. This was also coupled with a lower likelihood that the low-skilled would go back to formal education, meaning that alternatives to their learning would need to be available through non-formal learning settings, and the validation and recognition of their prior skills.

Expanding participation among adults who have little inclination to return to school requires **meaningful learning pathways**. These pathways must start with lifelong guidance and the opportunity to have one's skills properly assessed, and progress into tailored forms of learning provision which differ from teaching in formal education programmes, given that low qualified adults often share a history of school failure that they are not willing to repeat. Services that allow for the validation of skills ensure that learners' acquired skills are visible and rewarded in the labour market. Finally, educational outreach activities are required to

46 At the time, the proposal was entitled a Proposal for a Council Recommendation on establishing a Skills Guarantee.

47 Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on establishing a Skills Guarantee, COM/2016/0382 final - 2016/0179 (NLE) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0382&qid=1655224321731>

48 COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Analytical underpinning for a New Skills Agenda for Europe Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE: Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness, SWD/2016/0195 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016SC0195&qid=1655225174481>

raise awareness about what one can achieve by pursuing adult learning among individuals who have lost hope that participation in organised education can support them in any meaningful way in their lives.

The Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways aims to address these obstacles, by requesting Member States to:

1. Offer adults who have not acquired a qualification on EQF level 3 or 4 and/or having a low level of skills, knowledge and competences an opportunity to acquire a **minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence** and/or acquire a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences relevant for the labour market.
2. Within the main target group of the low-skilled, identify **priority target groups** for the delivery of upskilling pathways at national level.
3. Where appropriate, base the design of upskilling pathways on **three steps**, namely a skills assessment, provision of a tailored, flexible and quality learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills acquired.
4. Ensure effective **coordination and support** to implement the Recommendation, through engaging stakeholders.
5. Implement **outreach, guidance and support measures** to raise awareness on the benefits of upskilling, provide guidance and/or mentoring services to support learners' progression through all steps of the process, consider the design and implementation of support measures that address obstacles to participation, and support the initial training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of staff engaged in delivery of upskilling pathways.⁴⁹

The Recommendation builds on and complements previous relevant EU policies stressing the importance of working towards equal access to basic skills and opportunity to acquire higher levels of skills and qualifications, including the Council conclusions on the follow-up to the Report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems (2002)⁵⁰, the EU Action Plan for Adult Learning in 2007, promoting 'one step up frameworks', and the policies aiming at the prevention of early school leaving. It also builds on work that aims to establish an integrated pathway approach to skills development, starting with a skills assessment that guides the development of a tailored learning offer responding to the individual's specific skills needs, which are also determined through validation of existing skills.

The Recommendation was kicked off by the **2016 New Skills Agenda**⁵¹ and resonates, among other policies, with the **2012 Council Recommendation on validation**⁵², the **Youth Guarantee framework** (renewed in 2020) and the **2016 Recommendation on the**

49 Council conclusions of 14 February 2002 on the follow-up to the Report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems in view of the preparation of a joint Council/Commission report to be presented to the Spring 2002 European Council. (2002). 2002/03/05. pp. 1-11. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52002XG0305\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52002XG0305(01))

50 Council conclusions of 14 February 2002 on the follow-up to the Report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems in view of the preparation of a joint Council/Commission report to be presented to the Spring 2002 European Council. (2002). 2002/03/05. pp. 1-11. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52002XG0305\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52002XG0305(01))

51 European Commission. (2016). COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE - Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness (10th of June 2016). Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381&from=EN>

52 European Council. (2012). Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01). Official Journal of the European Union C 398/1. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN)

Integration of the long-term unemployed⁵³. Furthermore, the Recommendation responds to the results of the first round of the OECD PIAAC survey, which demonstrated the detrimental effects of low levels of basic skills, and how low levels of basic skills become a route cause for low levels of participation in adult learning⁵⁴.

The **intervention logic** for the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 1 below. The intervention logic builds on the needs which the Recommendation aims to address and the wider socio-economic and policy context it was meant to operate in, as outlined above and defined in the preamble of the Recommendation (clauses 1-29). It articulates the activities defined in the Recommendation and links these to intended outputs, outcomes and impacts whilst paying particular attention to the causal links between them.

The **rationale** for the Recommendation concerns the need to meet the upskilling/reskilling needs of low-skilled adults. It focuses, as per the preamble of the Recommendation, on the need to provide tailored lifelong learning opportunities to adults with low level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills. This rationale feeds into the **general objective** outlined in the preamble of the Recommendation of ensuring a high level of employability and active participation in society. This general objective is then further detailed in the **specific objective** of providing flexible, personalised opportunities to adults with low levels of skills and qualifications to enhance their literacy, numeracy and digital competences and/or to acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards higher qualifications.

These objectives are operationalised at EU and national levels. The **operational objectives for the European Commission** (paragraphs 1–18) are to:

1. Provide mechanisms for Member States to use existing competence frameworks and tools to support development of upskilling pathways.
2. Extend and intensify cooperation and mutual learning between Member States.
3. Support the use of European funding programmes in the area of skills development.
4. Support and carry out relevant research and analysis on adult learning and skills assessments.

The **operational objectives for Member States** (paragraphs 19–25) are to:

1. Offer a three-step process to specified target groups (encompassing the steps outlined in the Recommendation: 1) skills assessment, 2) provision of tailored and flexible learning offer, 3) validation and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences).
2. Allow and facilitate individuals' access to upskilling pathways activities.
3. Raise awareness of upskilling pathways and provide guidance and/or mentoring services.

53 European Commission (2007). Communication of the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions - Action Plan on Adult Learning: It is always a good time to learn - COM (2007) 558 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0558:FIN:EN:PDF>; European Council (2012). Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01). Official Journal of the European Union Vol. C 398/1. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN); European Council (2016). Council recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market (2016/C 67/01). Official Journal of the European Union. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H0220\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H0220(01)&from=EN)

54 European Commission. (2013). The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC): Implications for education and training policies in Europe.; Desjardins, R. (2020). PIAAC Thematic Review on Adult Learning (OECD Education Working Papers No. 223, Issue. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/paper/864d2484-en>

Following the intervention logic from left to right in Figure 1, achievement of the Recommendation's general, specific, and operational objectives is supported through the **inputs** allocated to the intervention. These inputs can be understood as both financial and non-financial support for the development of upskilling pathways. They principally concern the funding allocated and the human resources mobilised (in full time equivalent (FTE)) at both EU and national levels.

The inputs aim to support the development and implementation of a range of **activities** delivered at EU level and in the Member States. The **European Commission** should have a coordination role, following up on the implementation of the Recommendation, implementing mutual learning activities between Member States and supporting the use of existing competence frameworks, assessment tools and relevant EU funding programmes. It should conduct relevant research and analysis on adult learning and skills assessments in cooperation with Union bodies and international organisations. **Member States** should implement a wide range of activities to concretely establish upskilling pathways and make them accessible to the intended target group. To this end, they are supposed to:

1. Identify priority target groups, within the broader target group of the low-skilled, at national level.
2. Offer these adults the opportunity to undergo a skills assessment where appropriate applying validation arrangements to identify, document, assess and/or certify existing skills.
3. Offer a tailored and flexible learning offer that meets the needs identified by the skills assessment.
4. Build on existing validation arrangements to assess and certify the knowledge, skills and competences acquired.

In order to ensure adults have access to upskilling pathways, Member States should also implement motivation, outreach, guidance and support measures (e.g., awareness raising activities, making relevant information available, incentives) and ensure effective coordination to implement the Recommendation, through engaging relevant public and private actors in education and training, employment, social, cultural and other relevant policy areas. Finally, Member States should follow-up on and evaluate the measures implemented and their impact and use the results of evaluation to adapt the design and delivery of upskilling pathways at national level.

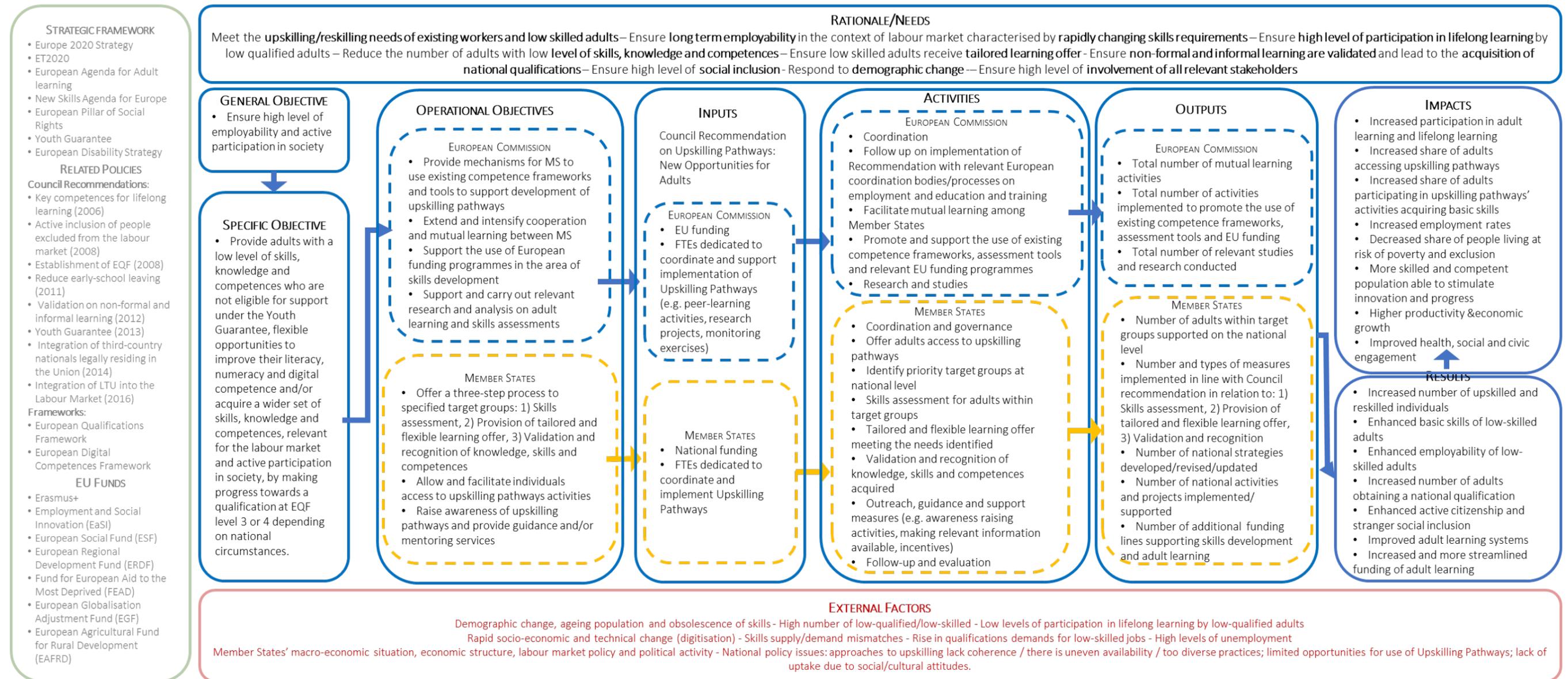
As the intervention logic shows, each of these activities supports the generation of **immediate outputs** linked to their focus. Reflecting the fact that such outputs are typically quantifiable, the diagram captures these in terms of (numbers of) adults supported, measures implemented, funding lines established, mutual learning activities conducted and so on. In turn, the activities and outputs they generate are intended to lead to a series of **key results** mostly linked to improvement of the individual low-skilled adults' situation (e.g., increasing the number of individuals with a higher level of basic skills, increasing employability and national qualification levels, and so on).

The last box of Figure 1 illustrates how the inputs, activities, outputs and results, are intended to contribute to achieving larger-scale **impacts** aligned to a range of EU objectives and to the objectives of the Recommendation as outlined in the preamble. These include on an individual level, increasing the participation in adult and lifelong learning, supporting employment, reducing poverty, and on a societal level stimulating innovation, technological progress, higher productivity and economic growth, and, ultimately, improving the health, social and civic engagement of European citizens.

The intervention logic also recognises that a range of other supporting activities and external factors will influence the implementation and the effects of the Recommendation. In part to recognise this, and inform the models developed to assess causality, examples of **key contextual considerations and likely influencing factors** are explicitly articulated across the bottom Figure 1.

Figure 1 Intervention logic of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways

Outline for a high-level intervention logic of COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults



Source: Ecorys/3s, 2022 based on the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

2.2. Point of comparison: the situation in 2016

At the time of the adoption of the Recommendation in 2016, the proportion of adults with low levels of formal qualification and the proportion of adults with gaps in their basic skills differed widely across EU Member States. Irrespective of these quantitative differences in the share of the population in need of upskilling, however, almost all Member States had in place some support for upskilling. However, the extent of the support differed: some countries had well-established systems in place, already aligned with the approach of the Recommendation, while others had a lack of integrated support for upskilling, resulting in different participation rates in formal and non-formal adult education, both of the low-qualified and the general adult population. This section outlines the situation in terms of the needs for upskilling across the EU27 and the support available to the target group of low-skilled adults at the time of adoption of the Recommendation in 2016.

2.2.1. Key indicators relevant to upskilling pathways

As expressed by the intervention logic shown in section 2.1, the need and potential impact of the Recommendation can be deduced from indicators measuring the following:

- **The needs for upskilling:** the following indicators allow us to assess the need for upskilling pathways in each Member State as they provide an overview of the potential size of the target group i.e. the size of the population that is in need of upskilling:
 - The proportion of low qualified adults with a level of educational attainment below upper secondary education (ISCED 0-2). Low levels of formal educational attainment imply a higher probability of having lower levels of basic skills.
 - The proportion of adults – irrespective of the educational attainment level – with gaps in their basic skills, understood as gaps in literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills.
 - The proportion of adults working in elementary occupations who are likely to face limited opportunities to use their skills at work – following the ‘use it or lose it’ paradigm⁵⁵ – who are taken as a group at risk as they might need upskilling to move on to more skill demanding work.
 - Indicators, such as the (long-term) unemployment rate of adults with low-education attainment, which capture the level of imbalance in demand and supply of low-skilled labour; In countries with low levels of low qualified or adults with gaps in their basic skill set, the difficulties to gain a job might be severe, making the availability of upskilling pathways an urgent matter.
- **The capacity of countries’ adult learning systems to provide the opportunities to participate in adult learning pathways** that allow individuals to overcome gaps in basic skills and low levels of formal educational attainment: the following indicators allow us to capture differences in the capacity of adult learning systems to support the target group:
 - Indicators on the participation in adult learning, in particular the European Labour Force Survey (LFS) structural indicator on participation of adults in learning (yearly data), complemented by the results of the Adult Education Survey (latest data in 2016).

⁵⁵ Desjardins, R. and Rubenson, K. (2011). An Analysis of Skill Mismatch using Direct Measures of Skills. Paris: OECD Education Working Paper No. 63.

- Indicators on the availability and/or use of services supporting participation in adult learning, including skill assessment, lifelong guidance and validation of skills are available from the Adult Education Survey⁵⁶.
- Indicators on public expenditure for adult learning. Cross-country comparative data on public spending on adult learning are scarce, with the latest attempt to compile data for Member States already quite dated⁵⁷. Relevant and recent data is only available for one subsegment, that is, spending on training within Active Labour Market Policy.

In the section that follows, the above comparative sources are used to understand the situation in 2016 in terms of the need for upskilling and the systems already in place to support it across the EU27. This analysis is then combined with the analysis of the mapping of types of measures in place, in section 2.2.2 to present a **baseline situation for 2016** against which the Recommendation's implementation will be assessed.

What was the need for upskilling in 2016?

Share of the population with low-educational attainment

In 2016, the EU average share of the population with low educational attainment (low-qualified) stood at 23.4%. In 10 countries (BE, EL, ES, FR, IT, LU, MT, NL, PT, RO) this share was over 20% of the adult population, as seen in Figure 2. However, for some countries (in particular, ES, IT, MT and PT), this data is strongly affected by past conditions of the education system, as reforms opening up access to upper secondary education took place at different moments in time, and previous cohorts (aged 45-54 or 55-64) had faced much more restricted educational opportunities than more recent cohorts⁵⁸. For this reason, it is important to also analyse the educational attainment of younger cohorts of adults. The level of educational attainment of the 25–34-year-old age group can provide a more cautious picture of the potential target group for upskilling measures in a country because it is better able to capture more recent changes in the performance of initial education systems and qualifications awarded by them⁵⁹. For that reason, the proportion of the 25–34-year-olds with low educational attainment provides an informative proxy for the size of the population with the highest probability to enter longer educational pathways leading to a qualification⁶⁰. According to this proxy, in 2016, the **potential group in need of upskilling – understood as those without an upper secondary level of education – stood at 16.8%** across the EU27. This ranged from 34.8% in Spain to 5.8% in Poland. Five Member States had a share of 25–34-year-olds with low educational attainment of over 20% (ES, IT, MT, PT, RO), and a further three countries (BE, BG, DK) had a level over 15% (see Figure A2.2 in Annex 2)⁶¹.

56 These are presented in Annex 2 and have been used within the country mapping.

57 European Commission (2013). The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC): Implications for education and training policies in Europe. Luxembourg.

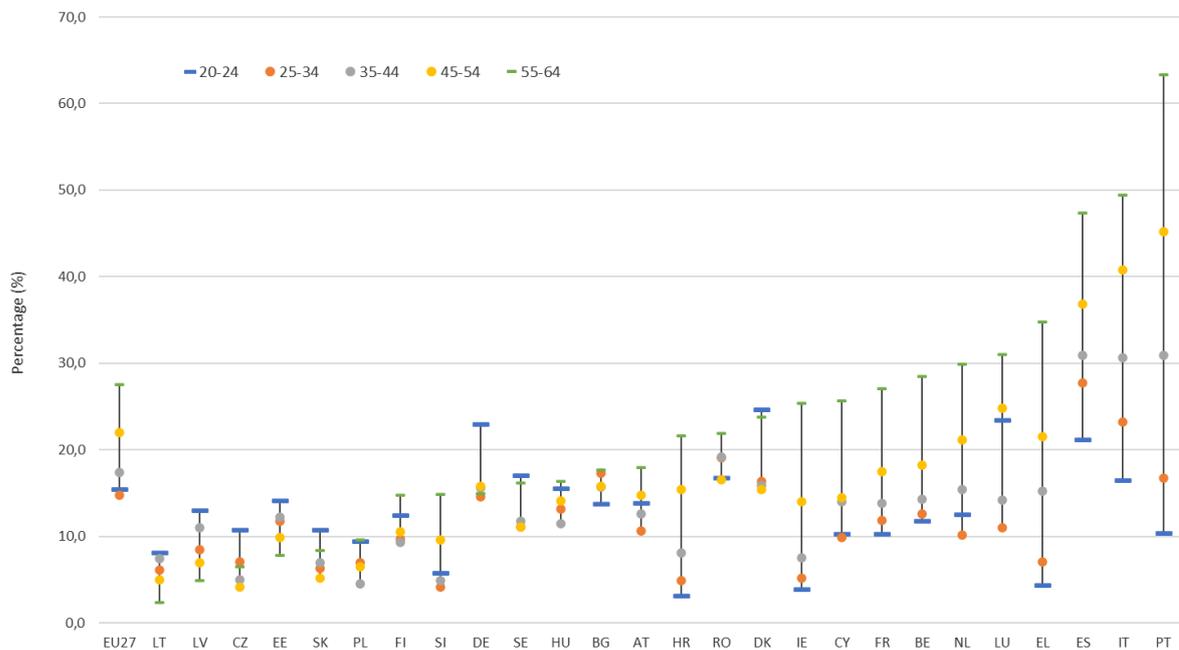
58 European Commission; EACEA and Eurydice (2021). Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. . https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf

59 The significance of cross-country differences in educational attainment levels stemming from the past conditions of initial education are purposefully downplayed in this data, reflecting the fact that the majority of attempts to overcome a low level of skills/educational attainment take place up to the age 45.

60 Kosyakova, Y. and Bills, D. B. (2021). Formal adult education and socioeconomic inequality: Second chances or Matthew Effects? *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 15, No. 9, pp. e12920. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12920>

61 Here and in the following: A2 refers to Annex 2, so Figure A2.2 points to the second Figure in Annex 2.

Figure 2 Percentage (%) of adults with low educational attainment (ISCED 0-2) for each age-group by Member State, 2016, sorted by % for 55–64-year-old age-group



Source: Eurostat, LFS, Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) – main indicators, edat_lfse_03

The educational profile of the **migrant population** is another aspect to consider to better understand the need for upskilling in a country. Mobile populations comprise both highly educated and low-qualified people, with large differences in the composition of foreign-born people across countries and time. In some countries, former policies of attracting low-qualified guest workers still imprint the qualification structure of the foreign-born population; in other countries, the recent intake of large groups of refugees from countries with poor educational opportunities has left its mark on the qualification structure of the migrant population⁶². On average, **foreign-born adults are more likely to be low-qualified than their native-born counterparts**. In 2016, 35.6% of adults born in a foreign country had low educational attainment, compared to 21.6% of adults that were native-born⁶³. The inflow of low-qualified adults, refugees in particular, constitute one main driver for a higher share of adults in need of upskilling in some Member States, in particular in Germany, Finland or Sweden⁶⁴.

Gaps in basic skills

Beyond using educational attainment as a proxy for the understanding skills levels, there are also indicators attempting to directly measure gaps in basic skills. These demonstrate that **the population in need of raising their basic skills level is larger than the group of adults with low levels of educational attainment**. The PIAAC⁶⁵ assessment scores

62 European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Retrieved from Luxembourg: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf.

63 For the marked cross-country differences see Figure A2.5 in Annex 2.

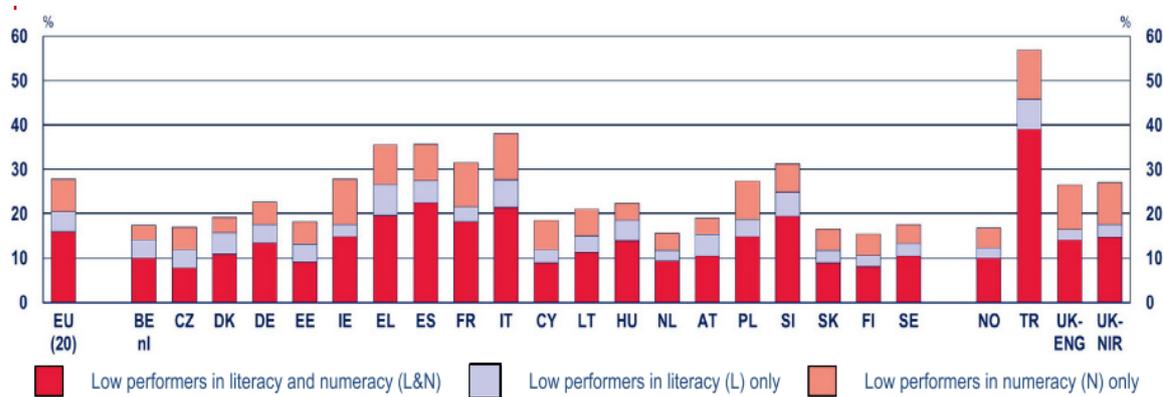
64 See Figure 1.3 in European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Retrieved from Luxembourg: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf

65 Quoted from European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Retrieved from Luxembourg:

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf. The share of the adult population

show that **16% of 25–64-year-olds have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills**⁶⁶, 4.4% have low levels of literacy, and 7.3% low levels of numeracy skills. Figure 3 shows that Italy, France, Greece, Slovenia and Spain have a particularly high share of individuals with low literacy and numeracy skills. By contrast, Czechia, Slovakia and Finland have the lowest shares of individuals with low literacy or numeracy skills.

Figure 3 Adults (aged 15-65 who are low performers in literacy and/or numeracy (%) 2011-2017



EU (20): See 'explanatory notes'.

	% EU (20)	BE nl	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LT
Low performers in L&N	16.0	10.1	7.7	10.8	13.3	9.1	14.9	19.5	22.5	18.1	21.3	8.9	11.3
Low performers in L only	4.4	4.0	4.1	4.9	4.2	3.9	2.6	7.0	5.0	3.4	6.3	3.0	3.7
Low performers in N only	7.3	3.3	5.1	3.4	5.1	5.2	10.3	9.0	8.2	9.9	10.3	6.6	6.1
	HU	NL	AT	PL	SI	SK	FI	SE		NO	TR	UK-ENG	UK-NIR
Low performers in L&N	13.9	9.3	10.5	14.9	19.5	8.9	8.1	10.4		10.0	39.0	14.0	14.7
Low performers in L only	4.6	2.4	4.8	3.9	5.4	2.7	2.6	2.8		2.3	6.7	2.4	2.7
Low performers in N only	3.8	3.9	3.8	8.6	6.3	4.8	4.8	4.3		4.6	11.2	10.2	9.6

Source: Country data: OECD, 2019. The population-weighted average of the 20 EU Member States is based on 2012 Eurostat data [demo_pjanbroad] and was calculated by DG EMPL

Low levels of **digital skills** represent a particularly significant gap in an adults' basic skills sets, as considerable levels of digital literacy are required in the majority of workplaces and for mastering everyday tasks and participating fully in civic life. In 2016, **44% of adults aged 25-64 in the EU27 had no or low digital skills** or could not have their skills assessed as they had not used the internet in the last three months⁶⁷. The low-qualified are at a disadvantage in terms of level of digital skills. Across the EU27, they were five times more likely than those with high qualifications and almost twice as likely as those with medium level qualifications to have low or no digital skills, as seen in Figure A2.15 in Annex 2. In eight Member States, the shares of the low-qualified with low or no digital skills or who could not have their skills assessed were 90% or higher (BG, CY, EL, HR, IE, LT, PL, SK). On the other end of the spectrum are Denmark and Luxembourg with shares at 29% and 41% respectively. However, even in these better performing Member States, the share of the low-qualified with low or no digital skills or who could not have their skills assessed remains over five times higher than the share of highly qualified individuals.

with low scores is based on the PIAAC, OECD assessment of adults aged 25-64 whose literacy score was below 226 points. Measurement took place in 2011-2012 in Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden; in 2014-2015 in Greece, Lithuania, and Slovenia; in 2017 in Hungary. Data for the following countries is not available: Bulgaria, Croatia, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Portugal and Romania.

66 In the 20 EU countries in which the survey was conducted.

67 Eurostat, Individuals' level of digital skills (until 2019), ISOC_SK_DSKL_I, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ISOC_SK_DSKL_I_custom_3116259/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=4772673b-8ded-4257-987a-caa037aa49b9

Foreign born individuals are also more likely to have low or no digital skills. In 2016, there was an eight-percentage point difference in the shares of foreign born and native-born adults with no or low digital skills in the EU average (45% compared to 53% respectively) – see Figure A2.17 in Annex 2).

Estimating the full range of adults with a need for better basic skills

As there is a considerable overlap between adults with low levels of educational attainment, and with gaps in their basic skills, including ICT related skills, and a lack of opportunity to use their skills at work, Cedefop has developed an estimate measuring the magnitude of the adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. Cedefop estimated the **share of adults who would benefit from upskilling and reskilling**, since they have either low levels of formal educational attainment, other basic skill gaps (literacy, numeracy, ICT) or work in elementary occupations and are at risk of skill loss/skill obsolescence.⁶⁸ The estimate is particularly important in capturing the potential for upskilling with the adult population with medium to high educational attainment⁶⁹.

The Cedefop approach shows that across the EU27 and the UK, **46% of the adult population has a potential need for upskilling and reskilling** (based on datasets from 2015 and 2016⁷⁰). There are considerable differences among EU countries as shown in Figure 4. The highest shares of adults with potential for upskilling and reskilling are in Malta, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Greece, where over 55% of the population are in need of upskilling. The lowest shares can be observed in Czechia and Finland. However, even in countries with a low share of low-qualified adults (e.g., Czechia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia) the potential group in need of up and re-skilling is still substantial and exceeds one in four adults⁷¹.

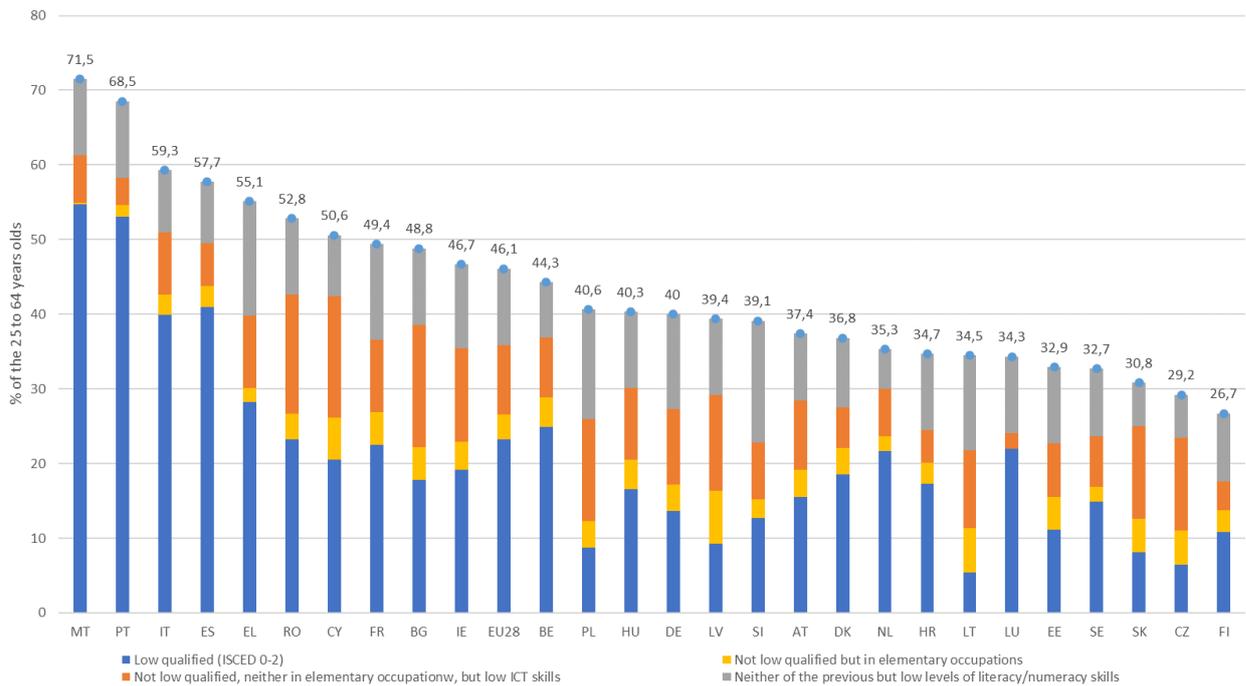
68 The Cedefop estimate uses data sources from various years (LFS 2016; CSIS 2015; PIAAC 2012 or 2015). The estimate procedure added layers of adults with potential need for upskilling not captured by the already included components. Components included, first, the low qualified (LFS 2016), the medium to high educated working in elementary occupations (isco08 – 9) (LFS 2016), the medium to high qualified (no low qualified) and not employed in a manual job (as proxy for elementary occupations) but with low digital skills (CSIS 2015) and finally, adults not captured so far but having low levels of literacy or numeracy skills (subsumed as 'cognitive skills') (PIAAC 2012, 2015).

69 For details on the limitations of the estimation approach see Cedefop (2020). Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways - Volume 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. Cedefop reference series; No 112., Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/475393>

70 See footnote 22.

71 While the estimate can be taken as a valid proxy for the situation in 2016, it can only be updated after the data from the second wave of PIAAC data will become available (data for 19 MS expected for 2024) <https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/about/piaac2ndcycle/>.

Figure 4 Estimated adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling, by country (% of the 25–64-year-olds), in descending order, EU-27



Source: Cedefop (2020). *Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling.* <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/475393>

Demand for upskilling can result in a stark imbalance in supply and demand for low-skilled work. **Low-qualified adults were much more likely to be unemployed than those with higher levels of education.** In 2016, across the EU27, 16.3% of unemployed adults aged 25 to 64 years had a low educational attainment, compared to 8.1% that had a medium level of education and 5.5% of adults that had a high level of education. (Figure A2.18 in Annex 2). In countries with a low share of low-qualified adults, the unemployment of the low-qualified tends to be higher than in countries with higher proportions of low-qualified, making upskilling opportunities urgent despite a lower proportion of adults in need of them. Low-qualified adults are also overrepresented among the long-term unemployed: in 2016, low-qualified adults were more likely than adults with higher levels of educational attainment to be in long-term unemployment in all 27 Member States as seen in Figure A2.19 in Annex 2. Low-qualified females are also at a disadvantage: 18.1% of unemployed females in 2016 were low-qualified compared to 16.7% of unemployed men. Significant discrepancies (more than five percentage points) are particularly evident in Spain (8 percentage points) Greece (7.6 percentage points), and Sweden (7.1 percentage points).

What was the capacity of countries' adult learning systems?

Participation rates of adults in education and training

Participation rates of adults (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) in education and training across all educational levels stood at **10.3% in 2016** for the EU27 (see Figure A2.6 in Annex 2). Six countries had a participation rate below 5% (BG, EL, HR, PL, RO, SK) and seven countries had a rate above 15% (DK, EE, FI, FR, LU, NL, SE), thereby meeting the ET2020 benchmark⁷².

⁷² According to EU cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:ef0016&from=EN>, by 2020, based on the European Labour Force Survey, 15% of adults (25-64 olds) should participate in formal or non-formal education and training within four weeks prior to the survey, see EU Benchmarks - Education and training - Eurostat (europa.eu).

Low-qualified adults were at a clear disadvantage in terms of their participation in education and training. In 2016, high-qualified adults participated in education and training at about four times the rate of low-qualified adults. This disadvantage of the low-qualified was recorded for all EU Member States for which data is available, although with considerable differences in the size of the disadvantage (See Figure A2.8 in Annex 2). 16 countries had a participation rate under 5% (BE, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, MT, PL, PT, SI).

The inactive and the unemployed also participate less in education and training than the employed – in 2016, 8.2% of the inactive population and 9.4% of the unemployed population participated in education and training compared to 10.9% of the employed population. The participation rates of the inactive were the lowest out of all three subgroups in a total of 14 Member States in 2016. Exceptions were Germany, where the inactive had the highest participation rate, and Latvia, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Sweden where the unemployed had the highest participation rate (see Figure A2.12).

Expenditure on ALMP training

Previous studies have shown that there are large differences in the public spending for adult learning⁷³. Whilst public spending on adult learning comes from a diverse range of sources from the public budget as well as employer contributions, comparable EU-wide data is scarce. Expenditure on ALMP training (for which a reliable indicator is available for the EU27) provides an insight into the degree of national funding dedicated to upskilling. There were **huge discrepancies between Member States on ALMP expenditure on training** per capita (relative to the 20–64-year-old population) in 2016. Six countries (AT, DK, FI, FR, IE, LU,) allocated over EUR 150 per individual, compared with six countries (CZ, EL, HU, SK, PL, RO) that spent EUR under 5 per capita. However, in some countries, large-scale training funds fuelled by the contributions of employers either replace or complement the public funding of adult learning, notably in Cyprus, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain.

2.2.2. Upskilling measures in place

Member States' upskilling situation in 2016 must also be understood in the context of the measures (policies and programmes) in place to support the low-skilled in 2016. This allows for an understanding of the **need for change** in each country's upskilling approach following adoption of the Recommendation.

The in-depth mapping of upskilling measures conducted for this study (methodology described in Annex 1) identified 58 measures relevant to the implementation of the Recommendation that were in place *before 2016* across the EU27⁷⁴. These measures were analysed according to the degree to which they already responded to the provisions of the Recommendation, namely, the three-step approach of providing a skills assessment, flexible and tailored learning, and validation and recognition⁷⁵. On the basis of this analysis, the measures were categorised into the following groups:

73 European Commission (2019). Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.; Molyneux, J.; Cutmore, M. and Biundo, I. (2020). Adult learning statistical synthesis report - A synthesis report drawing on statistical data relating to participation in, and the financing of adult learning in the European Member States. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

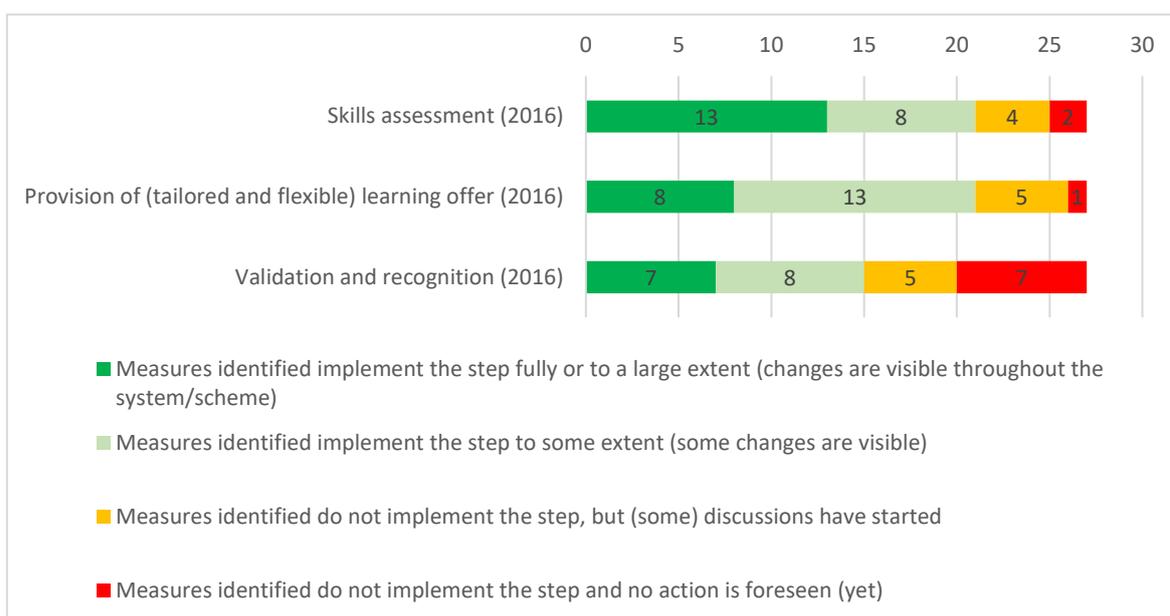
74 The in-depth mapping was based on a long-list of measures identified through desk research and expert input. The long list was then discussed with national authorities and the selection of measures implementing the Upskilling Pathway recommendation validated by national authorities. The mapping does not include all validation and recognition measures existing in a Member States, but only those that the Member States recognised as implementing the Recommendation. Hence, the scope of the mapping is different than the scope of the Cedefop validation inventory and the 2020 evaluation of the Council Recommendation on validation (SWD (2020) 121 final). Further information on the methodological approach to the mapping is provided in annex 1.

75 The following analysis of the measures does not provide an overall judgement of adult learning measures in Member States or a complete overview of all existing measures that could have been potentially linked to the three main steps of upskilling pathways. For a detailed explanation of the methodological approach, please see Annex 1.

- Measures implement the step **fully or to a large extent** (key features of the step are visible throughout the system)
- Measures implement the step to **some extent** (some key features of the step are visible)
- Measures do not implement the step, but **(some) discussions have started**
- Measures do not implement the step and **no action is foreseen (yet)**.

Figure 5 provides an overview of the number of Member States in which measures implemented before 2016 covered each of the three steps of the Recommendation, and the degree of implementation.

Figure 5 Degree of implementation of the three steps prescribed by the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation in EU Member States pre-2016 (Number of Member States by degree of implementation)



Source: *Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures*

The key findings in terms of degree of implementation of the three-step approach prior to the Recommendation are that:

- Measures implementing **skills assessments** were present in the majority of Member States already prior to 2016, although no relevant measures were identified in six Member States (BG, HR, CZ, LV, MT and PL).
- Measures for the provision of **tailored and/or flexible learning** to low-skilled adults were also already in place in most Member States, although no relevant measures were identified in six Member States (BE, BG, CZ, IT, MT, ES)
- Measures for the **validation and recognition of skills** were less common. In 12 Member States (BG, CZ, DE, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, LU, MT, PL, SK), no relevant measures implementing this step were identified.

On the basis of this analysis, the need for change following adoption of the Recommendation in each Member State, by step, was assessed as follows:

- Measures implement the step fully or to a large extent (Dark green) → **Low need for change**

- Measures implement the step to some extent (Light green) → **Medium need for change**
- Measure do not implement the step (either whether (some) discussions have started (Yellow) or no action is foreseen (Red)) → **High need for change**

This need for change is contextualised and further refined by the two key indicators that show the need for upskilling and the capacity for upskilling in each Member State as described in section 2.2.1: the share of low-qualified aged 25-64 and the participation rate of low-qualified aged 25-64 in education and training in 2016. The use of this contextual data is considered essential to the assessment of need for change as even countries with measures addressing the three steps could be characterised by a high share of people with low educational attainment or low participation in education and training, hence indicating the need for further action. This contextual data and the analysis of existing measures are then combined to provide an overall assessment of the need for change in each country as follows:

- **Low need for change:** the three steps are already fully implemented or, two out of three steps are fully implemented, and one is implemented to some extent; countries in this category are characterised by a low share of low-qualified and/or high level of participation in education and training by low-qualified.
- **Medium need for change:** a good level of implementation of the three steps is already present, but further progress in the implementation is possible; countries in this category are characterised by a medium share of low-qualified and/or medium level of participation in low-qualified in education and training by low-qualified.
- **High need for change:** the three steps are not yet implemented or only some of them are implemented to a low extent; countries in this category are characterised by a high share of low-qualified and/or low level of participation in education and training by low-qualified.⁷⁶

Table 2 below presents this analysis according to the degree of need for change. It provides an overview of the situation with regards to the three steps, prior to the adoption of Recommendation.

⁷⁶ The overall assessment is conducted by assigning a numeric value to each contextual indicator based on quartiles as shown in the table below. The total value ranges from a minimum of 0.5 (countries with a low share of low qualified and high participation in education) to a maximum of 2 (countries with a large share of low qualified and low participation in education). This total value is then summed up with the coefficient of implementation calculated as described in section 4.1 and Annex 1. The resulting values are then used to group the countries in Low (First Quartile), Medium (Second Quartile), High need for change (Third and Fourth Quartiles). For a full explanation of the assessment methodology please see Annex 1.

Contextual indicators	Value quartile 1	Value quartile 2	Value quartile 3	Value quartile 4
Low-qualified 25–64-year-olds – 2016 (%)	0.25	0.5	0.75	1
Participation of low-qualified in education and training 25–64-year-olds - 2016 (%)	1	0.75	0.5	0.25

Table 5 Overview of degree of implementation of the provisions of the Recommendation pre-2016, grouped by need for change

	Country	Low-qualified 25–64-year-olds – 2016 (%)	Participation of low-qualified in education and training 25–64-year-olds - 2016 (%)	Skills assessment	Provision of learning	Validation and recognition
Low need	Austria	15.5 (MN)	5.1 (LN)	LN	LN	LN
	Denmark	19.7 (MN)	19.7 (LN)	LN	MN	LN
	Estonia	11.4 (LN)	5 (LN)	LN	MN	MN
	Finland	11.9 (LN)	12.9 (LN)	LN	MN	MN
	France	21.9 (MN)	7.5 (LN)	LN	LN	LN
	Netherlands	22.9 (MN)	9.1 (LN)	LN	LN	LN
	Sweden	15 (MN)	19.3 (LN)	LN	LN	MN
Medium need	Germany	13.5 (MN)	3.7 (MN)	MN	LN	HN
	Latvia	9.3 (LN)	3 (MN)	HN	MN	HN
	Lithuania	5.4 (LN)	2.4 (MN)	MN	MN	MN
	Luxembourg	21.6 (MN)	6.9 (LN)	LN	LN	HN
	Portugal	53.1 (HN)	4.1 (MN)	LN	LN	LN
	Slovenia	12.7 (MN)	2.4 (MN)	LN	MN	LN
High need	BelgiumFR	24.9 (HN)	2.8 (MN)	MN	HN	MN
	BelgiumNL			MN	HN	MN
	Bulgaria	17.7 (MN)	0.5 (HN) ⁷⁷	HN	HN	HN
	Croatia	17.3 (MN)	0.4 (HN)	HN	MN	HN
	Cyprus	20.5 (MN)	1.5 (HN)	MN	MN	MN
	Czechia	6.6 (LN)	2.3 (MN)	HN	HN	HN

77 Data from 2017 was used to replace missing 2016 data

Greece	28.2 (HN)	0.7 (HN)	MN	MN	MN
Hungary	16.6 (MN)	2.7 (MN)	MN	MN	HN
Ireland	18.6 (MN)	2.3 (MN)	LN	LN	HN
Italy	39.9 (HN)	2.3 (MN)	LN	HN	HN
Malta	50.6 (HN)	2.8 (MN)	HN	HN	HN
Poland	8.7 (LN)	0.9 (HN)	HN	MN	HN
Romania	23.3 (HN)	0.3 (HN) ⁷⁸	MN	MN	MN
Slovakia	8.1 (LN)	n/a	MN	MN	HN
Spain	41.7 (HN)	3.4 (MN)	LN	HN	LN

LN = Low need for change

MN = Medium need for change

HN = High need for change

Source: Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures. For an explanation of the methodology used to come to these categorisations, please see section 2.2.2 and Annex 1.

⁷⁸ Data from 2015 was used to replace missing 2016 data

The table shows that in 2016, **14 Member States had high need for change** (BE, BG, CY, HR, CZ, EL, HU, IE, IT, MT, PL, RO, SK, ES). Overall, though with some exceptions, these countries had less developed measures in place addressing the three steps. Even where measures covering the three steps existed (e.g., CY, EL, RO), the share of low-qualified adults was remarkably high and participation in education and training low. These countries had the most need for change in relation to the implementation of the Council Recommendation.

Six Member States had medium need for change (DE, LV, LT, LU, PT, SI). These countries already had measures in place addressing upskilling needs. However, either the implementation of the three steps was varied (DE, LV, LU, SI) or the high shares of low-qualified and low participation rates in education and training indicated the need for new action, development of new measures or the reform of existing ones (e.g., PT).

Finally, **seven Member States had low need for change** (AT, DK, EE, FI, FR, NL, SE). These countries were already well-advanced in the provision of support to the low-skilled and presented a similar high degree of implementation of the three steps. None of these countries had high need for change based on the quantitative indicators, with all seven recording high participation rates of the low-qualified in education and training, and low-to-medium shares of low-qualified adults overall. Even though improvements to the existing provision of support for the low-skilled are welcome, the overall expected need for change in relation to the Recommendation in these countries is low.

3. Evolution since 2016

3.1. Key indicators relevant to upskilling pathways

This section provides an overview of how the key indicators used to establish the point of comparison in 2016 have developed over the evaluation period. It follows the line of reasoning presented in section 2.1.1.

What is the need for better basic skills in 2021?

The **share of the EU27 population aged 25-64-years with low educational attainment decreased** among Member States between the years 2016 and 2021, from an EU average of 23.4% to 20.7%, with all Member States except Germany, registering decreases over this time (as seen in Figure A2.3 in Annex 2). In countries where older cohorts had fewer opportunities to access upper secondary education, cohort effects – with less educated generations being replaced by more educated ones – past changes in the education systems of Member States are known to be the key driver for this change.⁷⁹ Beyond cohort effects, changes in the proportion of low qualified adults are further caused by changes in initial education (including the prolongation of years of compulsory schooling and policies preventing early school leaving), which has been considered in this study in the interpretation of data trends.

The effects of belonging to a particular ‘educational generation’⁸⁰ (facing more or fewer opportunities within the education system) are visible when breaking this sub-group down by age. The share of low qualified 25–34-year-olds decreased between 2016 and 2021 from a share of 16.8% in 2016 to 14.8% in 2021. This continues a downward trend that is visible from 2011 when the share was 19.1%. The decrease occurred in 24 Member States, with

79 European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Retrieved from Luxembourg: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf - page 31

80 Antikainen, Ari, & Kaupilla, Juha. (2002). Educational generations and the futures of adult education: a Nordic experience. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21(3), 209-219. doi:10.1080/02601370210127828

the most significant decreases seen in Portugal, Malta, Greece and Spain. The share of 25-34 years old with low educational attainment remains nevertheless high and above 15% in seven Member States (BG, DK, ES, IT, MT, PT, RO).

Among adults born in a foreign country, the share of the low-qualified has marginally decreased from 2016 to 2021 (from 35.6% to 34.1%). However, the **disadvantage of foreign-born adults has increased**, with the difference widening between foreign and native-born adults from 14 percentage points in 2016 to 15.7 percentage points in 2021. It is particularly noticeable (i.e., above 15 percentage points) in Belgium, France Germany, Greece, and Sweden (Figure A2.5 in Annex 2). However, it should be noted that changes may be driven by the educational attainment profile of newly arriving migrants, including refugees. Furthermore, upskilling low-skilled refugees requires a multi-year timeframe, as extended language and basic skills training do not immediately impact educational attainment levels (for example, in Germany, low-qualified refugees from the year 2015 have just started in 2021 to enter in larger numbers into upper secondary vocational education⁸¹).

Gaps in basic skills

New data on the proportion of adults with gaps in their basic skills has not become available since 2016 with the exception of data on digital skills which is available for up to 2019^{82,83}. There was a **marginal improvement** between 2016 and 2019 in the share of adults with low or no digital skills (see Figure A2.16 in Annex 2). The EU27 average share of low-qualified with low or no digital skills or who could not have their skills levels assessed as they had not used the internet in the last three months fell slightly from 78% to 74%, but with stark differences with the equivalent shares of medium and highly qualified individuals. Five Member States continued to have a share of low qualified with low or no digital skills of above 90% (BG, CY, HR, LV, SK).

In 2019, **age continued to be a major factor in the level of digital skills**. A recent report by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) has identified that an average 58% of 55-64-year-olds in the EU have below-basic skills, ranging from 30% in Finland to 80% in Bulgaria and Romania. Foreign-born individuals are also more likely to have low or no digital skills in 2019, with a fall of only two percentage points in the share between 2016 and 2019. **The disadvantage of foreign-born adults in terms of digital skills remains** and, in fact, the size of this disadvantage increased in 11 Member States between 2016 and 2019 (AT, BE, CY, DK, ES, FR, HU, IT, LV, SI, SE). Additional analysis of other socio-demographic characteristics showed small (0-3 percentage points) differences in the percentage of the population with a below-basic digital skills level with regards to gender⁸⁴.

Labour status of low-qualified adults

The **low-qualified remain at a greater risk of unemployment than medium and high qualified adults** in 2021, although the overall level of unemployed has decreased. The same can be said for the risk of becoming long-term unemployed – in 2021, a much higher share of unemployed across the EU27 were low-qualified, compared to medium or high qualified (12.7% versus 5.6% and 4.2% respectively). This was the case in all 27 Member States, with particularly high differences recorded in Slovakia, Sweden and Bulgaria (see figures Figure A2.18 and Figure A2.19 in Annex 2).

81 See the relevant section of BIBB - Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung. (2021). Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2021 - Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung. Retrieved from <https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/bibb-datenreport-2021.pdf>.

82 Due to a lack of more recent data, the Cedefop indicator for the potential of upskilling can also not be updated prior to 2024, when the second wave of PIACC data will become available.

83 Data for 2021 are presented in Figure A2_16 in the annex, however, due to a change in the methodology, results are not comparable with the 2016 data.

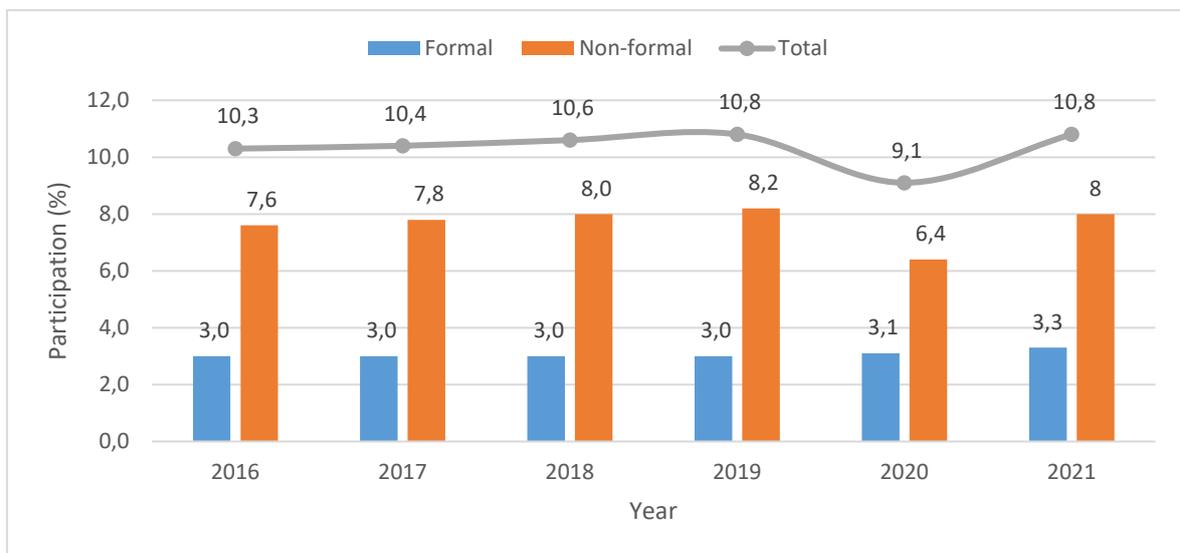
84 Centeno, C., Karpinski, Z. and Urzi Brancati, M.C., Supporting policies addressing the digital skills gap - Identifying priority groups in the context of employment, EUR 31045 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-51319-3, doi:10.2760/07196, JRC128561.

What is the capacity of countries' adult learning systems?

Participation rates in education and training

Participation rates in education and training of adults across all educational levels have been slightly increasing in the EU27 since 2016, to a high of 10.8% in 2019 (see Figure A2_6). This progress was reversed in 2020, following the external shock impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. By 2021, participation rates had recovered, with an EU average participation rate of 10.8% in 2021, equal to the value for 2019.

Figure 6 EU27 participation rate (%) in education and training of 25–64-year-olds (last 4 weeks) 2016 to 2021.

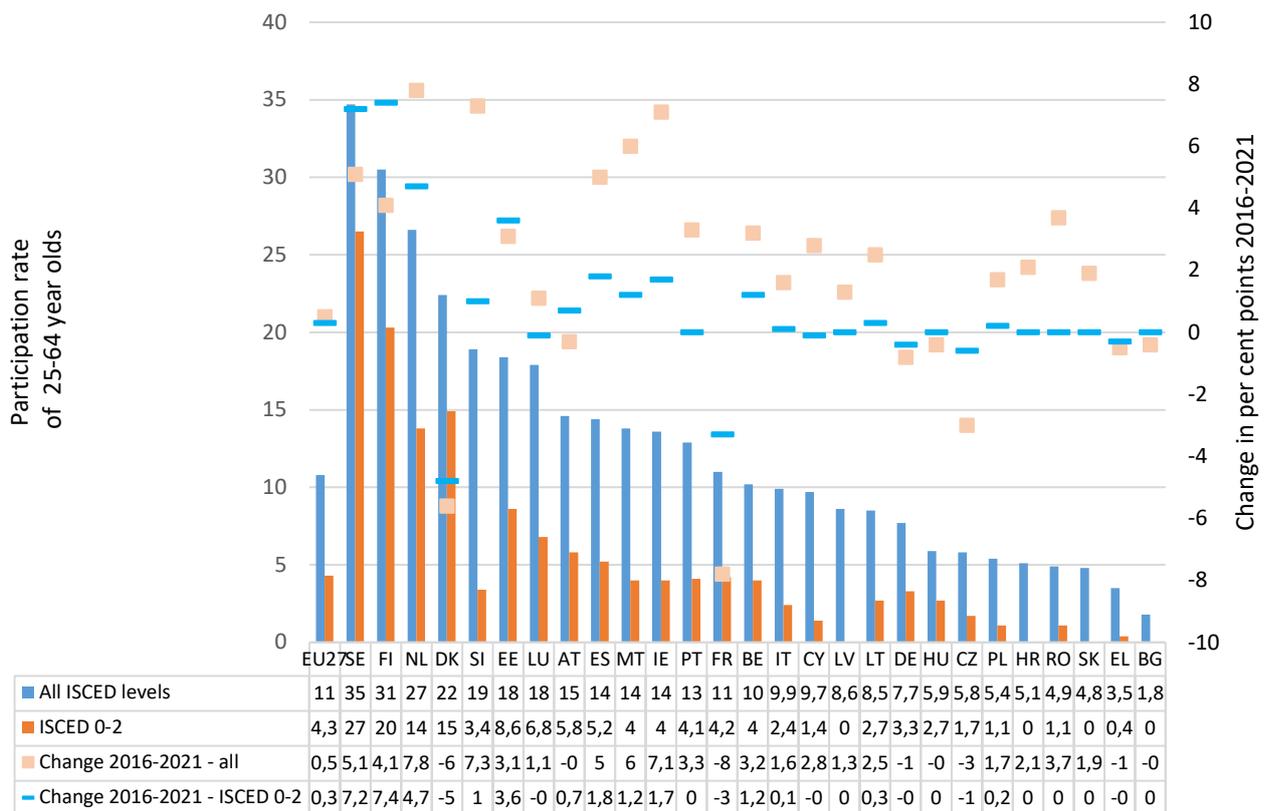


Source: Eurostat, *Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex and age (trng_lfse_01)*

Between 2016 and 2021, participation increased in 19 Member States (BE, CY, EE, ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK) and decreased in eight (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EL, FR, HU). The strongest improvements were reported in the Netherlands (+7.8 percentage points) and Slovenia (+7.1 percentage points). France (-7.8 percentage points) and Denmark (-5.6 percentage points) showed the largest declines (see Figure 7 below). Overall, it is unknown to what extent Covid-19 is still exerting a limiting effect on participation in adult learning during 2021, with potential variations across countries.

Participation of the low-qualified in education and training marginally increased between 2016 and 2021 across the EU (from 4% to 4.3%). However, in contrast to the participation rate of the total population, this increase can be observed in only 11 of 22 countries with comparable data available for both years (AT, BE, EE, ES, FI, IE, LT, MT, NL, SE, SI). The largest increase was recorded in Finland (7.4 per cent points) and Sweden (7.1 per cent points), two Member States that have consistently had higher-than-average rates of low-qualified adults participating in education and training. The Netherlands (4.7%) and Estonia (3.6%) also recorded strong positive growth in participation (Figure A2.9). **Low-qualified adults remain at a disadvantage** in terms of their access to education and training with their participation continuing to be starkly lower than that of medium and high qualified adults. This disadvantage is consistent across all Member States.

Figure 7 Participation rates of 25–64-year-olds, 2016 and 2021 and percentage point change



Source: Eurostat, Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex and age (trng_lfse_01)

With regards to **labour status**, participation rates have increased from 2016 to 2021 for the employed (from 10.9% to 11.5%) and the unemployed (from 9.4% to 12.7%) yet decreased for the inactive (from 8.2% to 7.9%). Most Member States (21 in total) have made progress in increasing the participation of the unemployed, with the biggest increases observed in Luxembourg (by 13.9 percentage points) the Netherlands (by 12.3 percentage points), Estonia (by 12 per cent points) and Ireland (by 10.9 percentage points). However, the **inactive continue to participate the least** in education and training, with very little progress in increasing participation of this subgroup between 2016 and 2021.

Country expenditure on labour market policies

ALMP expenditure on training per capita (20-64-year-olds) for 2019 shows that in 17 countries expenditure dropped between 2016 and 2019. This is likely driven by the decrease in unemployment rates over this period. The highest increases were nevertheless seen in countries with the lowest overall expenditure, including Slovakia and Hungary (Figure A2.22 in Annex 2).

3.2. Upskilling measures implemented since 2016⁸⁵

Overview of current degree of implementation⁸⁶ of the three steps

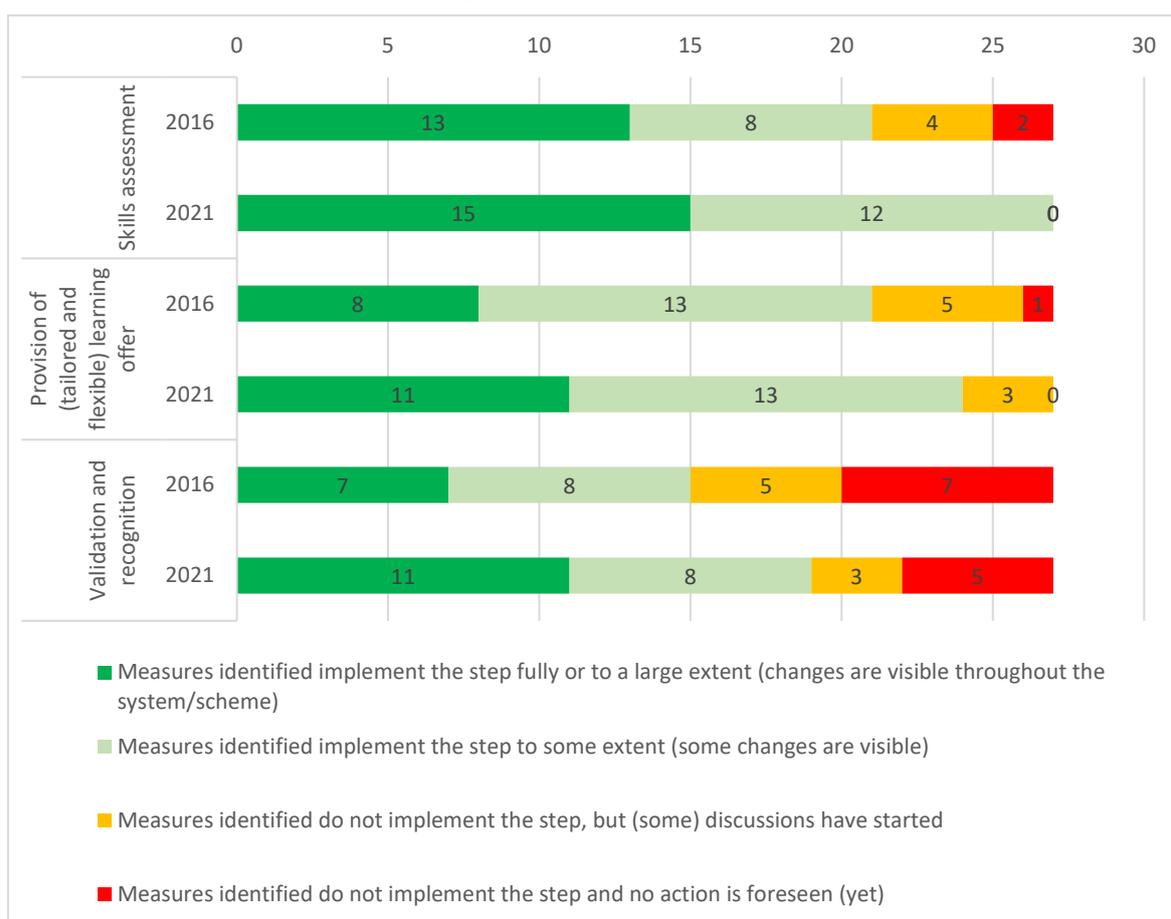
The section that follows examines the extent to which the three steps of the Recommendation have been implemented in Member States **since 2016 and until November 2021**. Figure 8 provides an overview of the number of Member States in which

⁸⁵ The in-depth mapping (provided in Annex 3) was based on a long-list of measures identified through desk research and expert input. The long list was then discussed with national authorities and the selection of measures implementing the Upskilling Pathway recommendation validated by them. Further information on the methodological approach to the mapping is provided in the methodological annex (annex 1).

⁸⁶ Current refers to measures implemented until November 2021.

measures implemented *after 2016* covered each of the three steps prescribed by the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and the extent to which they did so. This figure compares the level of implementation in 2016 (outlined in section 2.2.2) to the level of implementation in 2021 and is based on the complete in-depth mapping of 104 measures (46 implemented after 2016).

Figure 8 Degree of implementation of the three steps prescribed by the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation in EU Member States in 2016 and in 2021 (number of Member States by degree of implementation)



Source: Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures. For an explanation of the methodology used, please see Section 2.2.2 and Annex 1.

The figure shows that there has been an **increase in measures that implement each of the three steps fully or to a large extent since 2016**. The sections that follow present the degree of change in implementation against the point of comparison for 2016, for each step. This is indicated in the tables, as follows:

- '=' sign indicates that **no substantial changes** to the level of implementation of the step have been identified⁸⁷;
- '+' sign indicates that **positive changes** in relation to the level of implementation of the step have been identified since 2016.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ An '=' sign does not necessarily mean that a country has not implemented any new measure over the period 2016 onwards. It means that, even if a new measure has been implemented this is not considered to have marked a substantial improvement in relation to the country approach to a specific step of upskilling pathways.

⁸⁸ Multiple '+' signs indicate a more significant and impactful degree of change. As countries were at different levels of implementation prior to 2016, a scale from one '+' sign to up to three '+' signs is used. One '+' sign indicates that the country made some improvements on their measures; two '+' signs indicate that the country made moderate changes and

3.2.1. Skills assessment

All Member States have adopted measures implementing skills assessments. Table 3 provides an overview of the implementation of this step by country against the baseline and the expected need for change in relation to this step⁸⁹.

Measures using skills assessments were **implemented in seven countries since 2016**, all of which had a medium or high need for change at the time of adoption of the Recommendation. One country implemented new measures improving their existing skills assessment process (BE) and in six countries, skills assessment mechanisms were introduced (BG, HR, CZ, LV, MT, PL).

Table 6 Current degree of implementation of skills assessment by Member States

Country	Skills assessment	
	Baseline and expected need for change	2021 assessment
Austria	LN	=
Denmark	LN	=
Estonia	LN	=
Finland	LN	=
France	LN	=
Ireland	LN	=
Italy	LN	=
Luxembourg	LN	=
Netherlands	LN	=
Portugal	LN	=
Slovenia	LN	=
Spain	LN	=
Sweden	LN	=
BelgiumFR	MN	+
BelgiumNL	MN	+
Cyprus	MN	=
Germany	MN	=
Greece	MN	=
Hungary	MN	=
Lithuania	MN	=
Romania	MN	=
Slovakia	MN	=
Bulgaria	HN	+
Croatia	HN	++
Czechia	HN	+
Latvia	HN	+
Malta	HN	+
Poland	HN	+++

■ Measures identified implement the step fully or to a large extent (changes are visible throughout the system/measure)
■ Measures identified implement the step to some extent (some changes are visible)
■ Measures identified do not implement the step, but (some) discussions have started
■ Measures identified do not implement the step and no action is foreseen (yet)

LN = Low need for change
MN = Medium need for change

improvements; three '+' signs indicates that the country made significant improvements on their measures. This assessment was conducted on the basis of the triangulation of results from the mapping of measures, the national interviews conducted for the study and the expert assessment of the national experts.

⁸⁹ The table refers to the expected need for change assessed for this specific step, and it is not based on the overall assessment per country.

HN = High need for change

Source: Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures. For an explanation of the methodology used to come to these categorisations, please see section 2.2.2 and Annex 1.

3.2.2. Tailored provision of learning

Before 2016, about one quarter of EU Member States had not implemented any measures that included tailored provision of learning to low-skilled adults/ This situation has improved since the adoption of the Recommendation. Since 2016, **six countries have implemented the provision of a tailored learning offer**, either by introducing new measures to ensure the tailored provision of learning in their support for the low-skilled (BE, BG, MT) or by improving their existing provision of a tailored learning offer through strengthening or reforming existing policies (DK, EE, PL).

Table 7 Current degree of implementation of provision of tailored learning by Member States

Country	Provision of tailored learning offer				
	Baseline and expected need for change	2021 assessment	Tailored (2021)	Modular (2021)	Flexible (2021)
Austria	LN	=			
France	LN	=			
Germany	LN	=			
Ireland	LN	=			
Luxembourg	LN	=			
Netherlands	LN	=			
Portugal	LN	=			
Sweden	LN	=			
Croatia	MN	=			
Cyprus	MN	=			
Denmark	MN	+			
Estonia	MN	+			
Finland	MN	=			
Greece	MN	=			
Hungary	MN	=			
Latvia	MN	=			
Lithuania	MN	=			
Poland	MN	+			
Romania	MN	=			
Slovakia	MN	=			
Slovenia	MN	=			
BelgiumFR	HN	++			
BelgiumNL	HN	++			
Bulgaria	HN	+			
Czechia	HN	=			
Italy	HN	=			
Malta	HN	+			
Spain	HN	=			

■ Measures identified implement the step fully or to a large extent (changes are visible throughout the system/measure)
■ Measures identified implement the step to some extent (some changes are visible)
■ Measures identified do not implement the step, but (some) discussions have started
■ Measures identified do not implement the step and no action is foreseen (yet)

LN = Low need for change

MN = Medium need for change

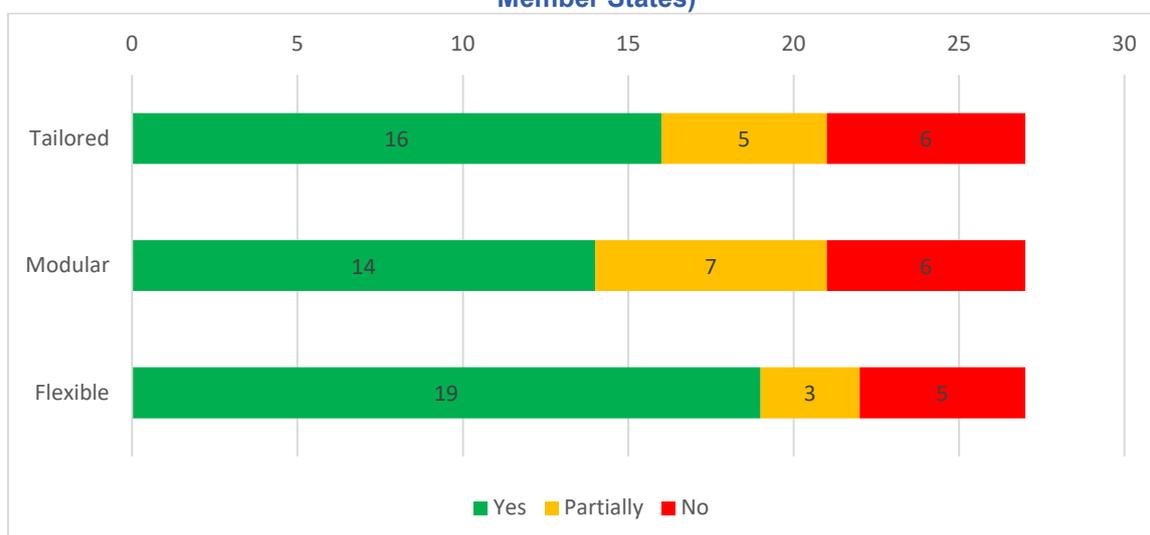
HN = High need for change

Source: Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures. For an explanation of the methodology used to come to these categorisations, please see section 2.2.2 and Annex 1.

As shown in the table above, the level of tailoring, modularisation and flexibility of learning offers varies substantially.⁹⁰ Flexibility of measures appears to be most common, with 19 Member States offering this in the measures mapped. Flexibility involves ensuring that learning can be adapted to the needs of the learner: for example, in **Cyprus**, the evening gymnasiums/lyceum for secondary general education were reformed in 2019, with the aim of implementing a new operating framework to increase flexibility and retention rates, including reducing teaching periods and introducing distance learning.

Tailored and modular offers are less common, with 16 and 14 Member States respectively offering this approach in the measures mapped⁹¹. In **Finland**, modular offers are offered with larger courses split into smaller units which allows learners feel empowered and more confident to continue their learning as they are able to experience early successes in their studies thanks to smaller units being completed quickly.⁹²

Figure 9 Degree of flexibility, modularisation and tailoring of learning offer (number of Member States)



Source: Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures. For an explanation of the methodology used to come to these categorisations, please see section 2.2.2 and Annex 1.

3.2.3. Validation and recognition of the skills developed

Validation and recognition of the skills developed through the tailored training remains the least developed among the three steps of the Recommendation. The table below provides an overview of the implementation of this step by country against the baseline and the expected need for change in relation to the validation and recognition of skills⁹³. Even though around one third of Member States have not yet implemented relevant measures to

⁹⁰ The assessment of the level of tailoring, modularisation and flexibility of learning was not available for the baseline and it was only conducted in relation to the 2021 assessment. As such, this assessment was not factored into the overall assessment of measures implementing learning provisions. The general assessment of the implementation of the step was conducted on the basis of the existence of measures (or lack of thereof) foreseeing the provision of learning. This assessment is then further qualified with information on whether the learning offer is tailored, modular and/or flexible.

⁹¹ 'Modularisation' is defined as a building blocks approach to education and training programmes / qualifications in which the content is broken down into smaller units. These smaller units – modules – may be taken on their own or combined with other modules. Modular programmes often do not have clearly defined sequencing. 'Tailored and flexible learning' offer is defined as an offer of education and training that meets the needs of an individual as identified by a skills assessment, considering as far as possible local, regional and national labour market needs.

⁹² For more examples of tailored, flexible and modular offers, please see Box 9 in Section 4.1.

⁹³ The table refers to the expected need for change assessed for this specific step, and it is not based on the overall assessment per country.

establish validation and recognition in their upskilling systems⁹⁴ some progress is evident: **eight Member States have implemented validation measures since 2016**, including five countries that have introduced systems for validation and recognition of skills where they did not exist before (BG, DE, IT, LV, SK) and three that have improved their existing systems by reforming policies (CY, EL) or introducing new measures (BE).

Table 8 Current degree of implementation of validation and recognition measures by Member States⁹⁵

Country	Validation and recognition	
	Baseline and expected need for change	2021 assessment
Austria	LN	=
Denmark	LN	=
France	LN	=
Netherlands	LN	=
Portugal	LN	=
Slovenia	LN	=
Spain	LN	=
BelgiumFR	MN	+
BelgiumNL	MN	+
Cyprus	MN	+
Estonia	MN	=
Finland	MN	=
Greece	MN	+
Lithuania	MN	=
Romania	MN	=
Sweden	MN	=
Bulgaria	HN	++
Croatia	HN	=
Czechia	HN	=
Germany	HN	+
Hungary	HN	=
Ireland	HN	=
Italy	HN	+
Latvia	HN	++
Luxembourg	HN	=
Malta	HN	=
Poland	HN	=
Slovakia	HN	+

■ Measures identified implement the step fully or to a large extent (changes are visible throughout the system/measure)
■ Measures identified implement the step to some extent (some changes are visible)
■ Measures identified do not implement the step, but (some) discussions have started
■ Measures identified do not implement the step and no action is foreseen (yet)

LN = Low need for change
MN = Medium need for change
HN = High need for change

Source: Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures. For an explanation of the methodology used to come to these categorisations, please see section 2.2.2 and Annex 1.

⁹⁴ The in-depth mapping was based on a long-list of measures identified through desk research and expert input. The long list was then discussed with national authorities and the selection of measures implementing the Upskilling Pathway recommendation validated by national authorities. The mapping does not include all validation and recognition measures existing in a Member States, but only those that the Member States recognised as implementing the Recommendation. Hence, the scope of the mapping is different than the scope of the Cedefop validation inventory and the 2020 evaluation of the Council Recommendation on validation (SWD (2020) 121 final). Further information on the methodological approach to the mapping is provided in annex 1.

⁹⁵ LN= Low need for change; MN= Medium need for change; HN= High need for change. Further explanation on the categories and methodology used is provided in section 2.2.2.

3.2.4. Integrated pathways

The aim of the Recommendation's three-step approach is to build an integrated pathway for the target group consisting of a seamless provision of services from skills assessment through to a tailored and flexible learning offer and validation of existing skills. The mapping of measures conducted for this study did not systematically examine the degree to which the three steps are integrated into one pathway through each measure. However, around 35% of the measures mapped provide all three steps, suggesting that there is still room for increasing the integration between the steps across upskilling measures. Furthermore, evidence from the qualitative research conducted for the study (interviews, case studies, surveys and expert meetings) shows that even when the three steps are integrated in one measure, this does not always translate into a seamless and comprehensive pathway across the steps *for the user*. This is further explored in section 4, Q1.3 of this study.

3.3. Summary of evolution since 2016

On the basis of the analysis presented in the sections above, the in-depth mapping of relevant measures and the key quantitative indicators relevant to upskilling pathways, the table below provides an overview of the **overall status of implementation** of the three steps and the evolution in implementation since 2016, as well as the change in the indicators between 2016 and 2021.

Table 9 Status of relevant indicators and implementation of the three steps in 2021, grouped by need for change in 2016

Overall need for change	Country	% change - Low-qualified 25–64-year-olds – 2016 to 2021	% change - Participation of low-qualified in education and training 2016 - 2021	Skills assessment	Provision of tailored learning	Validation and recognition
Low need	Austria	-9.0	13.7	=	=	=
	Denmark	-9.1	-24.4	=	+	=
	Estonia	-7.9	72.0	=	+	=
	Finland	-6.7	57.4	=	=	=
	France	-18.7	-44.0	=	=	=
	Netherlands	-15.3	51.6	=	=	=
	Sweden	-16.7	37.3	=	=	=
Medium need	Germany	12.6	-10.8	=	=	+
	Latvia	-16.1	13.3 ⁹⁶	+	=	++
	Lithuania	-5.6	12.5	=	=	=
	Luxembourg	-8.8	-1.4	=	=	=
	Portugal	-23.7	0.0	=	=	=
	Slovenia	-31.5	41.7	=	=	=
High need	BelgiumFR	-25.7	42.9	+	++	+
	BelgiumNL			+	++	+
	Bulgaria	-6.2	20.0 ⁹⁷	+	+	++
	Croatia	-26.0	-25.0	++	=	=
	Cyprus	-24.9	-6.7	=	=	+
	Czechia	-15.2	-26.1	+	=	=
	Greece	-28.4	-42.9	=	=	+
	Hungary	-17.5	0.0	=	=	=
	Ireland	-32.8	73.9	=	=	=
	Italy	-6.5	4.3	=	=	+
	Malta	-24.1	42.9	+	+	=
	Poland	-21.8	22.2	+++	+	=
	Romania	-18.5	266.7 ⁹⁸	=	=	=
	Slovakia	-17.3	n/a	=	=	+
Spain	-13.4	52.9	=	=	=	

■	Measures identified implement the step fully or to a large extent (changes are visible throughout the system/measure)
■	Measures identified implement the step to some extent (some changes are visible)
■	Measures identified do not implement the step, but (some) discussions have started
■	Measures identified do not implement the step and no action is foreseen (yet)

Notes: '=' sign indicates that no substantial changes to the level of implementation of the step have been identified; '+' sign indicates that positive changes in relation to the level of implementation of the step have been identified since 2016. As countries were at different level of implementation prior to 2016, as indicated by the use of four categories (i.e. Measures implement the step fully or to a large extent; Measures do not implement the step and no action is foreseen; etc.), countries that underwent major changes in their approach to the three steps moving them across more than one category are marked by multiple '+' signs. One '+' sign indicates that the country made some improvements on their measures; two '+' signs indicate that the country made moderate changes and improvements; three '+' signs indicates that the country made significant improvements on their measures. A maximum of three '+' signs were used. This assessment was conducted on the basis of the triangulation of results from the mapping of measures, the national interviews conducted for the study and the expert assessment of the national experts.

Source: Ecorys/3s in-depth mapping of relevant measures. For a full explanation of the methodology used to come to these categorisations, please see section 2.2.2 and Annex 1.

96 Data for 2019 was used to replace missing 2021 data

97 Data for 2017 was used to replace missing 2016 data

98 Data for 2015 was used to replace missing 2016 data

The table shows the following:

- In the group of countries where **low need for change in 2016** was identified, there have been limited changes to the provision of the three steps of the Recommendation in the upskilling offer (in **two of seven Member States**, DK and EE). However, positive progress was recorded in the key indicators, as the share of low qualified decreased in all Member States in this time, whilst the participation rate of low qualified increased in all Member States but two (DK and FR).
- In the group of countries that had **medium need for change** in 2016, changes to the provision of the three steps of the Recommendation were identified in **two of the six countries** (DE and LV). However, there was positive progress on the indicator of the share of low-qualified which decreased in all Member States but one during this time (DE). More mixed progress was recorded in participation rates of the low qualified which increased in three (LV, LU, SI), stayed the same in one (PT) and decreased in two Member States (DE, LU).
- In the group of countries that had **high need for change**, changes to the implementation of the three step approach have been identified in the majority of Member States: changes took place in **10 Member States out of the 14** that had high need (BE, BG, HR, CY, CZ, EL, IT, MT, PL, SK), though the degree of change varies. There was also positive progress on the indicator of the share of low-qualified which decreased in all Member States in that time. Changes in the participation rate of the low qualified is more mixed however: it increased in eight Member States (BE, BG, IE, IT, MT, PL, RO, ES), decreased in four (CY, CZ, EL, HR) and stayed the same in one (HU).⁹⁹

In summary, there are **positive quantitative trends** in the relevant indicators to upskilling pathways from 2016 to 2021. The size of the potential group in need of upskilling has become smaller across the EU, with the share of the low-qualified decreasing in all Member States, except Germany. There are also **somewhat positive trends in implementation efforts**. The majority (10 out of 14) of the Member States that were in high need of implementing the Recommendation implemented changes to their provision of support of the three steps. However, the degree of changes varies. There are 13 Member States that did not implement changes to their upskilling approach in line with the Recommendation.

The link between the progress on the quantitative indicators and the measures implemented in response to the Recommendation will be further explored in section 4 of the study.

⁹⁹ Data for SK is not available for 2021.

4. Evaluation findings

4.1. Effectiveness

*Q1.1 To what extent have the Member States **facilitated access to upskilling pathways for adults with low level of skills, knowledge and competences** to: a) acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence; and/or b) acquire a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences, relevant for the labour market and active participation in society by making progress towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4?*

Key findings

The evidence shows that **Member States have made some efforts to facilitate** access to upskilling pathways since the Recommendation was adopted. 10 Member States out of the 14 that had a high need for change in 2016 – based on their existing adult learning provision and the size and needs of the target group – implemented change in response to the Recommendation. However, of the 13 Member States where no change in response to the Recommendation was identified, four Member States (HU, IE, RO, ES) had high need for change and three had medium need for change in 2016 (LT, LU, SI), showing that even in countries where change to upskilling pathways in line with the Recommendation would have been needed, change has not always occurred.

The indicators relevant to upskilling pathways also show moderate progress: since 2016, there has been an overall improvement in the educational attainment level of adults across the EU, with the share of low-qualified decreasing in all Member States (except Germany) in that time and the EU average falling from 23.4% to 20.7%. However, **there is limited evidence which shows that this improvement is the result of upskilling pathways implemented in response to the Recommendation**. Long-term trends show that higher educational attainment levels are due to long-standing improvements of initial education. The direct macro effects of the measures taken in response to the Recommendation will only become fully apparent in the longer term, given that individual upskilling journeys usually take a number of years to complete.

Nevertheless, on the **micro level**, progress on the objectives of the Recommendation is evident: results from evaluations conducted of specific measures/programmes linked to the Recommendation show that the qualification levels of adults that participated in these measures increased, with a positive effect on their employability and employment also recorded. Participation in upskilling measures introduced since the Recommendation is held by stakeholders as having contributed to an improvement in various areas that are linked to social participation and inclusion, including gaining more confidence and improved participation in society overall. Particularly in countries that had high need for change in 2016, stakeholders confirmed that the **Recommendation has contributed to highlighting the challenge of the low-skilled**, revealing issues with current learning provision and setting out a way forward for improving the upskilling provision for the target group.

This discrepancy between progress on the macro-level due to the Recommendation (limited) and progress on the micro-level due to the Recommendation (more evident) cannot be explained fully by the results of this study. However, it may suggest that measures to facilitate access to upskilling pathways are either **taking place on too small a scale** to be reflected on the macro-level or have **not been implemented for a long enough period of time** for their results to be reflected in the quantitative data trends.

Facilitating access to upskilling pathways

The study has found that Member States have somewhat facilitated access to upskilling pathways since the Recommendation was adopted but changes have not been exhaustive and have also not occurred in all Member States where they would have been necessary. Table 7 below presents an overview of the levels of implementation of Upskilling Pathways for all countries in the EU27, before and after its introduction in 2016, based on the mapping presented in section 3.2. The ‘coefficient of implementation’ is calculated based on the degree of implementation of each of the three steps prescribed by the Recommendation (see section 2.2.2 and section 3.2 for a full overview). A numerical value is assigned to each level of implementation:

- Measures identified implement the step fully or to a large extent (changes are visible throughout the system): 0.33
- Measures identified implement the step to some extent (some changes are visible): 0.25
- Measures identified do not implement the step, but (some) discussions have started: 0.17
- Measures identified do not implement the step and no action is foreseen (yet): 0.08

The coefficient can range from a minimum of 0.24, where no significant measures implementing any of the three steps were identified, to a maximum of 1, where measures identified implement all steps fully or to a large extent¹⁰⁰. Table 7 presents these coefficients before and after the introduction of the Recommendation and provides an overall **assessment of the degree of change** as follows:

- ‘Significant change’ (change range between 0.25 and 0.334) indicates that new measures have been implemented that improve either the degree of provision of all three steps or that fully introduce one step where there was previously no provision of that step;
- ‘Moderate change’ (change of 0.16) indicates a change in the degree of provision of two steps or the full introduction or change in the degree of provision of one step where there was previously no provision of that step;
- ‘Modest change’ (change of 0.08) indicates limited change in the degree of provision of one step only;
- ‘No change’ (change of 0) indicates that no new measures or no measures making significant changes to existing ones were identified.

This degree of change is also compared to the expected need for change in 2016 (as outlined in section 2.2.2. Table 7 shows the following:

Based on this methodology, **change was identified in 14 Member States between 2016 and 2021** to implement the upskilling approach defined in the Recommendation.

- Significant change since 2016 in their upskilling approach was identified in four of these countries (BE, PL, BG, LV) with a further three recording moderate change (EL, HR, MT). Seven Member States implemented modest change (EE, SK, CZ, CY, DK, DE, IT).

¹⁰⁰ For a full explanation of the methodology used, please refer to Annex 1.

- Change (modest, moderate, or significant) took place in 10 of the 14 Member States where there was high need for change in 2016 (BE, BG, CY, CZ, EL, IT, HR, MT, PL, SK).

No change was identified in 13 Member States¹⁰¹ to better align with the Recommendation between 2016 and 2021 (AT, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, PT, RO, SI, NL, SE).

- Five of these Member States (AT, FI, FR, NL, SE) had a low need for change in 2016 as their upskilling approach was already largely aligned with the Recommendation, their shares of low-skilled were low and/or their participation rates in education and training were high.
- Four Member States that did not implement change to increase alignment with the Recommendation (HU, IE, RO, ES) had high need for change and four had medium need for change in 2016 (LT, LU, PT, SI).

Table 10 Degree of change to upskilling pathways measures in Member States between 2016 and 2020, compared to the need for change in 2016

Country Code	Coefficient of implementation: 2016	Coefficient of implementation: 2021	Change	Degree of change	Need for change in 2016
BE	0.583	0.917	0.334	Significant change	High need
PL	0.417	0.750	0.333	Significant change	High need
BG	0.500	0.833	0.333	Significant change	High need
LV	0.500	0.750	0.250	Significant change	Medium need
EL	0.750	0.917	0.167	Moderate change	High need
HR	0.417	0.583	0.166	Moderate change	High need
MT	0.417	0.583	0.166	Moderate change	High need
EE	0.833	0.917	0.084	Modest change	Low need
SK	0.583	0.667	0.084	Modest change	High need
CZ	0.417	0.500	0.083	Modest change	High need
CY	0.750	0.833	0.083	Modest change	High need
DK	0.917	1.000	0.083	Modest change	Low need
DE	0.750	0.833	0.083	Modest change	Medium need
IT	0.667	0.750	0.083	Modest change	High need
AT	1.000	1.000	0.000	No change	Low need
FI	0.833	0.833	0.000	No change	Low need
FR	1.000	1.000	0.000	No change	Low need
HU	0.667	0.667	0.000	No change	High need
IE	0.833	0.833	0.000	No change	High need
LT	0.750	0.750	0.000	No change	Medium need
LU	0.750	0.750	0.000	No change	Medium need

¹⁰¹ No change' indicates that no significant changes to align the country's existing approach to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation were identified. It does not mean that no changes took place at all in the country's upskilling approach. Full explanation of the methodology is included in Annex 1.

PT	1.000	1.000	0.000	No change	Medium need
RO	0.750	0.750	0.000	No change	High need
SI	0.917	0.917	0.000	No change	Medium need
NL	1.000	1.000	1.000	No change	Low need
ES	0.833	0.833	0.000	No change	High need
SE	0.917	0.917	0.000	No change	Low need

Source: Ecorys/3s, 2022. 'No change' indicates that no significant changes to align the country's existing approach to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation were identified. It does not mean that no changes took place at all in the country's upskilling approach. Full explanation of the methodology is included in Annex 1.

Table 11 Summary of degree of change 2016-2021 compared to need for change in 2016

Need for change in 2016	Degree of change 2016 -2021			
	Significant change	Moderate change	Modest change	No change
High need for change	BE, PL, BG	EL HR, MT	SK, CZ, CY, IT	HU, IE, RO, ES
Medium need for change	LV		DE	LT, LU, PT, SI
Low need for change			EE, DK,	AT, FI, FR, NL, SE

Source: Ecorys/3s, 2022. 'No change' indicates that no significant changes to align the country's existing approach to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation were identified. It does not mean that no changes took place at all in the country's upskilling approach. Full explanation of the methodology is included in Annex 1.

These results shows that even if change has not always occurred where it would have been needed, **some efforts to facilitate access to upskilling opportunities for low-skilled adults in line with the Recommendation have occurred since 2016**. Other data collected in this study confirm this. Adult learning stakeholders consulted for the study have overall noted positive progress in facilitating access to upskilling for low-skilled adults in line with the Recommendation. The majority of respondents to the survey of organisations coordinating and implementing upskilling initiatives (71 out of 101 - 70%) agreed that adults with low levels of skills have had greater access to adult learning measures over the past five years to a great or a fairly large extent. The public consultation results echo this, with 65% of respondents (31 out of 48) assessing the effectiveness of the features of the Council Recommendation in helping low-skilled adults take part in adult learning measures as very or mostly effective.

Positive progress is also evidenced in monitoring data of specific upskilling measures and programmes across a range of Member States, gathered during the case studies and the mapping of initiatives. These show that participation in adult learning programmes has increased over the last years, even in cases where significant change to upskilling approaches to align with the Recommendation were not evidenced. Examples from Italy, France, Hungary, Austria, Spain, and Germany are included in the box below.

Box 1 Examples of increasing participation in adult learning programmes

In **Italy**, there were almost three times more participants in the *Centres for Adult Education* in 2017/2018 (224,799) than in 2015/2016 (82,863 individuals), with 68% taking first level courses and learning of the Italian language.

In **France**, in 2019, there were 100,000 more entrants to vocational training courses than in 2017 and just over 100,000 entrants in new programmes to support the least qualified unemployed in accessing training, whilst the *Plan for Investment in Skills* supported around one million beneficiaries between 2018 and 2020.

In **Hungary**, the measure '*Training of the low-skilled and those employed in public work schemes*' supported more than 100,000 participants to access training between 2015 and 2021. 68,000 successfully completed the training, of which 64,000 were adults with a low educational level.

In **Austria**, entrants per semester in the measure *Courses for the development of basic skills (Basisbildungskurse)* increased by 60% between the first funding period (2012-2014) and the second funding period (2015-2017) from between 2,500 and 3,000 to 4,500 entrants per semester. Increases were also seen in the take up of educational leave wage replacement payment, rising by 40% from 8925 in 2015 to 12579 in 2020.¹⁰²

In **Spain**, the *Aula Mentor* programme which started in 2009 includes the provision of infrastructure for the delivery of non-formal distance learning courses for adults. Since 2015, it has seen an increase of 65 more Aula Mentors, with almost 2,000 more students enrolled.

In **France**, the French Plan for Investment in Skills (2018-2022) supported around one million beneficiaries between 2018 and 2020 to increase their basic skills. This has led to an increase in the rate of access to training for jobseekers, with 1 in 6 jobseekers accessing training in 2020 compared to 1 in 10 in 2015. The plan was also found to have widened the variety of training courses and has allowed for innovation (EUR 800 million allocated to innovative projects) and more individualised training and support.

In **Germany**, a counterfactual impact evaluation of the *Bildungsprämie* which allows specific vulnerable groups to receive funding to cover part of their education and training costs, found the effects of the scheme on participation in learning was clearly positive. One third of the participants re-applied for the grant in the following year and a mobilisation effect concerning further subsequent training activities of the participants was also identified¹⁰³.

Even if gradual, however, this progress in increasing the participation of adults in upskilling measures was clearly impacted in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic. 13 Member States recorded lower participation rates in 2020 than in 2016. Interview and case study findings confirmed that adult learning measures saw a fall in participation in 2020, due to companies having to "*focus on survival rather than upskilling*" as well as the temporary shutdown of education and training institutions. Examples of this are included in the Box below.

Box 2 Examples of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on participation in upskilling measures

In **Bulgaria**, the results of an evaluation of the measures '*Vouchers for employees*'¹⁰⁴ shows that despite good implementation of the measure by the end of 2018, its

102 Please see the Case study for Austria for further details.

103 Kantar, Public Division, München., Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb) GmbH, Nürnberg, & Institut für Angewandte Wirtschaftsforschung. (2019). Evaluation des Bundesprogramms Bildungsprämie (BIP) – Endbericht 2019. Retrieved from München: https://www.f-bb.de/fileadmin/user_upload/1909_BiP_Evaluation_Endbericht_final.pdf

104 MLSP, Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of measures to support employed persons under Priority Axis 1 of the Operational Program "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020 Final report. <https://esf.bg/otsenka/>

implementation at the end of 2021 was below target, with performance and result indicators for those with secondary and lower education met only at about 40%. The evaluation concludes that the spread of Covid-19 from the beginning of 2020, is the primary cause for this as it hindered the on-site implementation of educational courses.

In **Ireland**, participation in the Irish *Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)* reduced by 14% from 2019 to 2020. Aontas, the adult learning organisation in Ireland, reported that there has been a 24% reduction in participation by Travellers and Roma in education and training, a 15% reduction by refugees and asylum Seekers and by people over 50 years and a 14% reduction in participation by people with disabilities¹⁰⁵.

Increased levels of skills

As seen in Section 3.1, the available comparable indicators on the level of basic skills of the EU adult population suggest a **slight upward trend in digital skills levels but not one that is widespread or considerable**. Furthermore, stark differences with the equivalent shares of medium- and high-qualified remain and five Member States continue to have a share of low-qualified with low or no digital skills above 90% (BG, CY, HR, LV, SK). This mixed picture in terms of progress is reflected in answers to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, with just over half of respondents (51%) stating that the Recommendation has contributed only to a small extent to changes in levels of literacy, numeracy, and digital skills.

Nonetheless, individuals participating in measures do note the impact of participation on their skills: in the survey of adult learners, when asked to describe the benefits of participating in adult learning programmes, 35% of respondents (11 out of 33) referred to benefits related to learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills in general, for example, the benefit of ‘in-depth learning’, acquiring basic skills, improving and expanding existing skills, or ‘feeling more educated’. 32% (10 out of 33) of respondents mentioned benefits related to digital skills, such as learning how to use a computer, a smartphone and getting acquainted with Microsoft Office.

Increased qualification levels

There is currently no data source available which would allow to estimate the contributions of the policies taken in response to the Recommendation to the stock of qualification levels. Information from available sources¹⁰⁶ show that adult learning – in the long run – contributes considerably to the acquisition of a medium level of qualification. In 2019, according to a special LFS data extraction, 7.5 % of adults (25-64) holding an ISCED level 3 qualification as their highest level of attainment had acquired this level after their 25th birthday¹⁰⁷. Values for this indicator are particularly high in Finland (32.5%), the Netherlands (28.7), Denmark (26.3) and Portugal (22.1)¹⁰⁸. The direct effects of the measures taken in response to the

105 Aontas 2021 What is Happening in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Ireland?

<https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Policy/What%20is%20Happening%20in%20ALE%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

106 AES 2016, PIAAC 2012, 2015; LFS 2019. See Desjardins, R. (2020). PIAAC Thematic Review on Adult Learning.

Paris: OECD Publishing. OECD Education Working Papers No. 223, for LFS;

<https://doi.org/doi:https://doi.org/10.1787/864d2484-en>; European Commission, E. E. (2021). Adult education and training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf; for AES: Hefler, G.; Steinheimer, E. and Wulz, J. (2017). Lebenslanges Lernen zwischen Konfliktaustragung und Institutionalisierung – Das Beispiel des

Zweiten Bildungswegs. *Magazin erwachsenenbildung.at*. Das Fachmedium für Forschung, Praxis und Diskurs, Vol. 2017,

No. 31, pp. 18, No 4. http://www.erwachsenenbildung.at/magazin/17-32/07_hefler_steinheimer_wulz.pdf

107 Table 1.12 in European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). Adult education and training in Europe Building

inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Retrieved from Luxembourg:

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf - page 31

108 see also Figure A2_24 for a related indicator expressed as the proportion of all 25-64 year olds

Recommendation on the proportion of the low-qualified in 2021, however, are expected to be too small to be directly measured by any sample-based survey and will become fully accessible only at a later stage, given that individual upskilling journeys are often a multi-year process with a change in the qualification level achieved at a later stage. Given this, **the findings do not strongly point to a widespread or significant increase in qualification levels of the low-qualified following the introduction of the Recommendation.** Whilst the numbers of adults with low-educational attainment have decreased since 2016, the longer-term data (as outlined in section 2.2.1 and 3.1) show that this has been a steady trend since 2011 and that there does not appear to be any substantial change in this trend after the introduction of the Upskilling Pathways as compared to pre-2016. Furthermore, the decrease likely also reflects the recent effects of measures combating early school leaving as well as the measures taken within the Youth Guarantee; while upskilling measures have contributed to the decline, their impact relative to the effects from the aforementioned policies is hard to establish based on the available cross-sectional data.

The interrupted time series analysis (ITSA) (see Annex 9) aims to further explore whether the changes in the indicators relevant to upskilling pathways and the changes in the implementation of the three-step approach in Member States can be linked, in order to provide a further insight into the extent to which Upskilling Pathways has increased the qualification levels of the target group as intended. The analysis looks at whether the numbers of low-qualified have evolved as could have been expected in 2016 based on trends in the development of the indicator on a country-by-country level from 2008¹⁰⁹. Overall, **evidence of any impact of the policy measures introduced from 2016 on the indicators is not strong.** Results were statistically significant only for four Member States and only in one of them do they show a possible link between upskilling measures introduced and an improvement in the indicators: the rate of decrease in the size of the low-qualified population in **Belgium** was more rapid or steep than the model predicted, and Belgium was also one of the four Member States where significant change in upskilling measures was identified through the mapping. In the case of Romania, the model actually predicted an increase in the post-intervention size of the inactive population, while the observed trends show a steady decline in the size of this population – however, no change was implemented in response to the Recommendation in Romania. In Finland and Sweden, the rate of decrease in the size of the population was not as rapid or steep as the model predicted. Again, no change in response to the Recommendation was implemented in these countries.

Nevertheless, specific **results from individual upskilling measures/programmes** linked to the Recommendation – the majority of which focus on increasing the level of qualification – show that there have been increases in qualification levels among low-skilled adults. Examples of this are presented in the Box below.

Box 3 Examples of measures that increase the level of qualification

In **Portugal**, one of the Member States with the highest shares of adults with potential for upskilling, the *Qualifica* programme has a high success rate, with around 96% of participants achieving a certification. Monitoring and results data from specific programmes was outlined in the case studies (see Annex 4).

In the *Aula Mentor* programme in **Spain**, 96% of students enrolled in 2019 (515,596) attained a certification.

109 As explained in Annex 10, confounding factors at least partly explain any relationship identified between the intervention and these outcomes, so these results cannot be interpreted as a causal impact of the Recommendation.

In **Bulgaria**, the vouchers scheme for employed persons established in 2016 supported around 48,000 people to obtain a qualification through training which was co-financed at a 50% rate through the vouchers.

In **France**, the proportion of training courses under the French *Plan for Investment in Skills* (2018-2022) leading to recognised certification has increased for all three years. Certification success is achieved for 80% of participating trainees.

Increased employability

There is **some evidence of positive increases in employability of the low-qualified, though again, this is not widespread or systematic** across the EU27 and cannot be attributed to the Recommendation. Following the introduction of the Recommendation, unemployment rates continued to fall across all levels of education but did so particularly for the low-qualified. The results of the ITSA do not suggest that this decrease has been greater than what could have been expected: only in two Member States has a possible link between the indicators and implementation of policy measures been identified: in **Czechia**, where the rate of decrease in the unemployment rate of the low-qualified was faster or steeper than the ITS model predicted; and in **Cyprus** where the model predicted a modest increase in the unemployment rate, while the observed trend was one of a decrease. Both Member States implemented some changes in their upskilling approaches.

Nevertheless, results from evaluations of measures linked to the Recommendation show participation in upskilling measures of low-skilled adults has a positive effect on employability and employment. Examples are included in Box 5 below. When asked about the degree of benefits of adult learning measures introduced in the last five years, 49% of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations rated 'gaining access to employment' as mostly or totally achieved.

Increased level of participation in society and social inclusion

Whilst this is a challenging indicator to measure, the evidence shows that there has been **no notable widespread increase in level of participation in society and social inclusion** of the target group since the 2016 Recommendation. This is evident firstly from the data on the share of the low-qualified that are inactive. Whilst the size of the low-qualified inactive population fell between 2016 and 2020 across EU27, this was a clear continuation of downward trend from before the intervention, across the quarters between 2008-2016. The interrupted time series analysis shows that in two Member States, **Denmark** and **Spain** the rate of decrease in the size of the inactive population was in fact slower or less steep than predicted by the model. The only Member State where the decrease was faster than predicted was **Romania**. Results for remaining Member States were not statistically significant.

Nonetheless, on the micro level, **participation in upskilling measures introduced since the Recommendation has contributed to an improvement in various areas that are linked to social participation and inclusion**. 'Gaining improved participation in society' was the most selected benefit of adult learning measures of the last five years by respondents to the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, 'gaining more confidence' was selected as mostly or largely achieved by 51% respondents (the highest share across all benefits listed) whilst 43% of respondents indicated that improved participation was also mostly or largely achieved. Impact on earnings can also be seen from participation in adult learning measures which in turn has an impact of social inclusion. An evaluation of the *Komvux* programme in **Sweden** showed that adult education through the programme is associated with positive effects on wage income, with increases on average by about 4-5 percent per additional academic year (see Annex 4).

Q1.2(a) *To what extent have Member States identified priority target groups and economic sectors for the delivery of upskilling pathways? Were the most in need and disadvantaged groups properly targeted (e.g., persons with migrant background, Roma, persons with disabilities, persons with a minority racial or ethnic background, other vulnerable groups, etc.)?*

Key findings

All Member States have identified priority target groups for upskilling pathways.

However, Member States have remained broad in their definition of the priority target groups of upskilling measures: around 45% of the measures mapped in-depth identify the low-skilled as their target, 40% specify the target group in terms of employment status (with a balanced split between the unemployed and employed), and 25% of measures specifically refer to the inactive as a target group. The majority of mapped measures cover all age groups.

Vulnerable groups are targeted by Member States' initiatives within these broader groups. Long-term unemployed, older workers, people with disabilities, nationals with a migrant background or third country nationals are the groups most often targeted. Evidence shows **that Member States have generally targeted those most in need of support**, though some groups emerged as requiring further attention, including employed workers with low skills, older workers, women, and refugees or newly arrived migrants.

However, there is evidence from the study that even though the right target groups have been identified, **challenges remain in effectively reaching them**. These include lack of awareness of opportunities amongst the group itself, financial barriers to participation, and stigmatisation and low motivation of the target group.

The study shows that **all Member States have identified priority target groups** for upskilling pathways. This is confirmed in the mapping where every measure mapped in-depth had a specified target group, and further confirmed by survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, where only 7% of responses (8 out of 108) indicated that no priority target group was defined. It is clear, however, that **Member States have remained broad in their definition of the priority target groups** of upskilling measures. Results from the mapping of measures highlight this, as follows:

- Around 45% of the measures mapped in-depth identify the **low-skilled** as their primary target, namely individuals with low basic skills. This tends to be defined as adults with ISCED levels 0-2/3. There are only a few examples of measures that define the low-skilled based on criteria beyond low educational attainment (as detailed in the box below). The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations suggests that the share of measures that target this broad group is even higher: people with low levels of basic skills were selected by 71% of respondents as the priority target group of adult learning measures.
- Around 40% of measures specify the target group in terms of **employment status** with a balanced split between the unemployed and employed. The majority of Member States cover both the unemployed and the employed low-skilled across all the relevant upskilling pathways measures implemented.
- 25% of measures specifically refer to the **inactive** as a target group.
- The majority of mapped measures cover **all age groups** that fall under the working age population and do not stipulate a specific age subgroup within this. If a more specific age subgroup is stipulated, this is either **young people** or **older workers** (most

commonly defined as above 54 years old), with a relative balance between these two age groups targeted across the measures.

Box 4 Examples of initiatives that define the low-skilled beyond low educational attainment

The **Polish** initiative *Szanza* stipulates that the target group is “25 + adults with basic skills below level 3 of the Polish *qualification* frameworks, regardless of their employment and education.

The **Danish** adult vocational training programmes target both low-skilled and skilled workers in particular, but are open to all citizens, irrespective of educational background.

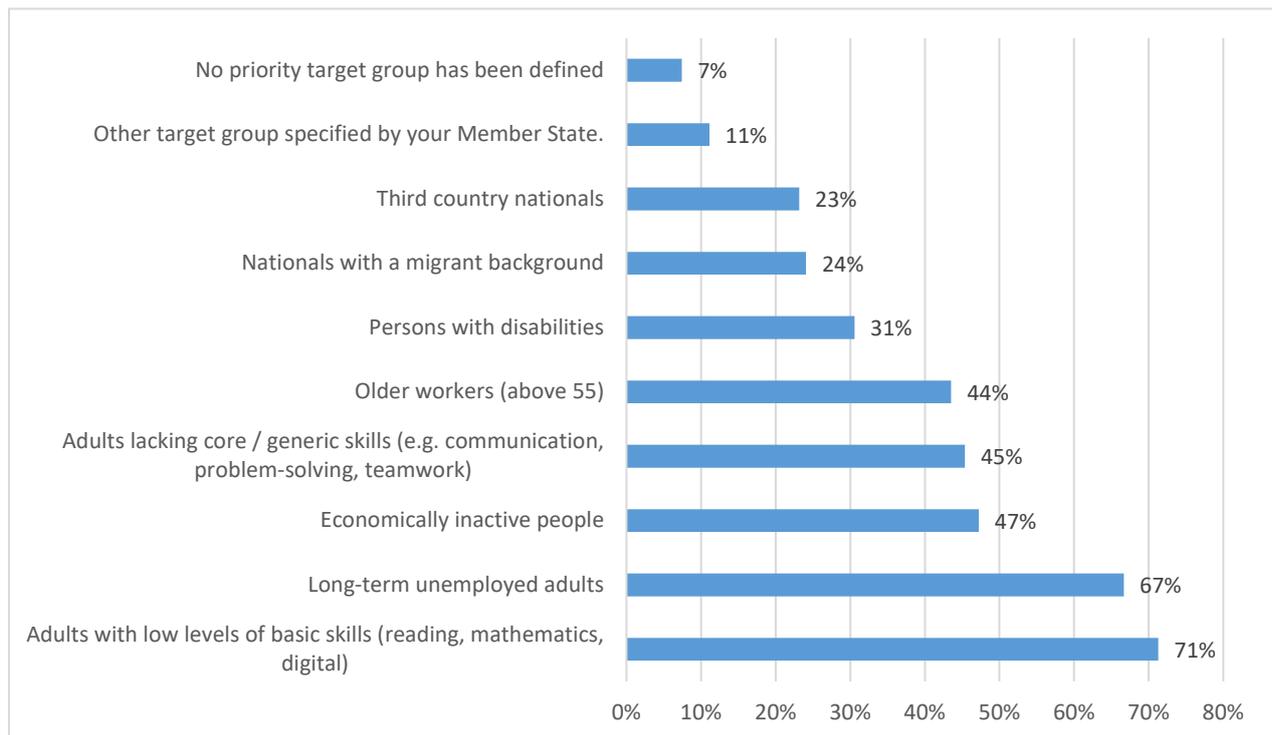
Vulnerable groups are targeted by Member States’ initiatives within these broader groups. Long-term unemployed, older workers, people with disabilities, nationals with a migrant background or third country nationals are the groups most often targeted according to the mapping and as confirmed by the interviews, the results of the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations (see) and the case studies (see Table below).

Table 12 Vulnerable groups targeted in mapped measures

Vulnerable group	Member States with mapped measures specifically targeting the group
Migrants and refugees	AT, BE, DE, ES, IE, IT, LU, MT, PL, SE
People with disabilities	AT, BE, BG, DE, IE, IT, LV, PL, RO, SI
Older workers	BE, BG, DE, LT, LU, IT, PL, RO, SI
Women	AT, BE, HU, IT, RO, SI
Long-term unemployed	AT, BG, FR, HU, IE, LT, RO
Roma	ES, HU, RO, SI, IE
Early school leavers	CY, CZ, IE, SI
Rural areas	FR, LV, PL, RO
Lone parents	BE, IE
Prisoners	BE, ES, IT

Source: Results of the mapping task, Ecorys and 3s

Figure 10 Priority groups targeted by adult learning measures; results from the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations



Source: Ecorys/3s 2022

Through this prioritising of more vulnerable groups within the broader cohort of the low-skilled, evidence shows that **Member States have targeted those most in need of support**. The vast majority of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations considered that the priority target groups listed were indeed those most in need/disadvantaged to a fairly large or a great extent. The interviews also confirm that whilst measures responding to the Recommendation address the low-skilled in general, this has not prohibited, where needed, a targeting of those most in need of support. However, the study did identify **some groups that have not been adequately targeted in upskilling measures** which are listed below:

- **Employed workers with low skills:** In **Ireland**, several stakeholders pointed out that some sectors have a high proportion of low-qualified workers, including for example the meat processing and agriculture sectors, who are not being addressed effectively by upskilling pathways measures in the country as they are in employment. In **Czechia**, stakeholders pointed out that the high levels of employment in the country may mask the level of upskilling needs: an estimated 48% of people in Czechia with low qualifications are employed meaning that upskilling measures that focus only on the unemployed risk leaving out a key cohort of low-qualified workers.
- **Older workers:** In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations older workers were most selected as the group that should have been targeted by upskilling measures since 2016 but was not (24% of respondents). Even though the mapping of measures conducted for this study shows that measures in nine Member States target older workers (see Table 9), the survey results suggest that this is not being done to an adequate degree. This perception of a gap in the targeting of older workers may be particularly due to the recent impact of the pandemic on the labour market which has revealed the extent to which older employed individuals are lacking the digital skills that have been needed to work and learn remotely and are thus in need of further support.
- **Women:** As shown in section 2.2.1, when it comes to participation in education and training, women are at a disadvantage compared to men. The unemployment rate of

low-qualified women in 2016 was 18.1% in 2016 compared to that of men at 16.7%. Significant discrepancies (more than five percentage points) are particularly evident in **Spain** (8 percentage points) **Greece** (7.6 percentage points), and Sweden (7.1 percentage points). However, very few Member States have particularly **targeted** women in their upskilling measures. This is evidenced in the mapping where only four measures out of 58 specifically referred to women as their target group.

- **Refugees or newly arrived migrants:** Even though the mapping of measures showed that refugees or migrants are targeted in upskilling measures from 10 Member States (see Table 9), there were a few reports from stakeholders consulted during the study that this is not being done enough. For example, in **Estonia**, the case study reported little evidence of systematic effective targeting of refugees or newly arrived migrants even though this would be warranted in terms of needs of the population.

There is clear evidence from the study that, even though as a whole the right target groups have been identified, **challenges remain in actually effectively reaching them** with upskilling measures. The following barriers emerged in effectively reaching target groups:

- **Lack of awareness of opportunities amongst the group itself.** In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, lack of awareness of upskilling opportunities was selected by 81% of respondents as an obstacle to upskilling opportunities to a great or fairly large extent, with 80% also considering that effective communication on the benefits of upskilling pathways was also an obstacle to a great or a fairly large extent. 63% of respondents to the survey of organisations representing low-skilled considered that adults with low levels of basic skills were aware of adult learning opportunities only to a small extent or not at all, with this share rising to 78% when considering the specific target group of third country nationals.
- **Financial barriers:** The lack of paid learning leave is seen as a barrier particularly with low-skilled workers. Unpaid participation in programmes/training may also seem less attractive to target groups that can get paid employment. In several countries, financial barriers were mentioned as posing a particular obstacle to engaging the target group in validation.
 - In **Poland**, the number of consulted persons in the *Information and Vocational Guidance Centres* gradually decreased, linked to the fact that the service costs money.
 - In **Bulgaria**, an evaluation of the ‘*Vouchers for employees*’ measure shows that the increase in co-financing of the trainings by participants sharply reduced their interest in the measure with a significant decrease in the demand for vouchers after the change. In the survey of organisations representing the low-skilled, financial support (e.g. covering travel and education expenses, financial allowance throughout the training programme, social benefits etc.) were most frequently mentioned as the key incentive that would encourage increased participation in adult learning.
- **Stigma/motivation of the target group.** Qualitative evidence from the interviews indicates that the stigma of being an adult that needs to return to school tends to reduce individuals’ motivation to engage and stay engaged in measures: Findings also show that the target group may have had bad experiences at school, thus stopping them from engaging with adult learning.
- **Digitalisation:** The global pressures of digitalisation and automation also emerged as an obstacle in reaching the target group, largely because these pressures have greatly increased the size of the target group. An interviewee stated that the challenge now is

that *'it is not just low-skilled people who need their own upskilling pathways anymore'*. Access issues also emerged, with broadband being less available in rural areas and amongst certain vulnerable communities.

- There is clear demand for such support amongst the target group: in **Austria**, for example, recipients of the wage replacement payment *Weiterbildungsgeld* have increase by 40% from 2015 to 2020 (from 8925 recipients to 12 579)

The following success factors in reaching target groups were identified in the evidence:

- **Informal outreach:** outreach actions to reach the target group is a key success factor of any upskilling initiative. However, the study pointed to the particular success of *informal* outreach in reaching this specific target group of low-skilled individuals. Word of mouth was repeatedly mentioned as an effective means of engaging more vulnerable people. Establishing personal relations with target groups allows reaching them successfully and keeping them on board. This often needs to involve actors outside public authorities, for example:
 - In **Denmark** support staff (for instance in cleaning) have been educated and helped to establish personal contacts and promote interest in education.
- **Individual hands-on approach:** Ensuring that training offers are personalised to the individual and that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is avoided also emerged as a key success factor. Mentoring the target group and providing different types of support outside education – including for example psychological support or childcare – is important in this regard. Flexibility is also a part of this, including being able to combine work with studies, as well as the provision of learner support.
- **Inter-institutional cooperation:** Strong cooperation between actors, particularly at the local level, emerged as a key success factor in reaching target groups. This is not limited to national authorities or education and training providers but extends also to social partners, who can support particularly in engaging low-skilled employees, and NGOs that can provide a valuable means of reaching vulnerable groups.
 - In **Estonia**, kindergartens, libraries and local associations have been used to reach low-skilled adults.

Q1.2(b) Which were the **outputs and results for specific groups** (in both qualitative and numerical terms, including the profile of the target groups covered as well as the number of participants from each group -at EU and MS level-?)

Key findings

Evidence that is available on the outputs and results for specific groups shows that participating in upskilling measures has a positive impact on different groups. Evaluations of specific upskilling pathways measures find that participants are more likely to progress into employment or further education after participation, with some evidence showing that this positive effect is higher for those groups that are in more vulnerable situations.

Given the breadth and range of measures implemented in relation to upskilling pathways in Member States, it has not been possible to conduct a systematic review of the outputs and results in quantitative terms for specific target groups in this study. The fact that most of the measures target the broad group of the low-skilled in general, as opposed to specific priority

groups (as outlined above), also means that where monitoring and results data is available, it is not always disaggregated by specific target group but rather captures information on the whole range of adults that can participate in the upskilling measure.

Nevertheless, evidence that is available, both from the mapping of measures conducted for this study and the consultations undertaken with relevant stakeholders, show that **outputs and results for specific groups participating in upskilling measures are positive**, with some evidence showing that this positive effect is higher for those groups that are in more vulnerable situations. Information on outputs is included in Box 1 above. Information on results for specific target groups that are available are outlined in the Box below.

Box 5 Results of participation in upskilling measures for target groups

Results for adults from a range of vulnerable groups

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in **Ireland** targets a diverse range of specific groups, all of which are considered to be more vulnerable/disadvantaged¹¹⁰. Participants in the programme were found to be 18% more likely to progress into employment or self-employment 3-6 months after the programme.

The Youth Reach programme also in Ireland targets young people aged 15-21 that are early school leavers. 28% of those completing the Irish Youth Reach programme go straight into employment, and 45% into another education and training course, as outlined in the Irish case study (see the Irish case study, Annex 4).

Results for adults with low qualification levels

The *Komvux* programme in **Sweden** targets all adults that have not completed compulsory education or upper secondary school. About 50% of students that completed their studies at Komvux were established on the labour market following completion. 16% were enrolled in higher education studies.¹¹¹

In **Hungary** the ESF-funded measure 'Training of Persons with Low Level of Qualifications and Participants of Public Work Schemes' reached more than 100,000 people with a dropout rate of under 10%.

Results for unemployed and inactive adults

Findings of the counterfactual impact evaluation conducted of the support for unemployed and inactive persons under Priority Axis 1 of the ESF Operational Program "Human Resources Development" in **Bulgaria** show that all age groups that participated in the measure have a higher probability of being employed after 6 months than those who did not participate. The effect of participation is bigger for those that are more vulnerable. Unemployed people with low educational attainment are 37 percentage points more likely to be employed 6 months after the participation in the measures people from the same group who were not included in the measures. Finally, the biggest effect from evaluated measures is reported for the group of the unemployed persons with disabilities. For them, the probability of employment 6 months after termination of participation is higher by 57 percentage points compared to unemployed persons with disabilities who did not participate in the measures.

110 Disadvantaged children and families, disadvantaged young people (aged 15-24), disadvantaged women, lone parents, new communities (including refugees and asylum seekers), people living in disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, Roma, the unemployed, low-income workers/households, Travellers, the disengaged from the labour market (economically inactive).

111 Statistics Sweden,

https://www.scb.se/contentassets/e16b0bec73954db684c57ec2437057ff/uf0549_2019a01_br_a40br1902.pdf

In **Estonia**, the measure offered by the PES targeting the unemployed and the employed at risk of losing their jobs had positive results. Six months after completing the training, the rate of employment was over 90% amongst participants. Comparing income before and six months after participating in a preventive measure, the increase in participants' income was 14.5% on average, exceeding Estonian average salary increase of 9,8% over the same given period¹¹².

Results for migrants/refugees

In **Denmark**, improved Danish language teaching and the basic education for integration have had clear positive effects; the level of employment in the group has risen markedly since 2017, and many more unemployed persons in the group have been assessed as ready for jobs.

Q1.2(c) Which methodologies/criteria were used by Member States for identifying the different target groups and relevant economic sectors? Which were most/least effective, and why?

Key findings

Educational attainment level or employment status are the key criteria for identifying target groups. Sectoral needs are addressed in the design of upskilling pathways though this has not been done across all Member States systematically. Where it is done, it is carried out either on a yearly basis based on skills forecasting/ demands, as demand arises, with specific measures developed to address skills shortages, or through identification of regional needs.

Educational attainment level or employment status are the key criteria for identifying target groups as confirmed by all evidence collected. This involves cooperation with different stakeholders and among different national authorities (different Ministries, PES, vocational education agencies). Examples are provided in the box below.

Box 6 Examples of approaches to identifying target groups

In **Latvia** and **Sweden** close cooperation with the municipalities allows for an understanding of the target group in need, thanks to a case management team that assess skills of individuals that could benefit from upskilling pathways measures and follows their progress through the different steps of training and support.

In the **Netherlands**, inter-ministerial programmes and action plans on adult learning and the prevention of low literacy and the promotion of basic skills ensure a culture of cooperation from the very top.

In **Malta**, NGOs are a key avenue through which measures determine target groups in need.

In **Poland**, the SZANZA¹¹³ project has a very well-developed system of identification of target groups that goes beyond targeting those with low-educational attainment. SZANZA established a definition of low-skilled adults, namely: "adults over 25 years of age, with basic skills below level three of the Polish qualification framework, regardless of their employment status and education level". This definition was chosen to measure the factual educational level and not to exclude people with significant basic skills deficiencies (for

112 Source: https://www.tootukassa.ee/sites/tootukassa.ee/files/tootust_ennetavate_meetmete_analuus_loplik.pdf

113 <https://szansa-power.frse.org.pl/en/>

example, people with higher education but with deficiencies in numerical or digital skills). After definition, eight target groups were selected:

- Workers in SMEs. The initial diagnosis found that there are significant deficits of basic skills, even though workers in SMEs are generally high functioning
- Unemployed and not working
- Individuals residing in disadvantaged areas; mainly the region of Bieszczady and Silesia
- Migrants, as the number of migrants in Poland is increasing and there is a need to address their skills.
- 50+ adults
- People with physical disabilities
- People with learning disabilities
- Domestic violence survivors

Priority sectors targeted

Evidence shows that **sectoral needs are addressed in the design of upskilling pathways though this has not been done across all Member States systematically**. The table below presents the main approaches to adapting to sectoral needs evidenced in the study. In all cases, identification of skills needs relies on cooperation between labour market institutions and education and training providers.

Table 13 Approaches to identifying sectoral targets of upskilling measures

Approach	Country	Measure
On a yearly basis based on skills forecasting/ demands	Greece	In May 2015, the government set up a mechanism for the identification of labour market needs, informed by the scientific guidance of the National Institute of Labour and Human Resources. This provides information on the supply of, and demand for labour by occupation and skills level at national, regional and sectoral levels to the organisations involved in the development of training and labour market policies and other relevant stakeholders. Social partners are engaged in various skills anticipation exercises to provide skills-related information to their members. Understanding which skills are more in demand in the labour market also helps social partners adjust the VET courses they offer accordingly.
	Estonia	Labour and skills needs are analysed through OSKA, the anticipation and monitoring system for labour and skills demand. The Estonian Qualifications Authority analyses skills needs and compares this to VET, Higher Education (HE) and continuing education provision, in cooperation with employers, policymakers and representatives of VET and HE institutions in order to determine priority sectors on a yearly basis. The sectors to be analysed are approved by the OSKA Coordination Council. All economic sectors are analysed once in 5 or 6 years.
	Romania	Every year, the National Vocational Training Plan of ANOFM is developed taking into account occupations required on the labour market.
As demand arises, with	Latvia	The State Revenue Service data on occupied jobs, State Employment Agency's short-term and Ministry of Economics medium-term labour

specific measures developed to address skills shortages		market forecasts, changes in average wages, and the CEDEFOP tool for analysis of online job advertisements ¹¹⁴ are used to analyse the most demanded occupations and skills. A survey of employers is also carried out in all regions annually to identify the needs of employers. The Ministry of Labour is responsible for regularly reviewing the list of training offers and skills to meet the needs of the labour market and the demand of employers, with the training offer determined through the State Employment Agency's short-term forecasting tool.
	Austria	Upskilling measures within Active Labour Market Policy are designed to target economic sectors with a shortage of skilled labour. Lists of sectors with shortages and related types of education activities are regularly updated, typically with consultation of Austrian Social Partners.
	Sweden	The public employment service identifies which sectors and occupations have a particular deficit of personnel and the National Agency for Education gives recommendations on 'VET packages' a selected number of courses in these fields.
	Spain	The Autonomous Regions are the ones competent for the implementation of education policies including identifying regional and local demands. This is the case for some PEAC calls that were offered based on industry demands, in order to reduce labour market mismatch.
	Ireland	Skillnet Ireland is a national programme to support businesses to up-skill staff that is well-established and embedded throughout 77 sectors. In 2020, 81,895 people in 21,695 companies undertook Skillnet training. It operates on a joint investment model, where government grants are combined with contributions from enterprise, thus reducing costs and other barriers for businesses. ¹¹⁵
	Netherlands	The SLIM-subsidy has a partial focus on agriculture, catering and recreation to respond to needs in these sectors.
Through identification of regional needs	Lithuania	Differences in the specific needs of regions are very high in Lithuania and the training offer for adult learners is adapted to these regional demands: Vilnius is dominated by IT, engineering and services sectors; production and industry dominate in Kaunas, engineering, furniture and shipping dominate in Klaipeda
	Hungary	The programme for training of low-skilled and those employed in public work does not define a specific economic sector but prioritises sectors in regions that are highly disadvantaged.
	Slovenia	Adult education counsellors need to confirm that they will carry out education programmes that are in line with regional priorities as set out in each region's regional development plan.

Source: Evidence collected by Ecorys through desk research and interviews, 2022.

Q1.3. To what extent have Member States applied the three steps approach in the design of upskilling pathways? How effective was this approach?

Key Findings

According to the study, around half of **Member States (14)** have made changes in **implementation of the three steps** either by adopting new measures or reforming existing ones, though the degree of changes varies. Progress is noticeable in all steps of the Recommendation but measures for validation and recognition of prior learning have

114 <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-online-vacancies>

115 <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/about/>

seen the biggest increase since 2016, though they remain challenging to implement. However, there is **less evidence of clear efforts to ensure a smooth integration and improved permeability of the three steps** (and accompanying measures) into one comprehensive pathway.

Skills assessment: Seven Member States have made changes to skills assessment approaches (BE, BG, CZ, HR, LV, MT, PL). The limited number of Member States that have made changes in this step can be explained by the fact that it was the step that was most implemented before the Recommendation was adopted. However, evidence from the interviews, case studies and the surveys shows that meaningful skills assessments are not always implemented or used even in cases where they are in place. Challenges include lack of specific skills of staff, lack of awareness of the benefits of skills assessments and lack of know-how by the target group itself and lack of a formal process underlining how a skills assessment should be undertaken,

Tailored learning offers: Six Member States have made changes in their provision of tailored learning offers since the Recommendation was adopted (BE, BG, DK, EE, MT, PL). Out of these countries, three had high need for change in 2016 in this area of the Recommendation (BE, BG, MT). Nonetheless, it is clear that the provision of a tailored learning offer is relatively widespread now across EU Member States. Barriers remaining include the difficulty in identifying/adapting to diverse training needs of disadvantaged adults, insufficient funding for tailored programmes, lack of information about tailored programmes and insufficient offers in rural areas.

Validation: Eight Member States have made changes in their upskilling approaches since the Recommendation to better implement the step of validation (BE, BG, CY, DE, EL, IT, LV, SK). Six of these Member States had a high need for change in this step (BG, DE, IT, LV, IT, SK). Even though there have been efforts to improve the system of validation, establishing fully functioning validation systems remains a challenge across all Member States, linked to key obstacles including the challenge of integrating the validation system into the adult learning system as a whole and the lack of take-up of validation amongst both the low-skilled and employers.

Progress is noticeable in all steps of the Recommendation but measures for validation and recognition of prior learning have seen the biggest increase since 2016, though they remain challenging to implement. However, there is less evidence of clear efforts to ensure a smooth integration and improved permeability of the three steps (and accompanying measures) into one comprehensive pathway. This was highlighted in particular by stakeholders consulted at the expert meeting who stressed that a **joined-up approach between all three steps is crucial** in ensuring that adult learners feel supported, engaged and stay committed to the whole process of upskilling. The evidence of challenges in cooperation between all actors involved in upskilling measures (outlined in the answer to Q1.4a, below) further highlights that a seamless pathway from the perspective of the user between the three steps and accompanying measures (outreach, guidance) is challenging to achieve given the multiplicity of actors involved in delivering the three steps. Nonetheless, there are some positive examples of an integrated three-step approach:

- The *Qualifica* programme in **Portugal** is designed to raise individuals' qualification levels and employability and is combined with the recognition of prior learning (*reconhecimento, validacao e certificacao de competencias*) and a 'Qualifica passport', an online tool to record competences and qualifications.
- In **Denmark**, a highly differentiated system of provision is in place supported by frameworks providing skill assessments, flexible provision and validation.

- In addition, in some Member States, specific initiatives follow closely the three-step approach for specific, closely defined target groups. For example, in **Austria** (e.g. the *Competence with a system approach* - see Box 9 and the Austrian case study), with specific offers complementing regular forms of provision. However, the three steps are not combined within one framework.
- In addition, in **Sweden** (see the Case Study Sweden), the three-step approach was already broadly adopted as a general principle for the provision of adult learning prior to the Recommendation through *Komvux*, the main pathway for adult education in the country.

It is also important to note that, in some countries, while all three steps of the Recommendation can be found in the national offer of training and support for low-skilled adults, they are not necessarily combined in a single programme. For example:

- In **Germany**, the measures set out in the Recommendation are covered by a range of national programmes including Alphadecade (aiming to improve stakeholder coordination), Qualifizierungschancengesetz (skills matching), Bildungsprämie (providing assessment, lifelong guidance and tailored training), and Valikom (aiming to improve validation).
- In the **Netherlands**, progress has been made in line with the three-step approach by combining new large-scale general measures, such as the introduction of the STAP budget and the extension of targeted approaches (the expanded Count on Skills subsidy), against the backdrop of already well-developed structures, for example, for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (see the Case Study Netherlands).
- In **France**, since 2018, measures outlined within the 2018 Plan of Investment in Skills (in particular the reform of the Individual Learning Account) have further strengthened the structures in place for providing skill assessments, tailored provision and validation of non-formal and informal learning. New instruments have also been added such as, for example, a framework for supporting on-site workplace integrated learning (AFEST, *Action de formation en situation de travail*) tailored to the needs of low-qualified learners who are not inclined to enter classroom-based learning activities (see the Case Study France).

A closer look at the degree of implementation of the three steps is outlined by step in the section that follows.

Skills assessment

Degree of implementation since 2016: Since the Recommendation, as shown in Section 3.2.1, **seven Member States have made changes to skills assessment approaches**, (BE, BG, CZ, HR, LV, MT, PL). The limited number of Member States that have made changes in this step is explained by the fact that it was the step that was most implemented before the Recommendation was adopted, in part due to the fact that it tends to be a standard practice of Public Employment Services when assessing what kind of support jobseekers will need.

Effectiveness of implementation: However, evidence from the interviews, case studies and the surveys shows that **meaningful skills assessments that thoroughly assess the range of a person's skills and competences are not always implemented or used** even in cases where they are in place. 46% of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations indicated that skills assessments are used 'not at all' or 'to a small extent' by priority target groups. Evidence from the interviews confirms this and has identified the **obstacles** to effective skills assessment as follows:

- **Lack of specific skills of staff:** In **Czechia**, interviewees reported that skills assessments undertaken in the framework of upskilling measures are often purely subjective i.e., based on how career counsellors assess the client, with no actual assessment of specific skills. In **Estonia**, interviewees reported that the skills assessment is rather informal and for the assessment of more specific professional skills, counsellors do not necessarily have the appropriate tools or training.
- **Lack of awareness of the benefits of skills assessments and lack of know-how by the target group itself:** In **Spain**, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training developed the *Informate portal*, an assessment tool that guides the applicant in the choice of the training itinerary best suited to their skills. However, the tool requires a wide understanding of technical concepts that are not understood by the target group, decreasing its effectiveness. The survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults showed that whilst 43% of respondents believed that skills assessments are accessible to the target group to a fairly large extent, 53% held the view that skills assessments were used by the target group only to a small extent.
- **Lack of a formal process** underlining how a skills assessment should be undertaken: In **Bulgaria**, the skills assessment is included in labour market services provided by PES (employment offices) as an informal process but is not developed fully as a comprehensive system with accompanying instruments and tools to implement it effectively and in a uniform way.

The evidence also identified some **common enablers** of effective skills assessments. These are outlined in Box 7.

Box 7 Examples of successful skills assessment approaches

In **Latvia**, a specially designed assessment tool that assesses skills relevant to employability is used that allows the consultant in the PES to evaluate the client's profile, skills, previous experience and motivation.

In **Slovenia**, the Counsellors' network is spread across all regions of Slovenia, and active outreach is carried out, particularly in more remote and inaccessible areas, to reach the target groups and carry out an initial assessment of their skills where they are located, making skills assessments more accessible to all.

In **Ireland**, skills assessment is provided across further education and training services delivered by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The 'Initial and ongoing assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ level 1-3 – Guidelines and Toolkit'¹¹⁶ assists learners in assessing their skills by providing accurate initial and ongoing assessments of literacy and numeracy skills in a way that is designed to be learner-centred, rigorous, supportive, user-friendly and accountable. The toolkit is in use across the national network of ETBs and has been endorsed as the national assessment tool for NFQ Levels 1-3 (up to EQF 2).¹¹⁷

Tailored learning offer

Degree of implementation since 2016: Six Member States have made changes in their provision of **tailored learning offers** since the Recommendation was adopted (BE, BG, DK, EE, MT, PL). Out of these countries, three had high need for change in 2016 in this area of the Recommendation (BE, BG, MT). However, three countries where the need for change was high in this step, did not make changes to the provision of a tailored learning

¹¹⁶ <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/5451e6dd60/initial-and-ongoing-assessment-of-adult.pdf>

¹¹⁷ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7044-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

offer step (CZ, ES, IT). These three countries have yet to introduce measures for a stronger tailored provision of learning.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the provision of a tailored learning offer is **relatively widespread** now across EU Member States. Results from other data sources for the study confirm this. 73% of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations indicate that learning offers are tailored to the needs of target groups to a large or fairly large extent with similar results also seen in the public consultation (60% of respondents holding the same view) and in the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults (69%).

Effectiveness of implementation: Barriers in implementing tailored offers are still present and include:

- The difficulty in identifying/adapting to diverse training needs of disadvantaged adults.
- Lack of finances and funding for tailored programmes, including for supporting beneficiaries of programmes financially.
- Lack of information about tailored programmes.
- Insufficient offers in rural areas, resulting in long distances to training centres for potential participants.

Box 8 Example of successful approaches to tailoring the learning offer

In **Poland**, local labour market needs are also taken into account when designing learning offers in the *LOWE* initiative. Centres adjust their learning offer to local needs, creating suggestions for training based on the adult's needs as well as local resources or regional labour market gaps.

In the *Komvux* programme in **Sweden**, offers are tailored on the basis of a learning plan developed for prospective training participants and adapted to the needs identified by the skills assessment and by the labour market. The *Komvux* programme is built on modules (or courses) and each student is given an individual study plan responding to the skills they need to focus on; these modules are designed based on skills needs in the labour market.

In terms of the flexibility of learning offers as shown in section 3.2.2, the level of tailoring, modularisation and flexibility of learning offers varies substantially. Flexibility of measures appears to be most common, with 19 Member States offering this in the measures mapped. Tailored and modular offers are less common, with 16 and 14 Member States respectively offering this approach in the measures mapped¹¹⁸. However, in the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, 'tailored learning offer' was the feature most often selected as 'reformed or implemented after 2016'. Flexibility is ensured in varying ways, through modular training, flexible timetables, early morning and late evening classes, flexible enrolment, flexibility in geographical location, the possibility of remote or blended learning or mentoring and counselling.

Successful approaches to ensuring flexibility of offers identified most frequently across the surveys and the interviews are listed below. Examples of measures that incorporate such practices are included in the Box below.

¹¹⁸ 'Modularisation' is defined as a building blocks approach to education and training programmes / qualifications in which the content is broken down into smaller units. These smaller units – modules – may be taken on their own or combined with other modules. Modular programmes often do not have clearly defined sequencing. 'Tailored and flexible learning' offer is defined as an offer of education and training that meets the needs of an individual as identified by a skills assessment, considering as far as possible local, regional and national labour market needs

- A strong provision of online and hybrid courses, as well as video recordings and online tests. Such aspects were most frequently mentioned by respondents to the survey of adult learners as key success factors of ensuring flexibility.
- Ensuring a practical approach to learning and opportunities for work-based learning.
- Adjusting content to the pace of students and updating and adjusting learning offer according to needs; related to this, using initial skills assessment to create appropriate learning groups at the start of programmes/courses was seen as important.
- Providing choice to participants to design their course through optional modules
- In terms of learning cultures, encouraging flat hierarchies between teachers and students and a supportive environment through counselling and guidance provision.

Box 9 Examples of provision of flexible learning offers

In **Cyprus**, the evening gymnasiums/lyceum for secondary general education were reformed in 2019, with the aim of implementing a new operating framework to increase flexibility and retention rates. The reform involved a reduction of teaching periods, the introduction of distance learning, the recognition of attendance in programmes, as well as the certification of non-formal and informal learning.

In **Finland**, flexibility has been ensured through a modular approach with larger courses split into smaller units. Interviewees confirmed that this has had a positive impact, with an increase in the motivation of learners. Learners feel empowered and more confident to continue their learning as they are able to experience early successes in their studies thanks to smaller units being able to be completed quickly.

In **Hungary**, the training of low-skilled and those employed in public work schemes programme offers customised learning opportunities. SME employees taking part in the 'Skills Guarantee' programme can choose from 60-70 short 20 to 30-hour learning programmes. All the programs aim at developing key competences in different contexts which can help learners to better orientate themselves on the labour market and function in the workplace. Flexibility in delivery is also highly important, courses can take place in the workplace as agreed between the employer and participant, but also in open learning centres scheduled as agreed. Some participants prefer on-line training or self-paced e-learning. As self-confidence grows, participants can design their upskilling pathway toward the vocational system.

In **Austria**, the “*competence with a system*” policy is a modular programme for a variety of different apprenticeships. The modular system and the possibility to opt into a module in phases of unemployment or postpone parts of the training in phases of employment allows individuals to make progress despite changing life circumstances.

Validation

Degree of implementation since 2016: As shown in section 3.2.3, **eight Member States have made changes to validation** including five countries that have introduced systems for validation and recognition of skills (BG, DE, IT, LV, SK) and three that have improved their existing systems by reforming existing policies (CY, EL) or introducing new measures (BE). Four of these Member States had a high need for change in this step (DE, IT, LV, IT). However, a further seven Member States that had high potential to improve their provision of validation as assessed in 2016 did not implement changes in this area to align with the Recommendation, according to our mapping (CZ, LU, HR, HU, IE, MT, PL).

Box 10 Examples of validation introduced since the Recommendation was adopted

In **Greece**, there are plans for a Memorandum of Understanding between the Greek National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) and the Greek PES (OAED) in order to have PES training programmes validated. Moreover, over the past five years, there has been a focus on validation of non-formal learning in relation to adult trainers in non-formal learning.

ValiKom in **Germany** was introduced as a pilot project but has been continuously expanded regionally over recent years thanks to its success in particular in giving certain target groups motivation and confidence in their competences vis-à-vis the employer or in the labour market in general.

Effectiveness of implementation: Even though there have been efforts to improve the system of validation, findings show that establishing fully functioning validation systems remains a challenge across all Member States, linked to certain key obstacles:

Challenge of integrating the validation system into the adult learning system as a whole

- In **Ireland** validation has to date been a marginalised process set apart from the higher education sector. A new project among third level institutions in Ireland commenced in 2021 to put in place a consistent and coherent approach to validation.
- In **Sweden**, even if validation is in place today, it has been observed that it is used rarely and not fully effectively. Stakeholders indicated that validation should be more focused on the individual's needs and include skills gathered also through non-formal and informal training, as well as through professions where there is no formal training in the educational system. This links to a common issue shared by stakeholders across multiple Member States regarding transversal competences and validation. Transversal competences (e.g., critical thinking, communication skills, self-motivation, etc.) are not yet sufficiently taken into account in validation schemes but are crucial for low-skilled adults in particular.

Lack of take-up of validation amongst both the low-skilled and employers

- In **Bulgaria**, out of 907 Vocational Training Centres, no more than 40 offer validation, even though validation arrangements are in place, with one stakeholder stating that this is "*precisely because they think that people do not trust it, do not know it, and employers will not recognise the documents that are issued*".
- In **Hungary**, recognition of prior learning is encouraged by law, but rarely practiced, as it has to be initiated by the learner and carried out by the training provider. The national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning is not introduced yet in Hungary, although its components are being constructed.
- In **Latvia** recognition of competencies acquired outside formal education can take place but the activity is not in high demand at all, largely due to the lack of information provided to the target group and employer about the process, and the fact that such recognition is only possible for some occupations.

Q1.4(a) *To what extent have Member States delivered upskilling pathways in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, in particular social partners and local, regional*

and national economic actors? Were relevant public, private and third sector actors in education and training, employment and other relevant policy areas engaged?

Key findings

The evidence gathered in study has shown that Member States have delivered upskilling pathways in **cooperation with relevant stakeholders to a high degree** although there are differences across Member States and challenges remain in effective cooperation. Stakeholders most commonly involved in upskilling pathways are social partners, public employment services, local actors and NGOs.

Social partners are engaged in different aspects of upskilling pathways, with higher levels of involvement in countries that have a strong tradition of social dialogue. There is however room across the EU to involve social partners more in upskilling pathways, in particular in evaluation and monitoring of upskilling measures.

Public employment services often collaborate with social partners and other national authorities in the design of upskilling measures. There is also clear involvement of actors at the **local and the regional levels** in many upskilling pathways measures. NGOs in particular most often play a role in identifying target groups, particularly vulnerable individuals, and in delivering outreach activities. There is room, however, to involve these local actors – that are closer to the target group – more systematically in the design and implementation of upskilling measures.

Social partners are engaged in different aspects of upskilling pathways, with higher levels of involvement in countries that have a strong tradition of social dialogue. Social partners are involved in different ways, from assessing labour market needs to defining the content of vocational training in particular sectors, as outlined in the box below. However, interviews with national and EU social partners and with experts consulted during the expert meeting and validation workshop suggest that **meaningful involvement of social partners is not always guaranteed**: even in cases where their involvement is meant to occur in principle, it may not occur in a substantial way in practice (e.g., in the design of measures for low-skilled workers, in the guidance and support provided to employers and workers or in the monitoring of the impact of upskilling measures etc.). Experts consulted during the validation workshop expressed that there is therefore room across the EU to involve social partners more in upskilling pathways, in particular in evaluation and monitoring of upskilling measures.

Box 11 Examples of cooperation with social partners in upskilling pathways

In **Denmark**, a system of tripartite commissions regulates vocational and adult education programmes.

In **Estonia**, formal stakeholder cooperation takes place in the tripartite council of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, which includes the Ministry of Social Affairs, employers and trade unions. The development of a continuing education and retraining policy is taking place in cooperation with professional associations of employers and employees, for example.

In Wallonia, **Belgium**, social partners are systematically consulted about any piece of regulation and are present in all management bodies of public training providers (Forem, IFAPME). They are also partners in the 9 "*bassins enseignement formation emploi*" (regional groups "Education-Employment"). The groups were consulted in the major upskilling initiatives in the country, namely the "recognition of prior learning" and "certification of professional competence".

In **Latvia**, social partners are involved in reviewing the list of training courses available and ensuring they are aligned with labour market ends. This happens in the framework of an approved cooperation mechanism, the Training Commission, which has been operating since 2010.

Public employment services often collaborate with social partners and other national authorities in the design of upskilling measures. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, PES were cited by respondents as the stakeholders involved most frequently in skills assessment (73.2% of respondents), target group identification and support measures (each 70.7% of respondents) and guidance and/or mentoring (68.3% of respondents). Examples of collaboration with the PES are included in the Box below.

Box 12 Examples of cooperation with PES in upskilling pathways

In **Sweden**, collaboration between the public employment services (PES) and the municipalities is important both in relation to the matching of courses provided with the shortages on the labour market and prognosis of relevant developments on the labour market, as well as the identification of people in need of adult education and provision of guidance

In **Hungary**, there is a cooperation in between the Regional Offices of the Public Employment Services and the respective training providers at county level. They are generating the list of training together which are offered to the participants from which they could choose. The PES also work with a network of NGOs at national level who offer alternative labour market services to specific target groups.

There is also clear involvement of **actors at the local and the regional levels** in many upskilling pathways measures. In countries where regions have a strong remit, regional actors play a vital role – for example in Spain, Germany and Italy. In most Member States, local actors are also involved, with NGOs most often playing a role in identifying target groups, particularly vulnerable individuals, and in delivering outreach activities. Examples of regional and local level cooperation are included in the Box below. There is room, however, to more systematically involve these local actors – that are closer to the target group – in the design and implementation of upskilling measures, particularly in the delivery of outreach measures (see Q1.5, below).

Box 13 Examples of regional and local level cooperation in upskilling pathways

In **Ireland**, the nine Regional Skills Fora bring together education and training providers and employers to adapt the training provision to local employment market and skills shortages. The Labour Market Advisory Council is another forum which brings stakeholders together.

In **Germany**, in implementing the *AlphaDecade* (national Decade to raise the reading and writing skills as well as the level of basic education amongst adults in Germany) the Federal Ministry of Education and Research is advised by a board of trustees whose members include associations, educational institutions and local authority umbrella organisations. In this way, practical needs can be taken up in the further development of the *AlphaDecade* and the dissemination of project results can be supported.

In **Poland**, the project SZANSA cooperates with 31 NGOs that develop, test, implement and evaluate innovative pathways of upskilling adults.

In **Malta**, NGOs are a key part of the Maltese outreach strategy for the low-skilled vulnerable target group.

In the **Netherlands**, the ‘*Count on skills*’ programme focuses on increasing basic skills. This programme aims to reach adults through agreements with regional and local governments and a wide range of activities to promote the improvement of basic skills. The measure is implemented through schools, local libraries, youth healthcare institutions, pre-educational facilities and employers and contributes to step 2 of the Recommendation.

In **Spain**, organisations and entities from the third sector as well as enterprises are involved in the identification of market demands and the competencies of the workforce.

*Q1.4(b) How have Member States **ensured effective coordination of stakeholders** at national and regional level to implement the Recommendation? Which arrangements have been put in place and which were the most promising in terms of good practice? Were there any bad practices observed?*

Key findings

Member States have **ensured coordination of stakeholders at national and regional level to implement the Recommendation through coordinating bodies** for adult learning policies and measures. These exist in the vast majority of Member States, with only five Member States indicating that they currently do not have such a coordinating body in place (CZ, DK, SI, SK, SE).

However, stakeholders consulted outlined that even if such cooperation processes are established on paper, **cooperation is not always fully effective in practice**. Challenges that have been identified include cumbersome administrative processes and a lack of clearly defined responsibilities and roles between the partners which is particularly the case in this field of policy given that adult learning often sits between the remit of education and labour market authorities.

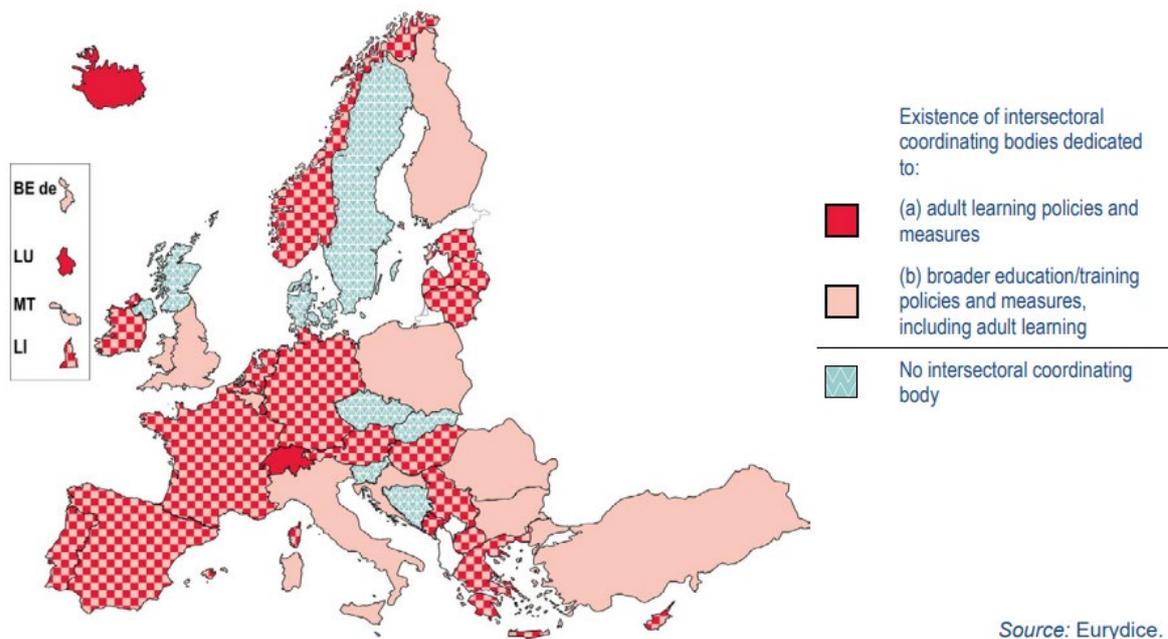
Member States have ensured effective coordination of stakeholders at national and regional level to implement the Recommendation through **coordinating bodies to for adult learning policies and measures**. These exist in the vast majority of Member States, with only five Member States indicating that they currently do not have such a coordinating body in place – Czechia, Denmark, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Sweden¹¹⁹ (see Figure 11). There are two types of coordinating bodies:

- a) Bodies that focus **specifically** on coordinating the design and implementation of adult learning policies and measures; and
- b) Bodies responsible for the design and implementation of **broader** education and training policies and measures (e.g., lifelong learning, national qualifications systems), including adult learning. Often, these bodies also involve social partners and representatives of education and training providers.

Some examples of coordinating bodies are presented in the Box below.

¹¹⁹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/827fcd9c-1a8c-11ec-b4fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232128473>

Figure 11 Coordinating bodies for adult learning policies and measures, 2019/2020



Source, Eurydice, 2022, *Adult education and training in Europe, Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications*, p.50

Box 14 Examples of coordinating bodies to support cooperation on upskilling pathways/adult learning

Ireland's Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) was presented at the expert meeting held in February 2022 for this study. The EGFSN includes a wide diversity of stakeholders, such as government departments, higher education authorities and trade unions, in the area of skills policy. It plays an important role within Ireland's national skills system as well as the overall context of the country's skills policy. Recent and upcoming EGFSN studies focus on the areas of design thinking, digital transformation, renewable energy, artificial intelligence (AI) regulation, as well as particular challenges around the construction and housing crisis in Ireland.

In **Bulgaria**, the Association for Adult Learning was created for institutions and organisations at the local level with over 400 institutions. Coordination groups have been set up at the district level and district coordinators are included in the National Advisory Council and can participate in decision-making.

In **Italy**, cooperation and governance is carried out through territorial networks of lifelong learning services and a national table coordinated by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, which is attended by all the institutional actors at different levels (state, municipal regions).

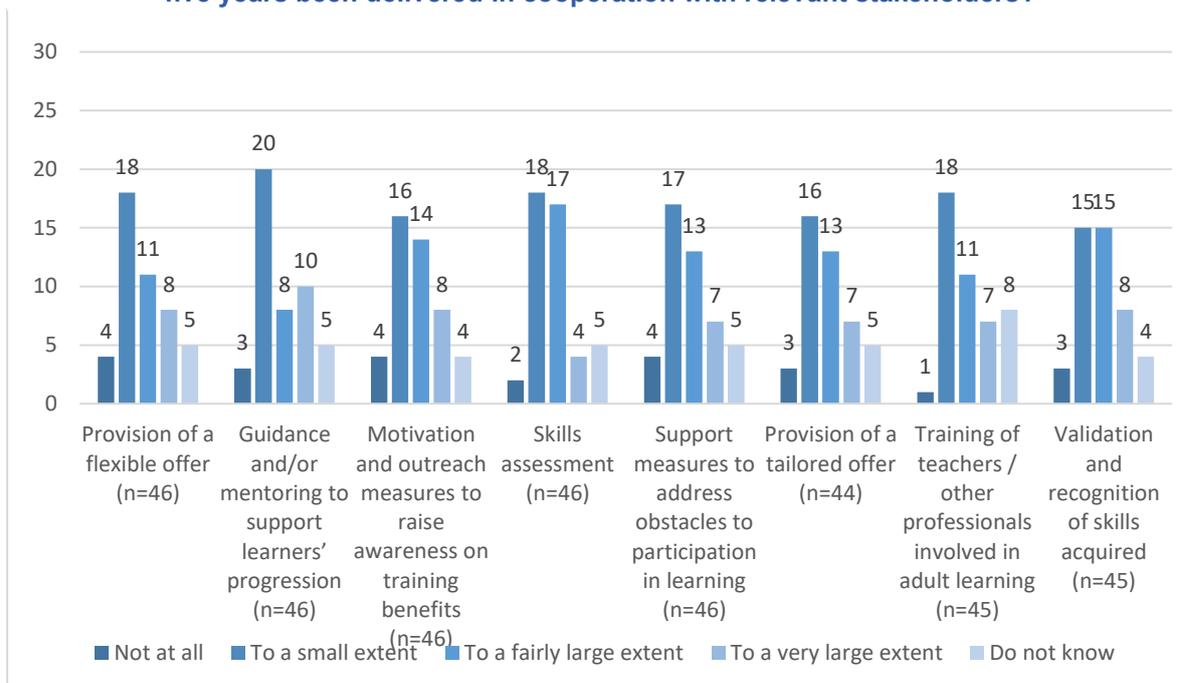
In **Austria**, an important group of stakeholders are the regional governments (*Bundesländer*) that hold key legal competences in the field of adult education. Both the Austrian lifelong learning and Validation Strategies were developed by a working group that includes all ministries concerned with the different areas of education, social partners and scientific expertise.

In **France**, the *Plan for Investment in Skills* is a major policy with national scope that is implemented through regional councils as part of the country's *Regional Skills Investment Pacts*. The Plan covers the years 2018-2022 and contains actions aimed at developing the skills of low-skilled jobseekers and unqualified young people. It aims to

meet the recruitment needs of companies and contribute to the transformation of skills in the workforce, in particular linked to digital and green transitions.

Results from the study suggest that **cooperation is not always fully effective**, however. In the public consultation, similar proportions of respondents indicated that the various

Figure 12 To what extent have the following features of adult learning measures in the past five years been delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders?



Source: *Ecorys/3s, 2022*

features of adult learning measures were delivered in cooperation with relevant actors to a very large or fairly large extent and that stakeholders were only involved in a small extent or not at all. This is the case in general across all features of the Recommendation, as seen in Figure 12.

Some **challenges** were identified through the case studies and interviews:

- **Cumbersome administrative processes** that are needed to formalise cooperation arrangements. For example, in **Austria**, although a substantial change in the field of adult education was possible by overcoming barriers in the competence distribution between the federal and regional governments, the agreement between the federal and regional governments must be renewed every three to four years. This results in phases of insecurity in the negotiation and transition to the next agreement and a long-term solution is desired by many stakeholders.
- **Lack of clearly defined responsibilities and roles between the partners:** In **Germany**, the skills development system is based on cooperation with the social partners, which has been described as vastly beneficial in terms of socio-economic outcomes¹²⁰. However, cooperation between the multiple stakeholders has been described by stakeholders as challenging, particularly in the context of the highly decentralised nature of the German system, in which different responsibilities are held according to levels of government. Various initiatives aim to facilitate stakeholder

120 Busemeyer, Marius R., & Trampusch, Christine (Eds.). (2012). *The Political Economy of Collective Skill Formation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

cooperation across policy fields and levels of policymaking and between social partners. In **France**, the main actors working on the implementation of the Recommendation are the State, the regional authorities, the Local Outreach Offices, the Public Employment Service, the Transition Pro (an organisation authorized to finance the professional retraining of employees in the private sector), the GRETA (Group of Lifelong Learning Establishments of the Ministry of Education), and trade unions. However, the case study indicates that these actors and other key stakeholders encounter difficulties in working together in the implementation of actions due to a lack of clear division of roles and responsibilities.

*Q1.5 To which extent have Member States provided **outreach and guidance services** to support the implementation of upskilling pathways? Which arrangements have been put in place and which are the most promising in terms of good practice? Were there any bad practices observed? Which stakeholders have been involved? To what extent have Member States provided support to learners or indirect support to employers for upskilling their employees? To what extent has the support to learners and employers addressed obstacles to participation? To what extent have Member States provided initial training and continuous professional development to staff engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways (in particular to teaching professionals)?*

Key findings

There is **widespread evidence of outreach to potential learners** in upskilling pathways measures in all 27 Member States, but with **varying degrees of effectiveness** in implementation. The vast majority of measures mapped that are relevant to upskilling pathways offer some form of outreach to potential learners. Promising examples have several factors in common including local level cooperation, sufficient funding to ensure comprehensive outreach, and outreach that is embedded into the broader system of support to adult learners. However, **more holistic types of support including psychological support are less common and more tailored outreach is needed**, in recognition in particular of the heterogeneity of the target group of low-skilled adults, and the intersectional nature of their vulnerabilities. For this to occur, more funding and human resource capacity needs to be dedicated to outreach, whilst local actors that are closer to the target group need to be more systematically involved in outreach efforts.

Guidance that is provided in the context of PES and that involves direct contact with a counsellor is available in all EU Member States to unemployed individuals¹²¹.

However, services are not always available to the low-skilled that are in employment, whilst the low level of awareness of the offer of support also poses an obstacle to accessing guidance services.

Evidence shows that the **provision of outreach and guidance services to employers has been somewhat inconsistent and piecemeal**. Whilst many Member States engage with employers in some way in the design of upskilling pathways, systematic provision of guidance to encourage employers to support employees is limited. This lack of guidance has a more detrimental effect on SMEs than larger companies.

Evidence of providing **training and continuous professional development** to staff involved in delivering adult learning measures was identified in the majority of Member States, though the degree of effectiveness of such support and the level of tailoring to the needs of the target group vary substantially. In some Member States, training is provided but it is not tailored to working with adult learners; in others Member States, a great focus is given to ensuring continuous professional development of staff involved in adult

¹²¹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/827fcd9c-1a8c-11ec-b4fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232128473>

learning provision on a strategic level: in some Member States, there is a strong focus on CPD of staff, but only on a project-basis, with limited evidence of systematic provision.

Outreach services

- Local level cooperation, e.g., cooperation between public bodies and NGOs or outreach organised on the municipal level
- Sufficient funding to ensure comprehensive outreach that is targeted to the target population and their needs.
- Outreach that is embedded into the broader system of support to adult learners

There is **widespread evidence of outreach to potential learners** in upskilling pathways measures in all 27 Member States, but with varying degrees of effectiveness in implementation. The vast majority of measures mapped that are relevant to upskilling pathways offer some form of outreach to potential learners. Promising examples have several factors in common which are listed below with examples included in the box that follows.

Box 15 Promising examples of outreach

In **Slovenia**, outreach is provided by the counselling service which is the foundation of adult education in the country with counselling provided through a countrywide network of counsellors, now systematised and transformed into a public service. Individual counsellors undertake active outreach, particularly in more remote and inaccessible areas, to reach target groups and carry out an initial skills assessment.

The **Portuguese Qualifica centres** (*Centros Qualifica*) (153), which are structures funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and state budget, play a key role in attracting adults with low levels of qualifications and motivating them to enrol in education and training programmes. Cooperation with different stakeholders (employers, education and training providers, municipalities) is fundamental for identifying and reaching out to adults with low levels of qualifications and providing guidance on and referrals to education and vocational training opportunities.

In **Sweden**, the municipalities have an obligation to reach out to inform and offer education to anyone in need. In terms of outreach activities and provision of guidance, a range of different actors and authorities cooperate to provide educational and career advice, even though schools and municipal adult education institutions carry the main responsibility for this. Since 2018, municipalities can apply for a state grant to carry out outreach, information and guidance measures. Further, the PES works to identify individuals in need of training or education in order to establish themselves on the labour market. This can be carried out through physical meetings at the PES but also increasingly through digital channels. For example, a website provides information about what specific training, education or courses might be required for a specific job.

In **Estonia**, local-level approaches like outreach through municipalities, local libraries or the food bank were mentioned as effective ways for reaching groups otherwise difficult to reach.

Nonetheless, there are **challenges** in the provision of support and outreach to learners. In the initiatives mapped for the study, **more holistic types** of support including psychological support are less common. Evidence from the case studies and interviews confirm this, in particular pointing out that **more tailored guidance** is needed, particularly for those with complex needs. For this to occur, **more funding and human resource capacity** needs to be dedicated to outreach. Furthermore, more systematic involvement of local actors that

are closer to the needs of the target groups is warranted. The examples provided below showcase in more detail some of these challenges.

Box 16 Challenges in the provision of outreach

In **Hungary**, for example, whilst outreach, guidance and mentoring services are typically offered alongside relevant measures, there is no lifelong guidance service designed specifically for adults with low qualifications. Furthermore, SME employees are least supported and got fewest chances to get into training on the Hungarian labour market but there are no established channels to reach out to this group.

In **Germany**, the counterfactual impact evaluation of the *Bildungsprämie* which allows specific, vulnerable groups to receive State funding to cover part of their education and training costs, shows that the measure reaches people generally interested in lifelong learning. However, it did not reach people outside of this group. The evaluation suggests the introduction of accompanying measures focusing attracting this target group is essential, including an increase in outreach activities specifically targeted to individuals with low skills.

In **Bulgaria**, the employment offices are trained and prepared to provide motivation and outreach measures that include events for raising awareness on the benefits of upskilling, making available information on existing guidance, support measures. However, the case study found that methods used for these activities are still underdeveloped. The mediators and case managers are successful model but further support in terms of investment in both human resources and financing is needed to ensure effective outreach.

In **Sweden**, outreach activities are in place under the responsibility of municipalities, however, in some cases, smaller municipalities have difficulties in fully implementing holistic outreach activities due to lack of funds and capacity.

Guidance services

Evidence collected on the availability of **guidance services** suggests that these are widely available across all Member States. According to the Eurydice report on adult learning of 2022, guidance that is provided in the context of PES and that involves direct contact with a counsellor is available in all EU Member States¹²². Many examples of guidance service provision were identified in the research, as outlined in the box below:

Box 17 Examples of guidance services available to the low-skilled

In **Latvia**, municipal adult education coordinators help people apply for participation in adult education projects, and provide advisory support and guidance including career counselling, especially if the person has low skills and low motivation, needs encouragement and psychological support.

In **Estonia**, career counselling has been provided to all unemployed people as well as jobseekers through the Unemployment Insurance Fund

In **Ireland**, a dedicated Adult Education Guidance Service is available in each of the 16 Education and Training Boards across the country. Furthermore, career guidance represents an important strand of Youthreach centre provision, with guidance activities (such as CV preparation) offered in almost all centres and more specialist guidance supports available in 85 per cent of settings.

122 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/827fcd9c-1a8c-11ec-b4fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232128473>

In **Belgium** a wide range of stakeholders provide guidance services and training, including psychological guidance.

In **Italy**, guidance and support services for individuals re-entering the workforce is available. In the case of complex needs, such as obstacles beyond the labour market dimension, territorial networks are activated to support beneficiaries (education, social, health services etc.)

In **Portugal**, information & guidance is provided to adult learners by *Qualifica* Centres (including at least 50 hours of complementary training), education and training pathways, or both for academic and/or professional, levels 1 to 4 of the NQF.

In **Finland**, the network of One-Stop Guidance Centers *Ohjaamo* (part of the Youth guarantee) offer comprehensive and tailored guidance to their beneficiaries.

In **Malta**, a new project established in 2020 has set up a guidance counselling service for adult learners. This has started to provide structured support to adult learners through an established guidance team consisting of four guidance educators. This service is aligned to the EU Adult Learning Strategy and is included in the National Strategy for Lifelong learning 2020-2030¹²³, with the intention of expanding this service to the national level if successful.

In **Lithuania**, a series of ESF-funded projects have aimed for the PES to offer personal guidance services to jobseekers. The projects have led to the creation of the position of Careers Counsellor in the PES, a new role, and have supported the expansion of provision for skills assessments and validation in Lithuania.

In **Spain**, a number of educational measures developed in the past few years provide guidance and support to learners. For example, the new Law on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training provides a professional guidance and support service that enables the design of individual and collective training itineraries. In addition, the Action Plan for Youth Employment (2019-2021) incorporates the hiring of 3,000 professional counsellors by the regional PES to provide guidance services.

In **France**, the offer of guidance is comprehensive with the following bodies and structures in place to support job seekers and low-skilled employees:

- **Professional Development Guidance** (CEP, *Conseil en évolution professionnelle*) has been a free service since the 2018 Law on the Freedom to Choose a Vocational Future. This service enables each participant in the labour market – employed or not – to take stock of their occupational situation. It makes it possible to develop, formalise and implement a strategy aimed at professional development, integration into employment, skills development, achievement of a vocational qualification, internal or external mobility, retraining/reskilling, occupational transition, and resumption or creation of activity. The counsellors carrying out this service depend on the PES (*Pôle emploi*), the Public Employment Service for executive professionals (*Association pour l'emploi des cadres*, APEC), the Local Outreach Offices (*Missions locales*), placement organisations (*Cap emploi*), or on any operator appointed by France Compétences, the body that oversees technical vocational education and training in France.

123 Ministry for Education (2020), National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020-2030, Directorate for Lifelong Learning, Research and Employment:
https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Pages/Consultations/NationalStrategyforLifelongLearning20202030.aspx

- **Information and Guidance Centres** (CIO, *Centres d'information et d'orientation*). This public service is provided by the Ministry of Education and aimed at young people and adults.
- **Competence Operators** (OPCO, *Opérateurs de compétences*): employees can contact their OPCO to be provided with guidance regarding the choice and financing of their training if they wish to do so.
- **Local Outreach Offices** (*Missions Locales*) focus on young people aged 16-25, providing counsellors to help them in all the steps relating to employment and training, to design a pathway to access employment, to be guided in the choice of training and/or to understand the types of help that they can access.

However, services are not always available to the low-skilled that are in employment, whilst the low level of awareness of the offer of support also poses an obstacle to accessing guidance services. **Awareness of the offer of support** is key to ensuring take-up of learning opportunities; however, from the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults, the view on awareness was somewhat mixed. 51% said that awareness amongst the target group was low. 2% said that there was no awareness. From the survey of adult learners, the greatest proportion of respondents said that they learned about their adult learning programme through friends (42%). A total of 10.5% cited national websites, 9.5% cited a provider of guidance other than an employment agency and 8.5% cited social networks. No respondents cited an employment agency. 15% cited other routes, such as their teachers or teachers of relatives or directly through the training organisation, professional associations and relatives.

Support to employers

Evidence shows that the provision of **outreach and guidance services to employers** has been somewhat inconsistent and piecemeal. Whilst many Member States engage with employers in some way in the design of upskilling pathways, evidence of systematic provision of guidance to encourage employers to support employees is limited. In **Estonia**, it is reported from the case study that there is no information on systematic employer outreach and guidance outside of general mass-media campaigns. Employers are expected to reach out to the Unemployment Insurance Fund to apply for employee training grants, employees' career counselling, Estonian language or digital skills training. Interviewees reported perceived hesitation from employers in using the services, fearing that more confident and skilled employees would look for employment elsewhere.

Consultations suggest that this lack of guidance has a more detrimental effect on SMEs than larger companies. This is particularly detrimental, as overall, employees in SMEs are less likely to participate in training than their counterparts in larger companies. In some countries, such as **Hungary**, the figure is particularly low, at around half the EU average¹²⁴.

Some positive exceptions include **Denmark**, where a comprehensive guidance website 'Voksenuddannelse.dk', in 2017, provides advice and information to employers whilst adult education institutions and municipal job centres also provide guidance at the local level; and Ireland, where Skillnet operates through sectoral networks, so the training and guidance provided is suitable for the needs of businesses. The types of guidance provided to businesses includes guidance on achieving value for money when investing in learning and development.

124 2018 SBA Fact Sheet – Hungary
<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/38662/attachments/14/translations/en/renditions/native>

Support to staff

Evidence of **providing training and continuous professional development to staff involved in delivering adult learning measures was identified in the majority of Member States**, though the degree of effectiveness of such support and the level of tailoring to the needs of the target group vary substantially. In some Member States, **training is provided but it is not tailored to working with adult learners**:

- In **Italy**, all stakeholders confirmed that this is an area for improvement that affects the quality of the offer in a decisive way. University training offers a generic curriculum that is scarcely relevant with respect to the professionalization and continuous training needs of the Adult Learning Workforce. There is a uniformity of curriculum that prevents specialization for those who work with adults. This prevents professionals from achieving adequate quality standards.
- In **Croatia**, there is no training of teachers who work with adults even though the model of work is different, requiring specific teaching skills adapted to a low-skilled cohort.
- A similar situation was reported in **Cyprus**, where despite having a long tradition of train the trainer programmes, especially as regards VET, there is no specific professional pathway for adult education trainers and their qualifications and specialisation usually derive from their degrees' subject knowledge and relevant experience. This is a key priority for Cyprus, with programmes currently being developed for the initial and continuing training of VET school teachers and in-company as part of the policy effort to improve VET's quality, flexibility and permeability as well as enhance the population's key competence.

In other Member States, a great **focus is given to ensuring continuous professional development of staff involved in adult learning provision on a strategic level**:

- In **Finland** this is built into the education package procurement system, which is carefully developed to include specific quality indicators that the educational institution bidding for the package must comply, including provision of continuous professional development to staff involved. The Ministry monitors outcomes and feedback from the learners and intervenes if needed.
- In **Germany**, the "General agreement on the national decade for literacy and basic education" (*AlphaDekade*), a strategic framework running from 2016-2026, aims to reduce functional illiteracy and raise the level of basic skills in Germany. Its measures include developing teacher training and qualifications for teaching staff.
- In **Belgium**, FORMAFORM is responsible for all training to trainers who work in public training organisations in Wallonia and in Brussels. The various governments are currently finalising the legal texts that will make this organisation a permanent one and to widen its mission.
- In **Bulgaria**, training of adult learning staff is provided by the Ministry. Courses for increasing the skills for working with different target groups are listed on the website of the Ministry, in the section National Program and there is reportedly high participation from most staff. Since 2021, there is also a program for teachers in more specific areas, namely regions with low interest in education and training.
- In some Member States, there is a strong focus on continuous professional development of staff, but only on a **project-basis**, with limited evidence of systematic provision:

- In **Greece** the BASIC project ensured that PES (OAED) trainers were all trained specifically on how to work with learners with different profiles, backgrounds, experiences and life/career plans. The project also developed three Guides for Trainers for literacy, numeracy and science training for basic skills development.

Q1.6(a) To what extent has the Recommendation contributed to the observed changes in Member States, including changes with regards to levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills among the target population?

Key findings

The **degree to which the decrease in the share of low-qualified across the EU can be attributed to the Recommendation is very limited**. The overall improvement in the educational attainment level of adults across the EU can only to a small extent be considered the outcome of upskilling pathways activities, given that it is likely to be due to long-standing improvements of initial education. This is reflected also in the fact that the downward trend in the share of low-qualified across the EU has been visible since 2011 (see section 3.2.1). The interrupted time series analysis (annex 9) has further confirmed this, only revealing one country (Belgium) where such a link between implementation of the Recommendation and change in the share of the low-qualified could be determined.

However, it is clear from the consultations with stakeholders undertaken for this study, that the **Recommendation has contributed to changes in an indirect way by acting as a catalyst for a renewed policy focus on the target group of low-skilled adults**. In Member States that had high need for change in particular, the Recommendation is viewed consistently by stakeholders as having made a contribution to highlighting the challenge, revealing issues with current provision, setting out a way forward for improving the upskilling provision for the target group of low-skilled adults and stimulating cooperation between actors on this topic that did not previously exist. This confirms the finding outlined in Q1.1 of a discrepancy between progress on the macro-level due to the Recommendation (limited) and progress on the micro-level due to the Recommendation (more evident). **Measures to facilitate access to upskilling pathways are either taking place on too small a scale to be reflected on the macro-level or have not been implemented for a long enough period of time for their results to be reflected in the quantitative data trends, but some progress on the micro-level in achieving the objectives of the Recommendation is evident**.

Observed changes in the **share of low-qualified**, as outlined in Q1.1, show a general decline in the size of the target group of the Recommendation. To recall: the share of the low-qualified population has decreased since 2016 in all Member States except Germany. However, the share remains nevertheless high and above 15% in seven Member States (BG, DK, ES, IT, MT, PT, RO). Evolution in the **participation rate of low-qualified adults** is also positive though not universal: between 2016 and 2021, participation increased in 19 Member States (BE, CY, EE, ES, FI, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK) but decreased in eight (AT, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EL, FR, HU).

The **degree to which these changes in the quantitative indicators most relevant to upskilling pathways can be attributed to the Recommendation is very limited**. The overall improvement in the educational attainment level of adults across the EU can only to a small extent be considered the outcome of upskilling pathways activities, given that it is likely to be due to long-standing improvements of initial education. This is reflected also in the fact that the downward trend in the share of low-qualified across the EU has been visible since 2011 (see section 3.2.1). The interrupted time series analysis has only revealed one country (Belgium) where such a link could be possible in terms of the share of the low-qualified (see Annex 9).

However, it is clear from the consultations with stakeholders undertaken for this study, that the **Recommendation has contributed to supporting the upskilling of low-skilled adults in EU countries by acting as a catalyst for a renewed policy focus on the target group**. In Member States that had high need for change in particular, the Recommendation is viewed consistently by stakeholders as having made a contribution to highlighting the challenge, revealing issues with current provision, setting out a way forward for improving the upskilling provision for the target group of low-skilled adults and stimulating cooperation between actors on this topic that did not previously exist.

We analyse in the sections that follow the degree to which the Recommendation has contributed to observed changes, according to the grouping of Member State's need for change in 2016 (outlined in detail in section 2.2).

Contribution to countries with low need for change: As outlined in Q1.1, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Netherlands and Sweden had low need for change in 2016 due to high levels of participation in adult learning and well-established systems of support for the low-qualified. In all these countries, the study found that **no or modest change had been implemented since 2016** to align with the upskilling approach outlined in the Recommendation. Decreases in the share of the low-qualified – which took place in all these Member States – thus occurred regardless of any direct response to the Recommendation. The ITSA confirmed this, as the analysis did not find any possible links between changes in indicators and any measures implemented since 2016. The limited contribution of the Recommendation to observed changes in this group of countries was also confirmed by the consultations that took place:

- In **Denmark**, all stakeholders reiterated that developments in adult learning happened with national motivation and were not initiated by the Recommendation. However, they highlighted that developments still corresponded well with aims of the Recommendation.
- In **Estonia**, all stakeholders were clear that the Recommendation itself was not the main driver of any actions, as national measures for providing upskilling pathways were in place already before the Recommendation.
- In **Finland**, stakeholders confirmed that the progress on upskilling the population has taken place irrespectively of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.
- In the **Netherlands**, stakeholders confirmed that many policy measures/initiatives already existed before the Recommendation. However, stakeholders also recognised that the “*Actiegerichte aanpak*” (action-oriented approach) initiated within the remits of the EaSI-project on Upskilling Pathways, and the SRSS-project on the topic accelerated improvements of basic skills and lifelong learning that were in line with the Recommendation.

Contribution to countries with medium need for change: In the group of countries with medium need for change in 2016, the share of the low-qualified population decreased in all Member States except Germany. However, **only Latvia and Germany implemented changes since 2016** to their upskilling approach (significant and modest respectively) whilst the remaining countries in this group (Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal and Slovenia) did not. In this group of countries, therefore, there is again limited evidence of the link between improvement of the indicator and the Recommendation itself, as also confirmed by the ITSA (see annex 9). Nonetheless, consultations with stakeholders show that even though the contribution of the Recommendation to the quantitative indicators cannot be ascertained, the **Recommendation did contribute indirectly to a prioritisation of the topic of upskilling pathways and the target group**.

- Stakeholders from **Slovenia** highlighted that, whilst measures in line with the Recommendation were planned before it was adopted, the Recommendation legitimised the approach, supporting to get buy-in and political will to continue implementation.
- In **Lithuania**, stakeholders confirmed that the Recommendation indicated the direction in which the country should direct investment and policy efforts thus indirectly contributing to the development of lifelong learning opportunities in the country.

Contribution to countries with high need for change: In the group of countries with high need for change in 2016, the share of the low-qualified population decreased in all Member States. As outlined in Q1.1, change in their upskilling approach in terms of policy measures has been implemented in this group, but to varying degrees. Furthermore, some Member States (CY, CZ, IT, SK and ES, HU, IE, RO) only implemented modest change or no change at all. The ITSA (see Annex 9) confirmed that there is very little **evidence of any impact of the policy measures introduced from 2016 to observed changes in the indicators**. Results were statistically significant only for four Member States and only in one of them do they show a possible link between measures and indicators: the rate of decrease in the size of the low-qualified population in **Belgium** was more rapid or steep than the model predicted, possibly linked to the significant change implemented in the country's policy approach to upskilling measures following the Recommendation.

Nevertheless, stakeholders from all countries from this group recognised that the **Recommendation has contributed in an indirect way to supporting the low-skilled** through highlighting the challenge, revealing issues with current provision and setting out a way forward for improving the upskilling provision for the target group of low-skilled adults.

- In **Italy**, stakeholders highlighted that the Recommendation has legitimised certain approaches, in particular, the skills assessment, in the regional vocational training system and was a catalyst for action.
- In **Greece**, stakeholders agreed that the Recommendation has put the issue of the need to improve basic skills on the table and precipitated action and, as such, is likely to have had an impact on the recent Law on VET which is very much aligned with the Recommendation.
- In **Czechia**, stakeholders consulted mentioned that the increased focus on digital skills in their countries has been supported by the Recommendation.

It is clear, therefore, that despite the lack of evidence pointing to a causal link between the implementation of the Recommendation and the improvement in the quantitative indicators, the Recommendation is likely to have contributed to observed changes to some extent by **acting as a catalyst** in:

1. Bringing attention to the policy issue of the low-skilled and bringing adult learning to the attention of numerous institutional and non-institutional actors
2. Stimulating cooperation between actors on this topic (as seen in Q1.4)
3. Accelerating change that was already underway in some Member States

These contributions are further explored in section 4.2 (EU added value).

Q1.6(b) To what extent has the Commission, with the support of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, been successful in following up on the implementation of the Recommendation, e.g., through exchanges such as mutual learning?

Key findings

The **three mutual learning events** funded by the EaSI programme and organised by the European Commission on upskilling pathways have been beneficial in terms of supporting the sharing of best practices. EU funding has also been identified as one of the principal contributions of the Recommendation with the ESF in particular supporting structural and systematic changes in Member States, particular those with less developed adult learning systems. **Projects supported by the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI)**, funded under the three specific calls for actions have enabled the piloting of approaches to upskilling and encouraged experimentation. The Commission's publication of a **stocktaking report** on implementation of the Recommendation in 2019¹²⁵ also allowed for an understanding of progress in Member States' implementation of the Recommendation.

In the majority of Member States, **EU funding** was seen as an important contribution of the Recommendation to upskilling. The European Social Fund (ESF) has supported some structural and systematic changes in Member States, particularly those with less developed adult learning systems, whilst EaSI-supported projects funded under the three dedicated calls on upskilling pathways were also mentioned by beneficiary countries with more developed systems (more information on the contribution of EU funding to implementation is provided in section 4.2, Q2.2).

The three **mutual learning events** funded by the EaSI programme and organised by the European Commission on upskilling pathways¹²⁶ were mentioned as beneficial in terms of supporting the sharing of best practices. These were particularly identified by Member States with a lower level of adult learning provision and a less developed adult learning system at the time of adoption of the Recommendation. However, it must be noted that 40% of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, selected 'do not know' when asked about the extent to which mutual learning activities by the European Commission have been useful in their country/region, suggesting a lower level of awareness of these activities from organisations responsible for delivering adult learning measures on the ground.

Other activities led by the European Commission in the field of adult learning, including the national coordinators for adult learning, the adult learning working group and the European Platform for Adult Learning and Education (EPALE) have also contributed to **the knowledge-sharing and awareness-raising** around low-skilled adults and supported the implementation of the Recommendation through gathering good practices from Member States. The work of Cedefop, in particular, various studies on upskilling pathways¹²⁷ as well as policy learning forums¹²⁸ bringing together key stakeholders on adult learning, have provided a platform for countries to come together to learn from one another and explore common challenges in upskilling adults with a low level of skills.

125 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf and

126 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>

127 Including Empowering Adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways Volumes 1 and 2;

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3081>

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3082>

128 See for example Second Policy learning forum on upskilling pathways: a vision for the future:

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

*Q1.7 To what extent have Member States **evaluated and monitored measures** related to upskilling pathways and used the results of their evaluation in informing the design and delivery of upskilling pathways?*

Key findings

Whilst measures related to upskilling pathways are monitored by Member States and some have been the subject of evaluations, the **degree to which the results have impacted the design and delivery of the measures is limited**. The involvement of a wide range of actors in the upskilling pathways measures (institutions from the labour market and education) means that cooperation needs to be very robust to allow for such data to be tracked, analysed and used to influence programmes. The lack of a systematic data collection process on the implementation of the Recommendation on the EU level was also identified as challenging, making it difficult to assess and compare progress EU-wide.

Many measures related to upskilling pathways are **monitored** by Member States and some have been the subject of **evaluations**, but the degree to which the results have impacted the design and delivery of the measures is limited. Collecting baseline data and tracking it longitudinally is resource-intensive and the involvement of a wide range of actors in the upskilling pathways measures (institutions from the labour market and education) means that cooperation needs to be very robust to allow for such data to be tracked, analysed and used to influence programmes. In **Ireland**, which has a relatively well-developed upskilling pathways system, stakeholders pointed to the challenge of collecting data on people's ability, and then tracking it as they progress through upskilling pathways measures, as well as after they have completed the training. Similarly, **Spain** lacks provision of monitoring and evaluating activities: few projects or initiatives at the national level include an impact evaluation dimension. As a consequence, there is a lack of robust data that could help both to improve further policy design and to share good practices among actors.

The **lack of a systematic data collection process** on the implementation of the Recommendation on the EU level has also been identified as hindering the evaluation and monitoring of upskilling measures. Member States fulfilled their obligation to "*outline appropriate measures for the implementation of this Recommendation at national level*", and submitted these plans to the Commission; on the basis of this, the European Commission published a Staff Working Document taking stock of implementation. However, the lack of *systematic monitoring* of these plans since then has meant that there is limited comprehensive, EU-wide, comparable data on the implementation of the Recommendation in Member States. Stakeholders from national authorities responsible for implementing the Recommendation in particular, highlighted that this makes it challenging to assess and compare progress EU-wide. Stakeholders referred to similar processes that are undertaken for other EU initiatives (for example, for the Youth Guarantee in the Employment Committee (EMCO)) which could possibly be replicated for the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.

Nevertheless, some examples of evaluations impacting the design of measures can be seen, as outlined in the Box below.

Box 18 Example of monitoring and evaluation of upskilling measures

In **Latvia**, participant surveys are conducted, and changes subsequently introduced on the basis of feedback such as changes to group size restrictions and the process of conducting skills assessments.

In **Bulgaria**, monitoring and evaluation activities take place in the context of Bulgaria's Human Resources Development (HRD) operational programme (OP) under the ESF. The first evaluation examines the impact of measures to support the unemployed and inactive

persons over the age of 29. The second evaluation examines the impact of measures to support employees.

In **Estonia**, no monitoring and evaluation activities are carried out specifically in terms of implementation of the Recommendation, but some upskilling measures are monitored regularly and adapted accordingly. For example, in the past, employers could apply for an employee training grant only if the volume of the training was at least 80 hours, but this was reduced to 50 hours based on feedback, to encourage higher take-up. Monitoring has also been carried out in relation to work-related training courses in the frame of the mid-term evaluation of the country's Lifelong Learning Strategy. Measures put into place by the country's Unemployment Insurance Fund from May 2017 to April 2019 have also been evaluated and implementation of the OSKA programme was evaluated in 2018. However, much of the monitoring and evaluation in Estonia seems to be less formal, for example in the form of collecting feedback from participants who have engaged in specific activities.

4.2. Efficiency

This section examines the efficiency of the Recommendation, focusing on the costs and benefits experienced by individuals, employers and society as well as the extent to which EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation. This description of the costs and benefits focuses on those arising **as a result of all adult education programmes** introduced over the last five years, rather than those resulting purely from the Recommendation. This approach is taken due to the difficulty in separating out the costs and benefits that arose as a *direct* result of the Recommendation, from those that might have occurred in the absence of the Recommendation. This challenge arises for two main reasons:

1. All Member States had adult education systems in place prior to the Recommendation, and in some cases these systems very closely resembled the system called for by the Recommendation.
2. Member States do not operate separate funding streams/budgets for measures introduced as a result of the Recommendation/education measures that are in line with the Recommendation, and those that aren't, noting that expenditures are cross-cutting and funded from the same national budget.

Given this, stakeholders consulted were often unable to comment on the size of costs and benefits arising as a direct result of the Recommendation, with the vast majority only able to provide information on costs and benefits in general terms, or at the level of the whole state budget for adult learning. As such, costs and benefits should be interpreted with caution, as they are likely to be overestimated. Where stakeholders noted that costs or benefits arose purely due to the Recommendation, or differed between regions within countries, this is stated in the text. Annex 11 summarises the available information on costs and benefits.

*Q2.1 What were the **costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation** for the different stakeholders (including adult learners) at various levels (national, regional, local)? To what extent have Member States encouraged participation in upskilling pathways through financial incentives?*

Key findings

Costs for the state and municipal administrative bodies include **adjustment costs from designing, delivering, and monitoring upskilling measures** often occurred at the national level and, for countries with devolved education systems, at the regional or local

administration level. Costs also arose to the state and municipal administrative bodies from providing **financial incentives** to encourage the provision and take up of adult education. Evidence shows that incentives to education providers are most common, followed by incentives to employers and then incentive to learners. Finally, should participating in learning mean that learners become eligible for new welfare payments or support there may also be an increased cost to the State or municipal administrative body.

Evidence shows that **learners can be expected to face some costs** as a result of engaging in upskilling measures, including costs for travel, accommodation, and any equipment such as textbooks (if not reimbursed via the learning provider) and costs in the form of forgone earnings. Overall though the **evidence available suggests that these costs for learners are likely to be relatively low.**

Costs for the state and municipal administrative bodies

Member States have incurred adjustment costs from **designing, delivering, and monitoring upskilling measures**. These costs are incurred from:

- Developing and/or rewriting existing qualifications frameworks and standards
- (Re)designing modular courses to suit adult learning, as per the flexible and tailored approach outlined in the Recommendation.
- Staffing costs linked to designing, delivering, and monitoring the Recommendation or measures linked to it.

These costs have been occurred at the national level and, for countries with devolved education systems such as **Germany** and **Sweden**, at the local administration level. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, 82% of the 67 respondents reported that they had incurred these types of costs in implementing adult learning measures over the last five years (39% to a great extent, 18% to a fairly large extent, and 25% to a small extent). In the public consultation results, the 'costs of designing, delivering, and monitoring measures' were the costs most frequently reported as incurred by the Recommendation to a fairly large or very large extent (16 respondents out of 43, 37%). Other costs that were reported in the public consultation were large expenditure for teacher salaries and consulting costs to conduct evaluations.

In terms of **staffing costs**, for policymakers and organisations representing low-skilled adults at the EU level, these costs are typically limited to one or two staff members working across adult education rather than focusing purely on Upskilling Pathways measures, so are **estimated to be low** (no exact estimate was provided), although the hours they spend on tasks related to the Recommendation do represent an extra cost. A small number of interviewees from national and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for employment policies (including Public Employment Services) also spoke of internal staff training costs, along with salary costs for career counsellors. Teacher training costs were also mentioned by EU-level representatives of education and training providers. **Bulgaria** was the only Member State where national interviewees additionally highlight costs of organising meetings/information days to inform other stakeholders of the Upskilling Pathways measures (no estimate of cost was provided).

Costs also arose to the state and municipal administrative bodies from providing **financial incentives to encourage the provision and take up of adult education**. Member States have reported offering financial incentives to learners, employers, and education providers. This has included providing training/courses for free or at a reduced fee to learners, covering certain aspects of learner's expenses (e.g., travel), and reimbursing employers for training costs. The size and type of financial incentives differs across Member States (as discussed

below), meaning the extent to which the financial costs of learning are borne by different stakeholders (e.g., individual learners, employers, the state) depends on to whom and in what way the incentives are provided.

Incentives to education providers: Evidence shows that incentives to education providers are most common, followed by incentives to employers and then incentives to learners. Respondents to both the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations and the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults indicated that incentives were provided to a great/large extent to education providers (41% and 45% respectively), to employers (38% and 37% respectively), and to individuals (31% and 33% respectively). Qualitative evidence from the interviews and case studies supports these survey findings, with approximately a third of EU and national level interviewees mentioned that some form of financial incentive accompanies courses linked to the Upskilling Pathways measures identified in the mapping.

- **Financial incentives aimed at individual learners:** These included offering education and training for free or at a subsidised cost through the provision of scholarships and study grants. For example:
- National interviewees from **Estonia** noted that adult learners can qualify to receive an of allowance of EUR 292 per month to study at a HEI or VET institution.
- The **Danish** State Educational Support for Adults (SVU) offers a grant or paid training leave to people active in the Danish workforce, who wish to participate in supplementary or further education.
- Through the *Bildungsprämie* in **Germany**, specific vulnerable groups are eligible to receive State funding to cover part of their education and training costs.
- The case study of **Bulgaria** highlighted that vouchers for the employed to undertake training had been introduced as a result of the Recommendation, with a total project cost of EUR15.3million over 2018 to 2021. Personal vouchers are also available to obtain a first degree.
- The **Austrian** case study noted that from October 2020, all participants of upskilling measures provided by the PES received an “education bonus” of EUR 180 a month.

Financial incentives for learners can also be in the form of **reimbursement of travel expenses**. For example, in **Latvia** national interviewees reported that state support for regional mobility has been introduced within the last five years, which means that if an unemployed adult attends an education institution more than 15 km away, their transport costs are reimbursed. The **Estonia** case study highlighted that because the country is sparsely populated, learners may travel large distances to access learning, especially individuals living in rural area. As such, the reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs represents a significant part of the country’s adult education costs (no exact estimate was provided).

Respondents to the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults additionally noted that participation in adult learning among priority target groups could be further increased by offering individuals additional financial incentives to fully cover travel, meals while at a training centre, course materials, and through providing educational leave or training during working hours. Respondents also highlighted that providing advice throughout the training program may help to prevent dropouts and improve confidence of learners.

- **Denmark** encourages training through a benefit, which compensates employers for the salary that they pay out to employees who undertake occupation-oriented adult and further education programmes during their work hours.¹²⁹
- The SLIM-subsidy policy in the **Netherlands** (launched in 2000) aims to stimulate adult learning among employees in SMEs and in the sectors of agriculture, hospitality and recreation industries, by allowing employers to claim back a proportion of their training cost.¹³⁰
- The **Swedish** national interviews and case study highlighted that Sweden pays subsidies to employers who allow staff time off work to undertake training (see box below).

Financial incentives aimed at employers: Costs also arose to the state and municipal administrative bodies as a result of providing financial incentives to employers. For example:

Box 19 Example of financial training incentives

Sweden uses a number of financial incentives to encourage both individual and employee participation in training. Basic adult education skills courses are provided free of charge. Furthermore, specific groups with education levels below upper secondary level that have been unemployed for a certain amount of time are eligible for a study grant of approximately SEK 9000 per month. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, access to this grant was extended to include newly unemployed people over 2020-2021. Additionally, subsidies are paid to employers who permit their staff to work shorter hours in order to complete training courses. This has the benefit of promoting competence and skills development as part of employment.

Welfare payments: Should participating in learning mean that learners become **eligible for new welfare payments or support** – as is the case in the Danish benefit described above - there may also be an increased cost to the State or municipal administrative body (consultees were not able to provide an estimate of the additional cost associated with implementing the Recommendations).

Infrastructure costs: The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that over four fifths (84%) of respondents had incurred infrastructure costs (33% to a great extent, 22% to a fairly large extent, and 28% to a small extent). This cost was also highlighted in the public consultation response and by interviewees from national government bodies responsible for adult learning/training in **Lithuania** and national authorities in **Malta**, who spoke of the costs of modernising and improving learning spaces (consultees were not able to provide an estimate of the additional cost associated with implementing the Recommendations).

Advertising costs: The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that over four fifths (85%) of respondents had incurred these types of costs to raise awareness of adult education opportunities (19% to a great extent, 24% to a fairly large extent, and 42% to a small extent). Consultees were not able to provide an estimate of the additional cost associated with implementing the Recommendations.

Total costs incurred by the state, regional or municipal administrative bodies: Overall, few countries have been able to estimate the total costs incurred as a result of the Recommendation, or to provide quantified estimates as to how these costs break down, by cost type. However, a small number of countries have been able to provide the total cost of

129 VEU allowance for occupation oriented adult and further education <https://lifeindenmark.borger.dk/school-and-education/the-danish-education-system/veu-allowance-for-occupation-oriented-adult-and-further-education>

130 <https://business.gov.nl/subsidy/incentive-scheme-learning-and-development-within-smes-slim-subsidy/>

programmes designed to meet the Recommendation. It must be noted that the following costs are the total cost of providing these courses in these countries, rather than purely additional costs that can be said to have occurred only as a direct result of the Recommendation. As such, they are likely to overestimate the costs associated with implementing the Recommendation to a large degree:

- The **Bulgarian** case study found that the total costs of implementing measures in accordance with the Recommendation was EUR 140 million.
- National authority interviewees in **Greece** noted that the total cost of their pilot programme, BASIC, which was designed to meet the Recommendation, was EUR 441 959.
- The case study for **Hungary** found that the Recommendation was used to develop training for specific groups, namely low-skilled adults and those employed in public work schemes, at a total cost of EUR 96.77 million.
- The **Swedish** case study noted that spending differs from one municipality to another, in part as local taxes are one source of financing, so municipality budgets vary, and the decision on how to distribute funds across policy areas is made by each individual municipality. At the national level, it is estimated that in 2020, Komvux, the main institute providing adult education, spent SEK 6.7 billion on courses meeting the Recommendation guidelines.

In contrast, the case studies and national interviewees from **Estonia** and **France** specifically stated that they incurred no additional cost as a result of the Recommendation, while interviewees from **Italy** and **Croatia** noted that associated additional costs were very low. This was due to these countries already operating measures largely in line to the Recommendation, meaning no major changes in policy or legislation were required. As such, the additional cost associated with the Recommendations varies between Member States (see Q2.5 for further details).

Costs for learners

Evidence shows that learners can be expected to face some costs as a result of engaging in upskilling measures. These are:

- Costs for travel, accommodation, and any equipment such as textbooks (if not reimbursed via the learning provider)
- Costs in the form of forgone earnings (if paid work hours are reduced to take part in training, and additional childcare costs to cover course time).

Overall though the evidence available suggests that **these costs are likely to be relatively low**. The survey of adult learners found that the majority (59%) of the 102 respondents¹³¹ did not face any financial costs when participating in adult learning programmes. A quarter (24%) reported facing expenses with an additional 14% noting that they paid for course supplies such as textbooks, and 3% noting that they saw a reduction in their income due to a reducing their paid work hours to completing the training. Among the 22 respondents to the survey of adult learners that provided an estimated value of the total costs they did incur, the majority noted that **costs were low**, with just three estimating the total cost to themselves to be over 100 Euros. No respondents reported facing additional childcare costs to cover course time. Nonetheless, adult learners were unlikely to be reimbursed, with only

131 These 102 responses were received from Slovenia, Poland, Portugal, and Italy.

19% of 31 respondents noting that costs were partially or fully reimbursed. Qualitative evidence from the interviews also suggests that such costs are not always reimbursed, and that costs to learners can be higher than reported in the survey. In **Bulgaria** for example, validation processes cost learners up to BGN 700 (EUR 300).

Q2.2 Which EU programmes have contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation? Was the use of funding from different EU programmes cost-effective?

Key findings

During the 2016-2020 period, a range of different EU programmes and funding mechanisms have provided funding to support the implementation of the Recommendation. **By far the largest source of EU funding was the European Social Fund (ESF)**, with over EUR 42 billion allocated to investment priority 10.iii (enhancing equal access to lifelong learning) for the period 2016-2020. Although the amounts were much lower, funding was also available under strands of Erasmus+ and EaSI, including specific calls for proposals related to the implementation of upskilling pathways. Funding was also available to support the implementation of the Recommendation under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Horizon 2020 and the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP).

Although it is impossible to provide a full assessment within the scope of this study, the scale of EU funding available, in particular via relevant priorities of the ESF, together with the range of activities targeted by different funding sources, suggests that **significant resources were available to meet the needs targeted by the Recommendation**. Nonetheless, there is a risk that an **over-reliance on EU funding can hinder the large-scale impact of the measures**, with project-based measures introduced, as opposed to large-scale reform. This is particularly the case for adult learning, also because national funding for this policy area is often included within broader budget lines for education investments as a whole and can thus remain scattered and insufficient.

The study has also found that the **use of funding from EU programmes has been cost-effective**. The use of existing funds (as opposed to the creation of a new fund or budget line) has allowed the use of existing structures (e.g., ESF and ERDF Managing Authorities, Erasmus+ National Agencies, etc.) and administrative mechanisms (e.g. IT tools, forms, reporting, etc.) to distribute and manage the funds which has led to economies of scale. The main concerns expressed about cost-effectiveness, in particular in relation to the ESF and ERDF, relate to the administrative burden, particularly for smaller beneficiaries. Evidence from the Commission's ESF evaluation however concludes that, for most stakeholders, the benefits outweigh the costs.

Overall, the extent of support provided for upskilling pathways greatly depends on Member States' willingness and capacity to earmark funding for this vital field of adult learning. **Adult learning overall tends to be supported by state budgets**, within the education or active labour market policy system, or by employer contributions. There is, however, a **lack of concrete data** capturing Member States' spending on adult learning, which makes it challenging to assess the degree of this national support: funding for the education of adults provided by the state within the education system is often not estimated or recorded by the Member States. More complete data are only available in the case of spending on active labour market policies as outlined in section 3.1. According to this data, it becomes clear that ALMPs have the spending power to support upskilling initiatives in some Member States (such as Finland, Austria, Denmark and France), but play no major role in funding support for upskilling in others (such as Czechia, Slovakia and Romania) (see Figure A2.22 in Annex 2). For the purposes of this study, this section focuses on the degree to which **EU funding** in particular has contributed to the implementation of the Recommendation.

Although no specific new EU fund was created for the implementation of the Recommendation, there have been specific calls for proposals for projects to support its implementation, for example under EaSI and Erasmus+. In addition, upskilling pathways can be funded under several other EU funds or programmes. The Recommendation specifically recommends that the Commission ‘*support the use of current and future European funding programmes in the area of skills development, in particular European structural and investment funds and Erasmus+, for the implementation of this Recommendation, in accordance with their legal basis*’ (§22). In the below section, we set out firstly (i) the EU funds which contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the Recommendation in the 2016-2020 period, and secondly (ii) a brief overview of the EU funds which are available for supporting upskilling pathways under the new Multiannual Financial Framework (from 2021).

(i) EU funds supporting upskilling pathways 2016-2020

The principal sources of EU funding for supporting the implementation of upskilling pathways under the previous Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), from the date of adoption of the Recommendation in 2016 until 2020, were the European Social Fund (ESF), Erasmus+ and the European programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), but there was also funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Horizon 2020 and the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP). Specific provisions which allowed funding for implementing upskilling pathways under each funding instrument during this period are set out in the table below:

Table 14 Overview of specific provisions in EU funding sources to support the implementation of upskilling pathways (2016-2020)

EU fund / programme	Specific provisions allowing funding for upskilling pathways
<p>ESF (2014-2020)¹³²</p> <p><i>(NB most relevant provisions in italics)</i></p>	<p>Investment priorities (Article 3.1): (a.i) Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people; (a.v) Adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change; (a.vi) Active and healthy ageing; (b.i) Active inclusion; (c.iii) Enhancing <i>equal access to lifelong learning</i> for all age-groups in formal, non-formal and informal settings, upgrading the knowledge, skills and competences of the workforce, and <i>promoting flexible learning pathways</i> including through career guidance and validation of acquired competences; (c.iv) Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitating the transition from education to work, and strengthening vocational education and training systems and their quality, including through mechanisms for skills anticipation, adaptation of curricula and the establishment and development of work-based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes; and (d.ii) Capacity building for all stakeholders delivering education, lifelong learning, training and employment and social policies.</p>
<p>ERDF (2014-2020)¹³³</p>	<p>Investment priorities (Article 5: (10) Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure.</p>
<p>Erasmus+</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial provisions (Article 18.2): (a.iv) Minimum allocation of 5% of the education and training budget to adult learning (Grundtvig).

¹³² Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1304>

¹³³ REGULATION (EU) No 1301/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1301&from=EN>

(2014-2020) ¹³⁴ .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific call for projects: Key Action 3: Support for Policy Reform: National Coordinators for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EACEA 01/2019)¹³⁵.
EaSI (2014-2020) ¹³⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis • Specific calls for proposals for activities on different dimensions of upskilling pathways (e.g., tailored learning provision¹³⁷, skills assessments¹³⁸, awareness-raising¹³⁹), specifically to support the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. • Other specific calls for proposals e.g., VP/2013/010 under PROGRESS: Delivering on skills for growth and jobs
Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) ¹⁴⁰	Societal Challenge 6 (Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies)
SRSP (2017-2020) ¹⁴¹	Specific objectives and scope (Article 5.2): (a) education and training; labour market policies, including social dialogue, for the creation of jobs.

The principal source of EU funding for the implementation of different upskilling pathways measures across the Member States was the **ESF**. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, by far the largest proportion of respondents (78.95%, 30 responses) considered that the ESF contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills to a fairly large (31.58%, 12 responses) or great (47.37%, 18 responses) extent. Over EUR 42 billion (levering further national co-funding of over EUR 64 billion) was allocated across the EU to ESF Investment Priority 10.iii (Enhancing equal access to lifelong learning) for the period 2016-2020, ranging from EUR 13.6 billion in **Spain**, 7.2 billion in **France** and EUR 3.5 billion in **Portugal**, to EUR 60 million in **Malta**, EUR 26 million in **Cyprus**, and EUR 19 million in **Luxembourg**; only the **Netherlands** did not allocate any funds to this priority (a full list of the amounts allocated per country can be found in Table 1 in Annex 10 of this report)¹⁴². While the funds allocated to IP10.iii do not only fund activities for low-skilled adults, but it is also an important indication of the scale of ESF funding in this area. Furthermore, as seen in the evaluation of ESF Thematic Objective 10 (see following paragraph), the largest proportion of funding under this IP, did go to low-qualified adults.

This study for the evaluation on the ESF support to education and training (Thematic Objective 10) showed that the **ESF contribution represents the lion's share of all the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) budgets earmarked for investment**

134 Article 18 of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (see below)

135 https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20210122142416/https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/selection-results/national-coordinators-for-the-implementation-of-the-european-agenda-for-adult-learning_en

136 Article 26, Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on a European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") and amending Decision No 283/2010/EU establishing a European Progress Microfinance Facility for employment and social inclusion, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1296>

137 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=629&langId=en&callId=551&furtherCalls=yes>

138 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en&callId=537&furtherCalls=yes>

139 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en&callId=515&furtherCalls=yes>

140 REGULATION (EU) No 1291/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 December 2013 establishing Horizon 2020 - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) and repealing Decision No 1982/2006/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1291&from=EN>

141 Regulation (EU) 2018/1671 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 amending Regulation (EU) 2017/825 to increase the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme and adapt its general objective, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018R1671&from=EN>

142 Source: Cohesion Data Platform. Planned EU funding under ESF Thematic Objective 10 Investment Priority iii for the years 2016 to 2020 inclusive. Data is available here <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2014-2020-Categorisation/ESIF-2014-2020-categorisation-ERDF-ESF-CF-planned-/3kkx-ekfg>

in education and training⁶⁵ in the period 2014-2020. Investment priority (IP) 10.iii (access to lifelong learning) was addressed with significant attention by almost all EU Member States, with operations funded under 109 Operational Programmes covering all categories of regions in 26 EU Member States. Under this IP, funds were concentrated on non-formal job-related education and training (53.8%), while 31% went to vocational and general secondary and post-secondary education and training, and 13% to non-formal not job-related education and training. By the end of 2018, there were 2,787,807 participations in this IP across the EU, with women representing 54%, and over-25 year olds representing 70%. 46.1% of participants were employed, 24.6% unemployed and 26.5% inactive. As noted above, the largest proportion (36%) of participants were low-qualified (ISCED 1-2), 34% were medium-qualified (ISCED 3-4) and 18% high-qualified (ISCED 5-8). The evaluation highlighted however that **operations risked focusing on ‘low hanging fruit’**, supporting people who need only minimal support anyway and leaving aside the more problematic cases, and that the basic skills deficiencies of adult workers that are at risk of exclusion in an increasingly polarised market should be more vigorously addressed. There is also the possibility, also highlighted in the ESF evaluation of Thematic Objective 10, that an over-reliance on EU funding can hinder the large-scale impact of the measures, with project-based measures introduced, as opposed to large-scale reform. This is particularly the case for adult learning, as also national funding for this policy area is often included within broader budget lines for education investments as a whole¹⁴³.

As shown in and discussed further in Section 4.4 (Coherence) below, several of the investment priorities of the 2013 ESF regulation (covering the period 2014-2020) align closely with the objectives of the Recommendation, which facilitated the use of the ESF for their implementation on the ground. Our mapping and interviews have shown that the majority of upskilling pathways measures implemented are co-funded by the ESF. Most of the national stakeholders interviewed as part of the targeted consultations (e.g., AT, BE, BG, CY, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK) underlined the crucial role of the ESF in funding upskilling pathways in their Member State. In some Member States (e.g., SK), it was stated that the ESF is the only source of funding for adult learning.

Some examples of the multiple ESF-funded projects providing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults which show the diversity of initiatives, both in terms of type of activity and Member State, funded by the ESF in this field include: ‘New Opportunity for my Future’¹⁴⁴ and ‘Voucher for Employees’¹⁴⁵ (**Bulgaria**) (see Box below), ‘Combating the Digital Gap’¹⁴⁶ and ‘Improving the quality and content of 21st century vocational training and adult education’¹⁴⁷ (**Hungary**), the SZANSA (‘A Chance – New Opportunities for Adults’) ¹⁴⁸ programme (**Poland**), ‘A New Beginning in the EPALs – Support of EPAL School Units’¹⁴⁹ programme (Greece) or ‘Formation of the Lithuanian qualifications structure, development of the **system** of assessment and recognition of competences and qualifications’¹⁵⁰ (**Lithuania**). In **Hungary**, upskilling of adults with a low educational background and low basic skills is the primary target group of the whole ESF operational programme EDIOP for the period 2014-2020.

¹⁴³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf

¹⁴⁴ https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_BG.pdf

¹⁴⁵ <http://2020.eufunds.bg/en/4/0/Project/BasicData?contractId=UL8Fam2%2FDwQ%3D&isHistoric=False>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/doc/4456>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/ginop-624-vekop-16-a-21-szzadi-szakkpzs-s-felnttkpzs-minsgnek-valamint-tartalmnak-fejlesztse>

¹⁴⁸ <https://szansa-power.frse.org.pl/en/>

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/greece-new-beginning-epal-initiative>

¹⁵⁰ https://www.esinvesticijos.lt/lt/finansavimas/patvirtintos_priemones/lietuvos-kvalifikaciju-sandaros-formavimas-kompetenciju-ir-kvalifikaciju-vertinimo-ir-pripazinimo-sistemas-pletra

Box 20 Example of use of ESF funding for upskilling pathways

Bulgaria - Voucher for Employees: use of ESF funding for upskilling pathways

The 'Voucher for Employees' project provides the opportunity for employees in Bulgaria who have an employment contract in enterprises outside state administration and an average or lower level of education, as well as employees over 54 years of age, to access training courses to improve their professional qualifications and/or key competences of foreign language or digital competence. The project is implemented through the provision of vouchers for the persons from the target group with 50% co-funding from their side. The aim is that the training will allow trainees to increase the relevance of their skills, facilitate their adaptation to new conditions and have better career development.

The **Erasmus+** programme has also provided an important contribution - albeit to a lesser extent than the ESF - to the implementation of the Recommendation, particularly in supporting upskilling measures less directly linked to labour market integration. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, the second largest proportion of respondents (55.26%, 21 responses) considered that Erasmus+ contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to a fairly large (21.05%, 8 responses) or great (34.21%, 13 responses) extent. Although it is difficult to ascertain the proportion allocated to low-skilled adults, it can be noted for example that nearly EUR 24 million was allocated to strategic partnerships for adult education (led by EU Member States) over the 2016-2020 period (see Table 6 in Annex 10), and nearly EUR 4.3 million to funding the National Coordinators within EU Member States for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in 2019 alone (see Table 7 in Annex 10). Over EUR 491 million was allocated in grants over 2016-2020 to projects led by partners in EU Member States under the Key Actions focusing on adult education staff mobility (KA104), strategic partnerships for adult education (KA204) and partnerships for creativity (KA227) – see the list of funding provided in Annex 10 - Table 5¹⁵¹. Further funding was also available for fields including adult education across other strands of Erasmus+, for example policy experimentations under Key Action 3.

A wide range of national stakeholders (e.g., BG, CZ, DK, FI, HU, IE, IT, MT, SE, SI) – including national policymakers, social partners and training providers – emphasised the **importance of funding from Erasmus+**. Stakeholders in **Hungary** and **Latvia** for example highlighted the important role of Erasmus+-funded projects on the National Coordinators for the European Agenda of Adult Learning: in Hungary, the project focused on the national implementation of the Recommendation by elaborating a green paper on the state of affairs, collection of international best practices as well as capacity building among stakeholders. Examples of projects relevant to upskilling pathways funded by Erasmus+ include Career Coaches for Low-qualified Adults (Qualify project)¹⁵², Creating Opportunities for Adult Learners through entrepreneurial competences (CORAL)¹⁵³ and Upskilling of More Creative Circular Economy (U-ECO)¹⁵⁴. Another example is the CITO Skills project (see Box below):

Box 21 Example of use of Erasmus + funding for adult learning

Malta - CITO Skills project: use of Erasmus+ funding for adult learning

The Basic Skills checker was developed as part of the Erasmus+ [Check In, Take Off \(CITO\)](#)¹⁵⁵ project, funded under Erasmus+ EU Policy experimentation in the fields of Education and Training, involving three countries: Malta, Ireland and Norway. The

151 Based on project lists and funding information provided by DG EAC of the European Commission in March 2022.

152 <https://qualifyproject.eu/>

153 <https://coral.erasmus.site/>

154 <https://www.bioazul.com/en/portfolio/u-eco-circular-economy/>

155 <https://citoproject.eu/>

SkillsChecker tool enables adults to carry out an initial self-assessment of their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. It also guides them in their options both for flexible learning opportunities and recognising their prior skills, while providing further pathways. The SkillsChecker is aimed at empowering adult learners to explore a learner-centred approach to lifelong learning. The tool has been piloted and is now being used by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability in Malta. The project was developed specifically in response to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation of 2016.

EaSI has also provided an important source of specific funding for supporting the implementation of upskilling pathways, in particular via the three specific calls for proposals focusing on tailored learning provision (2017)¹⁵⁶, skills assessments (2018)¹⁵⁷, awareness-raising (2019)¹⁵⁸ to support the implementation of the Recommendation (see Table 11 above). Although much smaller amounts compared to the funding for upskilling pathways provided by ESF or Erasmus+, over EUR 5 million was allocated to 12 projects in EU Member States¹⁵⁹ (BE, DE, EL (x2), ES, FR, HR, IT (x3), NL, SK) which were specifically designed to support the implementation of the Recommendation over the 2017-2019 period (see Table 4 in Annex 10 for detail)¹⁶⁰. The average grant awarded was €425,706. Three projects within the EU were funded under each the 2017 call (focused on tailored learning provision) and the 2018 call on skills assessments, while six projects were funded under the 2019 call focused on awareness-raising. In the targeted consultations, several national policymakers (e.g., BE, EL, IT, NL, SK) mentioned the importance of support provided by EaSI, corresponding to the EU Member States which received funding (see Table 4 in Annex 10). In the Netherlands, EaSI funded for example a project focused on making the VET learning offer for adults flexible which initiated the 'Actiegerichte aanpak' (action-oriented approach). In **Greece**, the [BASIC](#) (Building Alternative Skills Innovative sChemes) project¹⁶¹ which piloted the implementation of the 2016 Upskilling Pathways Recommendation in Greece was supported by the EaSI programme. Another example is the BLUESS project in **Slovakia** (see below).

Box 22 Example of use of EaSI funding for upskilling pathways

Slovakia - BLUESS (Blueprints for Basic Skills Development in Slovakia) project: use of EaSI funding for upskilling pathways

In Slovakia, EaSI funding was used to fund the [BLUESS](#)¹⁶² project, implemented in 2019-2021, which aimed to open a debate at national level on the need to address basic skills development for low-qualified adults. The project involved: mapping the existing provision for supporting basic skills development for adults; identifying the main challenges in raising basic skills levels and making recommendations to policymakers in this area; proposing tools for assessing basic skills levels of low-skilled adults; developing the capacity of practitioners to support basic skills development in low-skilled adults; and, carrying out exchanges of information and good practice with other countries.

However, in the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, only a relatively small proportion of respondents (29%, 11 responses) considered that EaSI had contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills to a fairly large (13%, 5 responses) or great (16%, 6 responses) extent, **reflecting perhaps the lesser known profile of this funding mechanism for providers**; 58% (22 responses) stated that they 'did not know'.

156 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=629&langId=en&callId=551&furtherCalls=yes>

157 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en&callId=537&furtherCalls=yes>

158 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en&callId=515&furtherCalls=yes>

159 3 other projects were awarded in Albania, Serbia and Turkey

160 Based on information provided by DG EMPL of the European Commission in March 2022.

161 <https://www.easibasic.gr/?fbclid=IwAR2RoiAUBTipSI9I8Wl5qHjRWlIkODeo4c604BFvcNhgD-zCsfrxHs0GGM>

162 <http://zakladnezrucnosti.sk/projekt-bluess/>

The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** has also provided important levels of funding to support the implementation of upskilling pathways at national level, providing complementarity with ESF through its specific objectives (see above) which allow funding for infrastructure to support adult learning. Over the period 2016-2020, although less than the ESF (which provided over EUR 42 billion), over EUR 5 billion was allocated to the ERDF priority for ‘infrastructure for VET and adult learning’ (levering a further EUR 7 billion in national co-funding). By far the highest allocation was to Portugal (EUR 1.45 billion), followed by Slovakia (EUR 520 million), Latvia (EUR 345 million), Croatia (EUR 315 million) and Germany (EUR 303 million). Smaller allocations were made in other countries, such as Finland (EUR 18.5 million), Malta (EUR 70 million), Greece (EUR 82 million) or Hungary (EUR 87 million). Several Member States (AT, BG, CY, DK, EE, IE, IT, LU, SE, SI) did not allocate any funding to this priority¹⁶³. A full list of planned funding to this priority can be found in Annex 10 - Table 2. In targeted consultations, certain national policymakers (e.g., ES) underlined the use of ERDF funding to support upskilling pathways in their country. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, 31.58% (12 out of 38 responses) of respondents considered that the ERDF had contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills to a fairly large (13%, 5 out of 38 responses) or great (18%, 7 out of 38 responses) extent. An example of an ERDF-funded project on upskilling pathways is provided in the box below; other examples are provided in Table 3 of Annex 10 of this report.

Box 23 Example of use of ERDF for upskilling pathways

Portugal - Cursos TesP - Technical training and courses expanded in Bragança: use of ERDF funding for upskilling pathways¹⁶⁴

With €8 million support from the ERDF between 2015-2022, the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança in the north-east of Portugal developed a range of 44 short, higher education technical courses, aimed at responding to demands for specific professional skills and the needs of local businesses. With the help of the ERDF, the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança acquired new equipment and adjusted classrooms, laboratories and workshops throughout its facilities to the specific requirements of the courses, due to their technical nature. The EU funds helped cover the cost of the teachers and trainers. The two-year courses focus on the needs of the labour market and those of companies, which substantially improves the chances of employment for students after graduation. In doing so, the project is closing the gap between the country’s educational offer and employment needs. Since its launch in 2015, around 71% of enlisted students had successfully graduated. Within six months after completion of the course, 65% of the students had either found employment or started a new study course

Funding for lifelong learning was also provided by the **Horizon 2020** Framework Programme for Research and Innovation under Societal Challenge 6 (Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies). Relevant examples included the ENLIVEN – Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive and Vibrant Europe¹⁶⁵ and EduMAP – Adult Education as a Means for Active Participatory Citizenship¹⁶⁶ (see box below) projects. Other examples of Horizon 2020 projects supporting upskilling pathways are provided in Annex 10 – Table 8.

163 Source: Cohesion Data Platform. Planned EU funding under ERDF “infrastructure for VET and adult learning” for the years 2016 to 2020 inclusive. Data is available at <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2014-2020-Categorisation/ESIF-2014-2020-categorisation-ERDF-ESF-CF-planned-/3kx-ekfq>

164 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/Portugal/technical-training-and-courses-expanded-in-braganca-portugal

165 <https://h2020enliven.org/>, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/693989>

166 <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/693388>, <https://blogs.uta.fi/edumap/>

Box 24 Example of use of Horizon 2020 funding for upskilling pathways

EduMAP - Adult Education as a Means for Active Participatory Citizenship project: use of Horizon 2020 funding for upskilling pathways

The Horizon 2020 EduMAP project, which was coordinated by *Tampereen Korkeakoulusaatio SR* in Finland and ran from February 2016 until January 2019, provided comprehensive analyses and practical insights on the efficacy of the European adult education system in preventing social exclusion and compiles an inventory of successful initiatives and communicative practices in and outside the EU. The fundamental aim was to help policymakers and educational agencies to ensure that the young generations as a whole are able to acquire the skills needed to fully participate in European societies and the labour market. The total EU funding allocated to the project was just under EUR 2.5 million.

The **Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP)** also provided funding which supported the implementation of upskilling pathways in the 2016-2020 period. Under the SRSP, technical support was provided to Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain to upgrade their adult education systems¹⁶⁷ for a total of EUR 1,740,000. A full list of funded projects is provided in Annex 10 – Table 9. Examples included the National Plan for Adult Literacy in **Portugal** (EUR 250,000), the National information system for adult education in **Croatia** (EUR 10,000) and Measures towards the design of a system for the identification, evaluation and recognition of basic competencies in adults in **Spain** (EUR 300,000). The box below provides details of the funding provided by the SRSP to improve the quality and relevance of the adult education system in **Hungary**.

Box 25 Example of use of SRSP funding for upskilling pathways

Technical support to improve the quality and relevance of the adult education system in Hungary: use of SRSP funding for upskilling pathways

The SRSP funding (EUR 280,000) provided in 2020 aimed to support the Ministry of Innovation and Technology in the reform of the adult education system in Hungary to address the significant skills shortages experienced in the Hungarian labour market that amount to 100,000 jobs and contribute to social inclusion. The reform of the system intended to switch from a content-based approach (offer driven) to an outcome-based approach (demand driven). The support measures include specific expertise in skills forecasting; specific expertise in career tracking; specific expertise in adult education policies, including financial incentive; workshops to get acquainted with best practices from Member States; and study visits to other Member States.

Other funding sources mentioned included for example the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**¹⁶⁸, which was used to fund a project in Sweden in 2016-2018 to provide early validation of newcomers' skills and identification of matching employers' needs.¹⁶⁹

Although it is impossible to provide a full assessment within the scope of this study, the scale of EU funding available, in particular via relevant priorities of the ESF, together with the range of activities (including specific actions related to the implementation of the

167 Directorate General for Structural Reform Support. Labour Market, education, health and social services, p.6, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/ht0120285enn.pdf> and further data provided by DG REFORM for this study

168 https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/funding/asylum-migration-and-integration-funds/asylum-migration-and-integration-fund-2021-2027_en

169 Commission Staff Working Document (2019), Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures

Recommendation) targeted by different funding sources, suggests that **significant resources were available to meet the needs targeted by the Recommendation**. Nonetheless, much of the EU funding, in particular via the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) relies on match funding at national or regional level, which may have limited the degree to which funding could be accessed. Furthermore, there is a risk, as highlighted by stakeholders at both EU and national level, that the short-term nature of much of the EU funding may not sufficiently facilitate the necessary long-term and more structural changes required. In addition, there is a risk, as highlighted by the Commission evaluation of ESF support to Thematic Objective 10, that mass-funded operations risk focusing on 'low-hanging fruit', supporting people who are easier to attract into upskilling measures and need less support.

(ii) EU funds available to support upskilling pathways from 2021

The table below sets out an overview of the EU funds available for supporting upskilling pathways under the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) since 2021.

Table 15 Overview of specific provisions in EU funding sources to support the implementation of upskilling pathways from 2021

EU fund / programme	Specific provisions allowing funding for upskilling pathways
<p>ESF+ (2021-2027)¹⁷⁰</p> <p><i>(NB most relevant provisions in italics)</i></p>	<p>Specific objectives (Article 4.1): (a) Improving access to employment and activation measures for all jobseekers; (b) Modernising labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and ensure timely and tailor-made assistance and support for labour market matching, transitions and mobility; (d) Promoting the adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change, active and healthy ageing; (e) Improving the <i>quality, inclusiveness, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems</i> including through validation of non-formal and informal learning, to support acquisition of key competences including entrepreneurial and digital skills; (f) Promoting equal access to and completion of quality and inclusive education and training, in particular for disadvantaged groups from early childhood education and care through general and vocational education and training, to tertiary level, <i>as well as adult education and learning</i>; (g) Promoting lifelong learning, <i>in particular flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all</i> taking into account entrepreneurial and digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting professional mobility; (h) fostering active inclusion with a view to promoting equal opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation, and improving employability, in particular for disadvantaged groups.</p>
<p>ERDF (2021-2027)¹⁷¹</p>	<p>Specific objectives (Article 3.1): (a.iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship; (d.ii): Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training.</p>
<p>Erasmus+ (2021-2027)¹⁷²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget (Article 17.3): (a.iv) At least 5.8% of the total budget for actions in the field of adult education. • Key Action 1: Learning mobility (Article 5.1): (d) Learning mobility of adult education learners and staff. • Annex 1 - Key Action 2: (2.2) Partnerships for excellence ('The action referred to in point 2.2 may also support partnership projects and alliances to promote excellence in the fields of school education and adult education'). • Specific call for projects: Forward-Looking Projects on adult education (Lot 3)¹⁷³.
<p>EaSI</p>	<p>Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis</p>

170 Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1057>

171 Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 Of The European Parliament And Of The Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1058&from=EN>

172 Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/>

173 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/erasmus-edu-2022-pi-forward-lot3>

(2021-2027) ¹⁷⁴	(NB: since 2021, EaSI is a strand under ESF+)
Horizon Europe (2021-2027) ¹⁷⁵	<p>Work Programme of Cluster 2 (Culture, creativity and inclusive society) for the period 2021-2022 includes references to lifelong learning and/or adult learning under:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HORIZON-CL2-2021-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-02: Providing support in a changing world of work and social protection (page 75) • HORIZON-CL2-2021-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-04: Addressing poor learning outcomes in basic skills and early school leaving at national, regional and local level in Europe (page 78) • HORIZON-CL2-2022-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-07: Conditions for the successful development of skills matched to needs (page 105)¹⁷⁶
Just Transition Fund (JTF) (2021-2027) ¹⁷⁷	Scope of support (Article 8.2): (k) – Upskilling and reskilling of workers and jobseekers.
Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) (2020-2026) ¹⁷⁸	Scope (Article 3): (b) Digital transformation, (c) Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, (f) Policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills.
Technical Support Instrument (TSI) (2021-2027) ¹⁷⁹	Scope (Article 5): (d) Education, life-long learning and training, vocational education and training, youth policies, labour market policies, including social dialogue, for the creation of jobs, increased labour market participation of under-represented groups, up- and re-skilling in particular digital skills [...]

As can be seen in the table above, both the new **ESF+** and **Erasmus+** regulations (2021-2027) provide more specific funding opportunities to support upskilling pathways than in the previous MFF (2014-2020). The new ESF+ regulation has a specific objective (g) to promote “flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities” and adult education and lifelong features under several other specific objectives. The new Erasmus+ regulation includes a greater proportion of the funding and more specific funding lines for adult education. Our research indicates that that Recommendation is likely to have contributed to this stronger focus on upskilling opportunities for low-skilled adults, and also that the reinforced focus in these major funding instruments is likely to contribute further to achieving the aims of the Recommendation.

174 Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1057>

175 Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/695/oj>

176 https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-5-culture-creativity-and-inclusive-society_horizon-2021-2022_en.pdf

177 Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1056>

178 Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241>

179 Regulation (EU) 2021/240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 February 2021 establishing a Technical Support Instrument, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2021:057:FULL&from=EN>

The table also shows that funding for upskilling pathways is available for the 2021-2027 period under the **ERDF**, **EaSI** and **Horizon Europe**.

The **Technical Support Instrument (TSI)** is continuing the technical support provided by the SRSP for improving national systems for upskilling pathways. Two projects were funded in 2021: 'Support to design Lifelong Learning Strategy in **Cyprus**' (EUR 400,000) and 'Improving the recognition of competences and development of individual learning pathways by the Provincial Centres for Adult Education in **Italy**' (EUR 400,000).

Box 26 Example of use of TSI funding to support upskilling pathways

Improving the recognition of competences and development of individual learning pathways by the Provincial Centres for Adult Education in Italy: use of TSI funding to support upskilling pathways

The CPIA (Provincial Centres for Adult Education) are the key entities implementing lifelong learning at local level in Italy. Since their creation and despite several reforms carried out during the last decade, the CPIA have low capacity to provide guidance and support to promote professional growth of adults. This leads to low participation in lifelong learning programmes and adult education, poor levels of basic skills and very limited impact of lifelong learning in the integration of low-skilled people in the labour market. The aims of the TSI support are to uphold the reform process initiated in 2012 by strengthening CPIA governance and capacity to deliver good quality lifelong learning across Italy. The funding will support: analysis of the current lifelong learning system (legislation, governance, inter-institutional relations); collection of stakeholders' feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the current system; review of EU good practice; organisation of international workshop/study visit to exchange good practice on relevant experience; provision of policy recommendations to improve reception and guidance of adults, as well as methodology to define the Individual Educational Path (PFI); provision of expert advice to strengthen existing systems to monitor provision and quality of reception and guidance actions; and piloting of the proposed measures.

Probably reflecting the newer nature of the TSI, in the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, only a relatively small proportion of respondents (28.95%, 11 responses) considered that it contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills to a fairly large (13.16%, 5 responses) or great (15.79%, 6 responses) extent.

Since its implementation in 2020, the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** has also provided funding for major initiatives in a range of Member States to support upskilling and reskilling to support the recovery. A slightly higher proportion (compared to the TSI) of respondents (36.8%, 14 responses) to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations considered that the RRF contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills to a fairly large (7.9%, 3 responses) or great (29%, 11 responses) extent; it is interesting to note that it scored the highest proportion of respondents considering that it had contributed to a great extent after the ESF and Erasmus+. Several national policymakers (e.g., BE, CY, ES, FR, GR, IE, LU) underlined important initiatives funded by the RRF. These include for example funding for upskilling and reskilling in digital skills and skills linked to green and digital transitions in **Cyprus** and the new 'Lifelong Skilling' strategy in **Greece** (see box below).

Box 27 Example of use of RRF to support lifelong learning

Greece - New 'Lifelong Learning' strategy: funding provided by the RRF

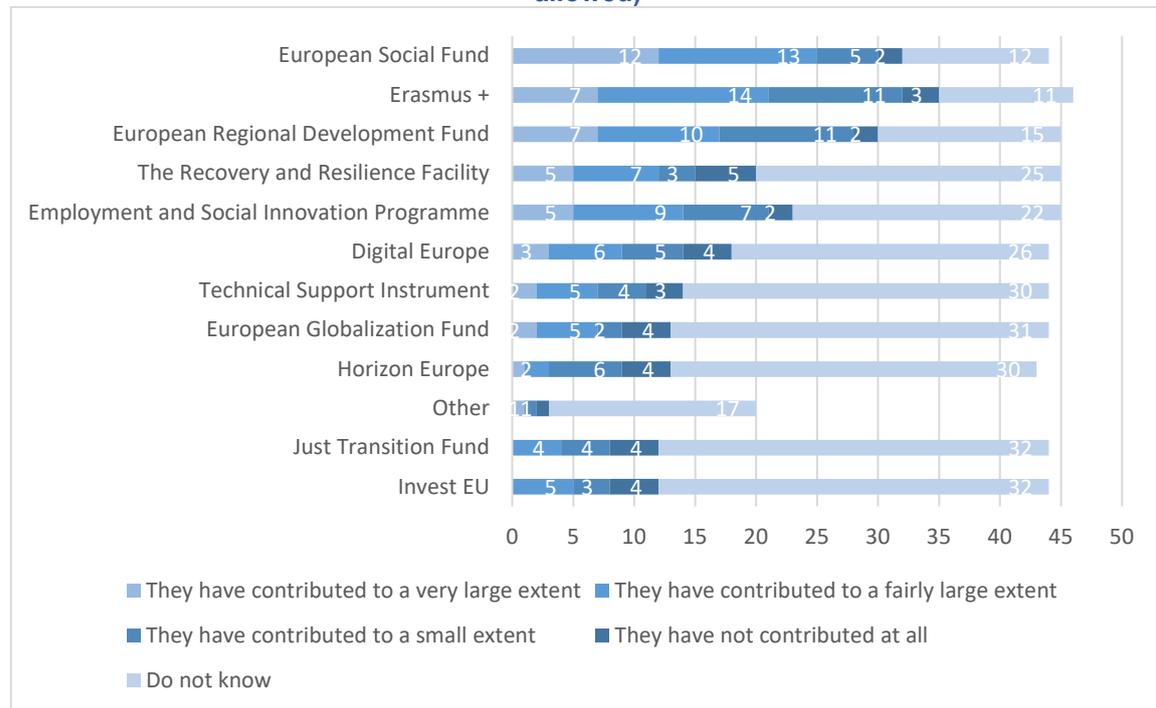
In Greece, a new 'Lifelong Skilling' Strategy will be supported by the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to improve training provision. The strategy includes (i) setting up 'lifelong learning accounts' as the main tool for ongoing/continuous training; (ii) a national 'eligible training provider' list based on minimum quality criteria for trainers; and (iii) a National Skills Council that will be responsible for designing the national skills strategy.

In the 2021-2027 period, the **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** is also available to support upskilling and reskilling in the regions most negatively affected by the transition to climate-neutrality, although no specific projects have yet been funded.

Some national consultees underlined that, in their countries, some of the upskilling pathways measures are funded uniquely with **national or regional funding**. Representatives from both national ministries and employers' organisations in Denmark for example underlined that this was the case for the tripartite upskilling measures in **Denmark**, which were funded by the accumulated excess of training levies paid by employers. As noted in the case study on **Germany**, the *Zukunftsstarter* as well as the *Qualifizierungschancesgesetz* are financed out of the federal PES budget. As seen in the case study on **Austria**, all measures within the Ministry of Labour's responsibility, such as *Competence with a System* and the *Skilled Workers Grant*, are financed solely out of national and/or subnational funds, as the ministry has withdrawn from ESF funding since 2015. The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations showed that nearly 40% of respondents (39.5%, 15 responses) considered that national funds contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills to a fairly large (23.7%, 9 responses) or great (15.8%, 6 responses) extent, as well as 21.1% (8 responses) for regional funds, 15.8% (6 responses) for local funds and 29% (11 responses) for sectoral funds.

The responses to the public consultation indicated that the **wider public was less familiar with the EU funding sources for implementing upskilling pathways**. When asked the extent to which eleven different EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills, 56% of respondents could not rate their contribution. Overall, 25% of respondents agreed that the funding programmes have contributed to a fairly large or a very large extent. As seen in Figure 13, the respondents most often considered that the ESF and Erasmus+ had contributed to a fairly large or a very large extent to the achievement of the aims of the Recommendation.

Figure 13 To what extent have the following EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objective of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills? (n=46, one option allowed)



Source: Analysis of responses to the public consultation, Ecorys, 2022

Evidence from interviews (at both EU and national level), case studies and our analysis indicates that the **use of EU funding has been largely cost-effective**. The ESF has in many countries allowed upskilling pathways measures to be upscaled and has increased their volume (number and range of beneficiaries, type of training, etc.), thus indicating important volume and scope effects. The use of existing funds (as opposed to the creation of a new fund or budget line) has allowed the use of existing structures (e.g., ESF and ERDF Managing Authorities and Monitoring Committees, Erasmus+ National Agencies, etc.) and administrative procedures (IT tools, forms, reporting mechanisms, etc.) to distribute and manage the funds which create economies of scale.

The main concerns expressed about cost-effectiveness, in particular in relation to the ESF and ERDF, relate to the **administrative burden** for both national authorities and training providers of the extensive reporting and data collection requirements. The evaluation of the 2014-2018 ESF support to employment and labour mobility, social inclusion and education and training indeed confirmed that administrative burden did hamper effective implementation and impacted cost-effectiveness (e.g., under Thematic Objective 8) and that gold-plating at national and regional level led to additional administrative barriers (e.g. under Thematic Objective 10). The evaluation suggests that administrative requirements can particularly discourage smaller beneficiaries such as NGOs, which are crucial for reaching vulnerable groups, from accessing ESF funds. However, it also showed that ESF administrative requirements are widely considered to be proportionate to the benefits achieved.¹⁸⁰ In the current study, some stakeholders, in particular representatives of education and training providers, also raised the challenge of the **time-limited nature** of EU funds to set up new training and support mechanisms for a target group such as low-skilled adults which has complex needs and requires time to establish.

¹⁸⁰ European Commission (2021), Commission Staff Working Document: evaluation of the 2014-2018 ESF support to employment and labour mobility, social inclusion and education and training (SWD(2021) 11 final), pp.41-42

Q2.3 What are the **benefits associated with the implementation** of the Recommendation for the different stakeholders (including adult learners), at various levels (national, regional, local)?

Key findings

Adult learning measures introduced in the last five years have **contributed to a range of benefits for individual learners, employers, and society**, at both the national, regional, and local levels. The main benefits for learners are increased learning opportunities, allowing both unemployed adults and employees to gain and adapt their skills and/or gain a qualification to become more productive. At the employer level, the adult learning measures introduced in the last 5 years have contributed to **additional funding** for training, fewer skills shortages, and more motivated staff as well as higher levels of productivity. At the level of society, upskilling pathways measures implemented since the Recommendation have likely contributed to increasing income tax and VAT as a result of increased wages and consumer spending and **to lowering the cost of welfare payments**, though this is challenging to quantify at this stage of implementation. **Other** benefits highlighted by stakeholders include **awareness raising** of the importance of prioritising the target group of the low-skilled and enabling a **common framework** on which to base discussions and cooperation on adult learning across different stakeholders.

Individual learner benefits

The main benefits for learners are **increased learning opportunities**, allowing both unemployed adults and employees to **gain and adapt their skills** and/or **gain a qualification to become more productive**, based on results from the surveys, interviews, and case studies. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, approximately nine in ten respondents considered that the adult learning measures introduced in the last five years contributed to individuals gaining a qualification (94%), gaining access to further education (93%), gaining access to employment (92%), and gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills (89%).

Figure 14 Extent adult learning measures introduced in the last 5 years contributed to benefits for the individuals



Source: Ecorys, survey of coordinating and implementing organisations (n=102), 2022

The public consultation results confirm these findings: the largest group of respondents (25 respondents out of 43, 58%) indicated that the Recommendation contributed to 'Gaining access to employment' to a fairly large or very large extent.

In addition, the vast majority of respondents to both the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations and the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults¹⁸¹ noted that the measures contributed to individuals gaining more confidence (82% and 86% respectively), improved individuals' participation in society (77% and 94%), and improved individuals health and wellbeing (73% and 76% respectively). Public consultation results again point to similar benefits with 21 out of 43 (49%) of respondents indicating that the Recommendation contributed to 'gaining more confidence' (21 out of 43, 49%) to a fairly large or very large extent. Just over two thirds (67%) of respondents to the survey of organisations representing low skilled adults further noted that the measures also contributed to individuals getting a promotion in their current workplace. The survey of adult learners highlighted a similar range of benefits for adult learners, additionally finding that learners benefited from being able to change careers, from gaining a higher paid job, and from being able to better support others in their learning.

This survey of adult learners also found that **learners expectations of the benefits to be gain from participating in adult learning where largely met**. The most common reasons for adult learners undertaking adult learning were to gain a recognised qualification (63%), to gain access to further education or training (59%) and to develop learners' personal portfolio of skills and competences (59%). Just over half (51%) participated to gain more confidence.¹⁸² Over three quarters of respondents noted that each of these expectations were met to a great or large extent (see the Methodology Annex 1 for further details). The expectation of adult learners that was most strongly met was that of gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills, with 89% saying this was meet to a great or large extent. Only a small minority of adult learners noted that their expectations were not met, with this figure being highest for the learner expectation of being able to better support children / family / community in their learning (11%).

Overall, more than nine in ten (91%) adult learners surveyed found their training useful. As a further indication of the benefits of adult education, 94% would recommend the training they took to others¹⁸³ whilst two thirds (68%) plan to continue learning in further educational opportunities in the future.¹⁸⁴

EU level organisation and national authority interviewees also referred to the **benefits of increasing and adapting skills and/or gaining a qualification to become more productive**. At the national level, **Lithuanian** national interviewees noted a wider range of learning opportunities as a key benefit of the Recommendation. Interviewees from both **Malta** and **Sweden** noted an increased uptake in courses, with national interviewees from Sweden additional stating that adult education financed as part of the Upskilling Pathways initiative had been associated with increased income for trainees. Interviewees from **Ireland** noted that a recent 2018 evaluation found that jobseekers who engaged with training financed as part of Upskilling Pathways were approximately 18 percentage points more likely to have progressed into employment or self-employment after 3 to 6 months than similar individuals who had not received this training. Similarly, interviewees from **Romania** and **Latvia** stated that trainees themselves have benefited from improved basic skills, including literacy and computing skills. The German case study noted that in addition to providing trainees with new skills, training that meets the Recommendations also provides

181 Low-skilled adults includes adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital), adults lacking core /generic skills (e.g., communication, problem-solving, teamwork), long-term unemployed adults, older workers (above 55), economically inactive people, nationals with a migrant background, persons with disabilities, and third country nationals. There were 51 respondents to this question.

182 Respondents were asked to select the five most relevant reasons for participating in adult education (n=95, 91 of the total responses were from either Poland, Portugal, or Italy)

183 Based on a total of 95 response to this question, with Poland, Portugal, and Italy together accounting for 91 responses.

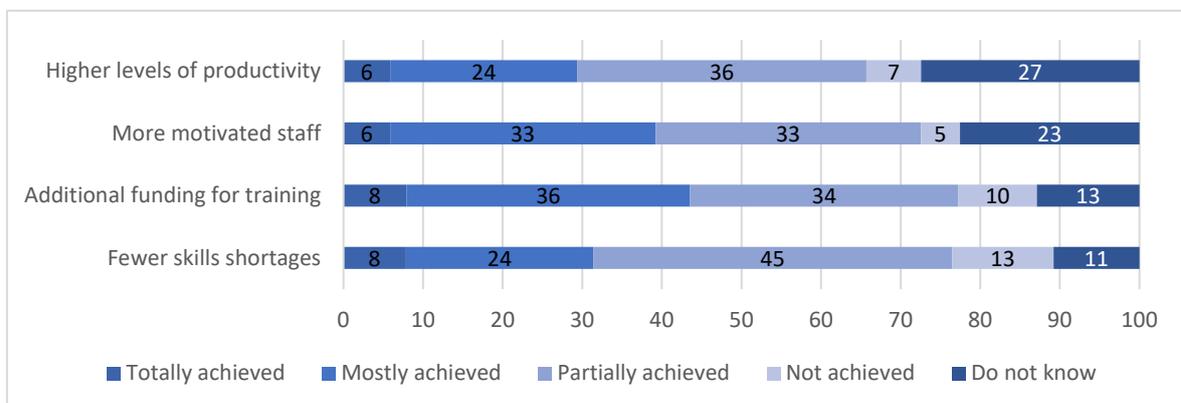
184 Based on a total of 95 response to this question, with Poland, Portugal, and Italy together accounting for 91 responses.

individuals with the opportunity to validate existing skills gained from previous non-formal learning, through assessments at the start of a course. **Latvian interviewees**, however, noted that a study for the Ministry of Finance showed that the benefit from adult learning was not higher wages, as while learners gained knowledge, this was not then necessarily applied in the labour market.

Benefits for employers

At the employer level, the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that approximately three quarters of respondents felt that the adult learning measures introduced in the last 5 years contributed to **additional funding for training (77%)**, **fewer skills shortages (76%)**, and **more motivated staff (73%)**. Two thirds (66%) noted that the measures contributed to **higher levels of productivity (66%)**. **Romanian national authority interviewees** also stated that businesses had benefited from the implementation of the Recommendation, due to an **increase in skills** among potential employees.

Figure 15 Extent adult learning measures introduced in the last 5 years contributed to benefits for employers



Source: Ecorys survey of coordinating and implementing organisations (n=102), 2022

Benefits for society

At the level of society, most EU and national authority level stakeholders pointed to the benefit of awareness raising as a result of the Recommendation, in terms of **ensuring education provision for low-skilled adults was a political priority**. Stakeholders reported that the Recommendation pushed adult skills to the front of organisations' minds, giving the policy area more attention and scrutiny than the topic was likely to have had in the absence of the Recommendation. For example, the case study for **Germany** noted that while direct links with the Recommendation are hard to identify and measure, the Recommendation has certainly made policy makers think more about adult education provision, especially in municipal area with less developed basic education and literacy.

Results for the public consultation indicate additional societal benefits but suggest that these have been achieved to a lower degree. 'Supporting the skills needed for green and digital transition' and 'gaining improved participation in society' were the two benefits most frequently assessed as resulting to a small extent or not at all from the Recommendation (19 respondents out of 43 for each benefit, 44%).

In addition, the Recommendation **enabled a common framework on which to base discussions** across different stakeholder groups. Several stakeholders consulted thus linked the Recommendation to instigating improvements/changes in adult learning provision. The expert meeting also picked up on this benefit, noting an increase in the

recognition of the importance of raising skills levels since the introduction of the Recommendation.

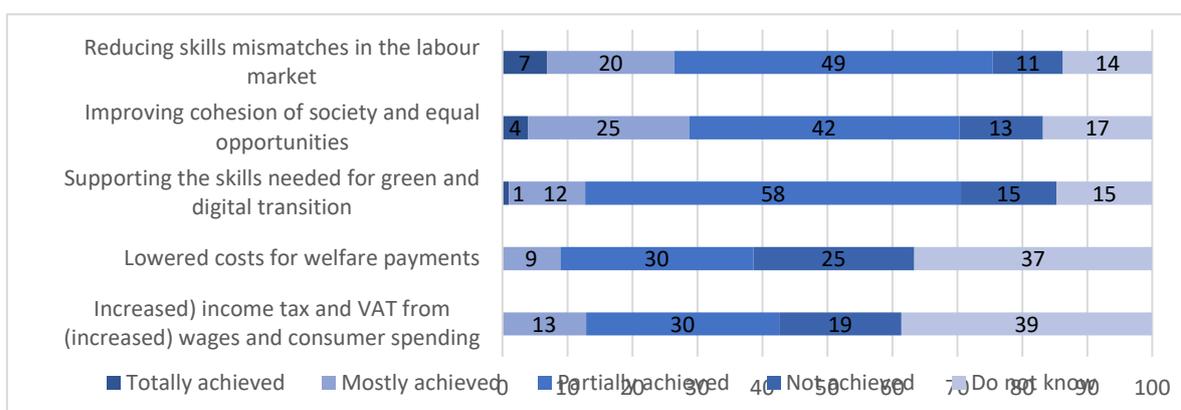
Box 28 Example of the benefits of the Recommendation

Hungary: Raising awareness of adult education

Hungary has not yet carried out an evaluation of the benefits related to the Recommendation. However, national authorities have found the framework set out in the Recommendation for implementing adult education measure very useful. In addition, the Recommendation redirected attention to the challenge of upskilling adults with low levels of education and the need in the country for basic skills provision for this group. Understanding that basic skills are key to improving the productivity of the existing and potential workforce grew significantly among policy makers and other stakeholders. As a result, the concept for the ‘National system of basic skills provision’ was developed, which aims to create a systemic approach for improving national basic skills provision.

Stakeholders linked such awareness raising as contributing to many of the benefits highlighted in the surveys, through increasing the number of adults engaging in lifelong learning, and thereby having both a short-term and longer term (i.e., five years plus) impact on society as a whole. For the individual, as shown by the survey results presented earlier, gaining new skills and knowledge can help them to find work or continue to develop in their current job. For each learner moving into work, the state may see reduced welfare payments and increased tax revenue, with the degree to which this applies depending on the hours the individual is able to work. The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations () found that adult education measures introduced over the last five years have already influenced these areas, with almost half (43%) of respondents considering that the measures introduced had **contributed to the aim of increasing income tax and VAT** as a result of increased wages and consumer spending being totally (13%) or mostly (30%) achieved. Just over a third (39%) noted that the measures had contributed to the aim of **lowering the cost of welfare payments** being totally (9%) or mostly (30%) achieved. Similarly, the public consultation found that just over one in ten respondents agreed that the Recommendation themselves had contributed to increased income tax and VAT to a great or fairly large extent (12%), and to lower welfare payment (also 12%). The Swedish case study also highlighted the potential for large long-term benefits in the form of reduce welfare payments as a result of previously unemployed individuals moving in to work (no monetary estimate was provided).

Figure 16 Extent adult learning measures introduced in the last 5 years contributed to benefits for society



Source: Ecorys survey of coordinating and implementing organisations (n=102)

An increase in adult learners can also bring about an increase in country productivity, especially if training was developed with country level or local skills gaps and shortages in mind. The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that the measures introduced in the last five years have contributed to the aim of **reducing skills mismatch** in the labour market, with 27% reporting that this had been totally (7%) or mostly (20%) achieved. The survey also highlighted that measures introduced over the last five years had contributed to the aims of **supporting the skills needed for green and digital transitions** (with 1% noting this had been totally achieved and 12% noting it had been mostly achieved) and **improving cohesion of society and equal opportunities** (with 4% feeling this had been totally achieved and 25% noting it had been mostly achieved). In addition, **Swedish** national authorities noted a **reduction in crime** may be seen in the future as a result of a lower unemployment rate, further benefiting the state and learners themselves.

Q2.4 What factors influenced the efficiency and how did they do so? Could benefits have been achieved at a lower cost?

Key findings

The study has found that **the Recommendation overall has been efficient**. Many countries already had adult education programmes running in some form prior to the Recommendation, so were able to adapt their current education provision supporting efficiency. The fact that the low-skilled have been prioritised at EU level has also been identified as supporting efficiency as this EU focus has meant that other key stakeholders, including education providers and institutions, have been increasingly engaged in offering courses that are in line with the needs of adult learners. There is also some evidence to show that, through raising awareness among employers that adult learning contributes to fostering productivity, competitiveness, and innovation, employers have become more engaged with adult learning.

Covid-19 is noted as having a negative effect on efficiency through slowing down delivery. This meant fewer adults undertook training than originally planned, reducing the scale of the benefits seen by wider society. Other challenges to delivery have also impacted efficiency including the lack of specifically trained staff in the training sector and the difficulty of reaching the target group which meant that more funding to outreach activities, along with better integration of NGOs with existing links to the target groups, was required to bring these people on board. Finally, overlaps identified between other measures focused on skills and adult learning was also noted as limiting efficiency as it has at times caused some confusion among potential learners on where to go to access training and who was eligible.

Overall, based on the data available, **it is unlikely that benefits of the Recommendation could have been achieved at a lower cost**. The evidence has shown that positive relationship between costs and benefits appeared to be mainly due to respondents experiencing low implementation costs and large benefits in terms of raising awareness and stimulating discussions with key stakeholders on the issue of adult education.

It has been difficult to find concrete evidence on factors that influenced efficiency and if benefits could have been achieved at a lower cost, given the scarcity of data on the size of the relevant costs and benefits. Nevertheless, the study has found that the **Recommendation overall has been efficient**. Factors supported this were mainly that many countries already had adult education programmes running in some form prior to the Recommendation, so were able to **adapt their current education provision**, rather than having to start developing courses from scratch. For examples:

- Interviewees from national authorities in **Hungary** noted that the fact that the Recommendation could be integrated into existing organisational structures, delivery systems, and partnerships was key in achieving efficiency.
- Interviewees from national authorities in **Poland** stated that having existing adult education systems helped with keeping the costs associated with ensuring measures were in line with the Recommendation far lower than they would otherwise have been. No stakeholders stated that they felt unable to adapt their existing system if required.

The fact that the Recommendation had been prioritised by the Commission has also been identified as a key factor in achieving efficiency. This EU and state level leadership has meant that other key stakeholders, including education providers and institutions, are fully engaged in offering courses that are in line with EU policy in the field, and the needs of adult learners. For example:

- A **Lithuanian** national authority highlighted that the redesigning of adult education to meet the Recommendation had been included in both government and implementing institutions action plans.
- Stakeholders consulted for the **Austrian** case study emphasised that the Recommendation legitimised national actions previously taken to improve adult education and contributed to preventing a cutback in adult education provision by highlighting the importance and need for such education measures, thereby helping to ensure the benefits of adult education (as outlined in Q2.3) continued.

The study has also found that the ability to identify and engage the target group of low-skilled adults had an effect on efficiency, as explained in the below box.

Box 29 Example of stakeholder cooperation improving efficiency

Greece: Working with stakeholders to identify and engage target groups

In 2020, Greece introduced a pilot project for Upskilling Pathways – the Building Alternative Skills’ Innovative Schemes (BASIC). This offered basic numeracy, science, digital, and language skills training. A key activity of BASIC was the mapping, identification, and prioritisation of potential target groups in need of upskilling. Interviewees stated that having the relevant stakeholders involved was vital to the success of the pilot, as it enabled them to use stakeholders established connections to reach out to target groups, as well as to use stakeholders’ knowledge of how best to assess skills needs and take learners successfully through the upskilling progress. The partnerships included government departments, the public employment service, the Greek statistical authority, education and VET providers, organisations representing employers, and EU, national and regional policy makers, all of whom helped raise awareness of the training opportunities. Without this partnership, identifying and recruiting adult learners would have been significantly more time consuming and costly, and benefits to target groups would have been reduced if fewer took part in training.

There is also some evidence to show that, **through raising awareness among employers that adult learning contributes to fostering productivity, competitiveness, and innovation, employers have become more engaged with adult learning.** This helped increase efficiency in delivery, through increasing the willingness of employers to provide training to staff and/or allowing staff to train during working hours, thereby increasing the number of adults undertaking training and so the scale of the benefits outlined under Q2.3.

Another key element in achieving efficiency is to try and purchase any inputs at the ‘best’ price, thereby achieving quality at the lowest cost possible. There is clear evidence of this being done by Member States in their upskilling approaches. For example:

- In **Malta**, national authorities confirmed that through having the resource to explore costs associated with provision and get quotes from several different providers, they had been able to improve efficiency, particularly when it comes to the price of meeting venues, where they found quotes varied widely.
- Efficiency has also been promoted through **linking payments with outcomes**. In **Sweden** this helped national authorities ensure providers focus on providing quality education for the best price. The higher the quality of the training, the higher the benefits for the individual trainee and for society as a whole are likely to be. Similarly, national interviewees from **Sweden** and **Finland** reported that having an open application process in which potential adult education providers are required to set out their project costs, helps to limit costs and promote effectiveness in delivery.
- A interviewee from a national authority in **Slovenia** interestingly noted that their internal analysis shows that having small class sizes of 10-15 participants helped with efficiency, as while this meant that programmes could take on fewer students, the quality of the programme was higher, improving participants' learning. This improvement in learning was found to offset the increased cost associated with running smaller classes.

Unsurprisingly, in terms of what has limited efficiency, **Covid-19 is noted as having a negative effect** by EU and national level interviewees and respondent to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, through slowing down delivery. This meant fewer adults undertook training than originally planned, as also evidenced in reduced numbers of beneficiaries in measures in 2020 and decreasing participation of adults in education and training (see Section 4.1 Effectiveness for further detail). This fall in participation reduced the number of individuals benefiting from adult education, thereby also reducing the scale of the benefits seen by wider society. As staff wage cost remained similar due to schemes such as furlough, and adult education can result in high long-term benefits, the reduction in benefits is thought to be greater than savings from not running course, although it should be noted that Member States have not carried out any assessments to determine if this was in fact the case.

Other challenges to delivery have also impacted efficiency. **Lack of specifically trained staff** in the adult learning sector has been identified as an obstacle in delivery of upskilling measures (see effectiveness section). This was noted in **Latvia** and **Poland** as impacting efficiency of delivery. National authorities in **Slovakia** noted that access to adult education is limited to those formally registered as job seekers, meaning not all low-skilled adults are eligible to take part in adult learning. The expert meeting also picked up on the challenge of **reaching the target group**, noting that more funding support from the EU towards outreach activities, along with better integration of NGOs with existing links to the target groups, was required to bring these people on board. The **Austrian** case study found that frequent changes in government could also limit efficiency, due to the uncertainty this created around the continuation of previously announced adult education priorities and system changes.

Overlaps identified between other measures focused on skills and adult learning was also noted by a minority of countries as limiting efficiency. While it was reported that the different government departments responsible for adult education and skills were working together to ensure policies were joined up and to remove duplication, a range of overlapping measures has caused some confusion among potential learners on where to go to access training and who was eligible. Consultations in **Ireland**, **Malta**, and the **Netherlands** identified this, noting that better mapping is required to reduce duplication and improve signposting for potential learners. Further details on overlapping measures are contained in section 4.4.

Overall, based on the data available, **it is unlikely that benefits of the Recommendation could have been achieved at a lower cost**. The evidence has shown that positive relationship between costs and benefits appeared to be mainly due to respondents

experiencing low implementation costs and large benefits in terms of raising awareness and stimulating discussions with key stakeholders on the issue of adult education. Examples of views on this are listed below:

- National authority interviewees from **Estonia, Hungary and Spain** felt strongly that the benefits could not have been achieved at a lower cost, due to the large numbers of adults now participating in lifelong learning.
- Interviewees from **Finland and Denmark** noted that while this question hasn't been fully examined, they have governance systems in place to try and ensure costs are kept as low as possible while still delivering high quality education and training, including selecting providers through an open tender system.
- Interviewees from **Sweden** highlighted that due to costs being upfront and benefits occurring over many years, costs may appear high when examined in the short run but over the long run benefits are large and unlikely to be possible on the same scale at a reduced cost.

*Q2.5 Are there **significant differences in costs/benefits between the Member States?** If yes, what factors may have caused that?*

Key findings

The evidence suggests that the **scale of both costs and benefits** seen is influenced by the extent to which Member States pre-existing adult education measures and planned direction of travel aligned already with the Recommendation at the time of its adoption. In countries that were already operating measures largely in line to the Recommendation, meaning no major changes in policy or legislation were required, stakeholders confirmed that they incurred no additional cost as a result of the Recommendation, or that these costs were very low. In countries where adult learning systems were overall less in line with the type of provision put forward in the Recommendation costs were higher. However, stakeholders from these countries also felt that benefits were likely to be relatively large, mainly due to the Recommendation increasing awareness of the importance of adult education, providing a framework to improve the provision of adult education, and stimulating cooperation between stakeholders to improve the system.

Evidence suggests that the **scale of both costs and benefits is influenced by the extent to which Member States' pre-existing adult education measures aligned already with the Recommendation at the time of its adoption**. Case studies and national interviewees from **Estonia** and **France** specifically stated that they incurred no additional cost as a result of the Recommendation, while interviewees from **France** and **Croatia** noted that associated additional costs were very low. This was due to these countries already operating measures largely in line to the Recommendation, meaning no major changes in policy or legislation were required. Similarly, the **Spanish** case study found that while adult education policies have been developed since 2016, these policies are not a response to the Recommendation; instead, they are a continuation of already existing policies that would most likely have been introduced even in the absence of the Recommendation. The case studies for **Ireland** and the **Netherlands** also highlighted that the Recommendation has not had a noticeable impact, due to the existing structures and practices already in place being largely in line with the Recommendations. As such, costs arising as a result of the Recommendations are also assumed to be low in these countries.

For countries that noted that the costs are low or non-existent, the scale of the additional benefits is also believed to be limited, as most benefits are likely to have occurred in the absence of the Recommendation.

Box 30 Example of costs and benefits of implementing the Recommendation

Croatia: Reasons for low costs and benefits

The national **cost** associated with the Recommendation in Croatia is estimated to be low, due to the country already having very similar adult education measures in place. These measures were introduced in 2014, when large-scale educational changes took place in the country following the adoption of the 'education, science and technology strategy'. This strategy included measures to enable lifelong learning with a view to increasing the nation's employability and quality of life. As such, the Recommendation tied in well with this strategy and Croatia's future adult education plans. Similarly, the **benefits** directly due to the Recommendation appear to be low, as many of the changes to the adult education system would likely have still occurred in the absence of the Recommendation.

In contrast, **Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary** had adult learning systems that were overall less in line with the type of provision put forward in the Recommendation (as outlined in Section 2) and have introduced new measures to meet the Recommendation. Stakeholders from these countries felt that benefits were likely to be relatively large, mainly due to the Recommendation increasing awareness of the importance of adult education, providing a framework to improve the provision of adult education, and stimulating cooperation between stakeholders to improve the system.

*Q2.6. To what extent are the **costs of the actions suggested by the Recommendation proportionate to the benefits** brought to individuals, economy and society?*

Key findings

Evidence indicates that the **costs and benefits are proportionate**. This is due to the belief in the critical nature of the Recommendation in raising awareness of the importance of, and availability of, adult education, along with the Recommendation's role in focusing political priorities on adult education. This is seen as a large-scale benefit, due to established links in published literature between participation in education and resulting benefits for the individual in the form of increased wages and/or moving into stable employment. By extension, society may then see benefits in the form of reduced welfare payments and increased tax revenue.

Overall, no **rigorous conclusion can be drawn regarding the proportionality of costs to benefits, as Member States did not quantify, and therefore place monetary values on the costs and benefits linked to the Recommendation**. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that the costs and benefits are proportionate. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, just over a third (36%) of the 108 respondents felt unable to comment at this time. However, among those who did comment, no respondents felt that the costs of the Recommendation were not at all proportionate to benefits brought to individuals, to the economy, and to society. In fact, around two thirds of all respondents (64%) believed that the costs are proportionate to the benefits (15% to a great extent, 31% to a fairly large extent, and 19% to a small extent).

Interviews conducted with EU and national agencies complement these survey findings, with consensus among interviewees who made a judgement, that the costs and benefits are proportionate. This is due to the belief in the critical nature of the Recommendation in raising awareness of the importance of, and availability of, adult education, along with the Recommendation's role in focusing political priorities on adult education. This is seen as a large-scale benefit, due to established links in published literature¹⁸⁵ between participation

185 Examples include Schuller, T. (2017) '[What are the wider benefits of learning across the life course?](#)' *Foresight Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning project*; Feinstein, L. et al (2003); and Hartley, R. et al (2005) '[Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: Towards a better understanding](#)'. National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

in education and resulting benefits for the individual in the form of increased wages and/or moving into stable employment. By extension, society may then see benefits in the form of reduced welfare payments and increased tax revenue. In particular, national interviewees from **Spain** noted that for these reasons they believe the benefits far outweigh the costs, with national interviewees from **Bulgaria, Denmark, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Italy, Hungary and Poland** also stating that they believe the costs of the actions are proportionate to the benefits.

There is some evidence that such society benefits are arising as a result of the Recommendation and measures introduced in the last five years, as discussed in the benefits section above. **Lithuanian** national authority interviewees also reported that their own internal cost-benefit analysis comparing the average cost of a training program to the number of people returning to the labour market demonstrates value added for both individuals and the state. Interviewees from **Malta** presented a more mixed view on the proportionality of costs to benefits, noting that the courses themselves are cost-effective but consultation meetings and outreach measures were less cost-effective.

4.3. Relevance

*Q3.1 To what extent are the **objectives defined in the Council Recommendation still relevant** to the current socio-economic and EU policy context*

Key Findings

The study confirms that the **key objectives of the Recommendation continue to be highly relevant to the current EU socio-economic context** and the EU policy context. Not only have challenges which were faced across Member States when the Recommendation was adopted in 2016 persisted, but new challenges – in particular those resulting from the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, the ongoing transformation of jobs and work, and the acceleration of the green and digital transition – have in fact heightened the relevance of the Recommendation’s objectives, in particular the need for increasing basic skills. Low-skilled adults in particular are highly vulnerable to the evolution of the socio-economic context, including the acceleration of the need for digital skills, and require increasing policy attention. Despite variation across the Member States, the share of adults with low educational attainment remains high, and participation in adult learning is significantly below the target (60% of all adults participating in training every year) set at the EU Social Summit in Porto.

The **objectives set out in the Recommendation remain highly relevant** to the EU policy context, in particular priorities set out in relation to the overall strategic agenda, the recovery from the pandemic, adult learning and social policy. The objectives have increased relevance in light of the 2030 headline target for adult learning, with a particular need to focus on increasing the participation of low-skilled adults in training in order to reach the goal.

Relevance to current socio-economic context

The research conducted confirms that the **key objectives of the Recommendation** (outlined in Section 2 of this report) **continue to be highly relevant** to the current EU socio-economic context as the main challenges faced across Member States (high levels of low-skilled and low-qualified) have persisted throughout the past five years. Changes since the Recommendation was adopted, including those resulting from the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the acceleration of the green and digital transition have in fact heightened the relevance of the Recommendation’s objectives, in particular the need to focus on low-skilled adults. The need to acquire digital skills to navigate through the pandemic and new ways of

working and learning have further shown the vulnerability of the low-skilled target group of the Recommendation to shocks and rapid changes, as confirmed by the interviews, expert and validation meetings carried out for this study. Demographic change, with an increasingly older low-skilled workforce requiring ongoing and urgent up- and re-skilling to meet the challenges of these wider socio-economic transitions, also confirms the ongoing relevance of the Recommendation's objectives.

The relevance to the current socio-economic context is confirmed by responses to the public consultation. Nearly 90% (41 out of the 47 responses to this question) indicated that providing learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults is still very relevant today. Respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations also found that the objectives of the Recommendation were still relevant to the current socio-economic and policy context in their country/region: 95% of respondents said that this was true to a great (71%) or fairly large (24%) extent.

The evolution of key relevant indicators over the period since the Recommendation confirms the continued relevance of the Recommendation. As outlined in Section 3 of this report, despite a downward trend, the share of 25-34 years olds with low educational attainment remains high and above 15% in seven Member States (BG, CZ, DK, ES, LU, PT, SE). The share of the EU27 population aged 25-64 years with low educational attainment (ISCED Level 0-2) also decreased among Member States between the years 2016 and 2020, but with still lingering country differences in 2020, with the share varying from a low of 4.6% in Lithuania to a high of 44.6% in Portugal. Participation in adult learning is also significantly lower for low-skilled adults; as seen in section 2 above, in 2016, high-qualified adults participated at about four times the rate as low-qualified adults in education and training. This disadvantage of the low-qualified was recorded for all EU Member States for which data is available.

As is clear from the country differences in the indicators presented in Section 3, **the extent of the relevance of the objectives of the Recommendation varies across Member States**. For some countries, such as **Spain**, where progress in relation to these indicators lags behind the EU average, the Recommendation's objectives continue to be highly relevant. The case study research found that a high proportion of the adult Spanish population works in a field unrelated to their training with a clear imbalance between the education fields pursued and labour market needs. As a consequence, upskilling and reskilling remain crucial. On the other hand, in **Czechia**, stakeholders indicated that the objectives of the Recommendation were less relevant due to lower unemployment rates and a lower share of the adult population aged 25-64 that is low-skilled. In **Germany**, whilst the labour market and training context has changed since 2016, when there was greater pressure on the training system due to the refugee crisis, the Covid-19 crisis has caused new distortions to the education system and the labour market, with the objectives of the Recommendation thus remaining relevant even in this altered socio-economic context. In **Sweden**, interviewees suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic has made upskilling measures even more relevant, with the government encouraging people as a response to this to use the lockdown as an opportunity for skills development. In **Ireland**, interviewees noted that Covid-19 had highlighted the ongoing educational divides, for example, between those who go on to higher education and those who go on to further education and training, in addition to the rural/urban divide, and the ongoing division between rich and poor. In this sense, the Recommendation's overarching goals are still relevant to the Irish policy landscape.

Certain respondents to the open questions in the public consultation also stressed that the Recommendation remains relevant due to the ongoing **need to adapt education and training to a changing world**. Ongoing changes to the labour market and education systems due to digitalisation (and increased reliance on digital skills since the pandemic) have widened the digital skills gap and have made access to education and training in the case of several vulnerable groups more challenging. The demand for new skills in relation

to the EU's green and digital transition was also highlighted by a wide range of EU and national policymakers, trade unions, employers' organisations in targeted consultations, including the expert and validation meetings, and is reflected too in the importance placed on skills anticipation and skills forecasting which is seen in several Member States (e.g., Estonia, Sweden) in the design of upskilling measures.

The evidence also shows that **the pandemic exposed the inadequacies of education infrastructure in supporting effective upskilling pathways** in an increasingly digital world, in particular for low-skilled adults. Stakeholders consulted across different Member States, including policymakers, practitioners (representatives of training providers) and social partners, highlighted key challenges such as lack of access to digital tools and high-speed internet, and inadequate use of digital technology in adult learning schools. The 'system-building approach' outlined by the Recommendation (as defined in Section 2.1 (Figure 1)) thus remains particularly relevant as this more holistic reform and in some cases modernisation of adult learning systems as a whole, is increasingly warranted, in particular to support the low-skilled, who often have the lowest access to digital technologies and infrastructure.

Relevance to the EU policy context

The objectives of the Recommendation are also still in line and relevant to the current EU policy context (as set out in more detail in the Coherence section (Section 4.4 of this report). Findings have shown that the objectives of the Recommendation are particularly relevant to the **Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030**¹⁸⁶, the **European Skills Agenda**¹⁸⁷ (2020) and the **New Skills Agenda for Europe**¹⁸⁸ (2016).

At the highest level, the objectives of the Recommendation remain strongly aligned with and relevant to the key objectives of the **EU strategic agenda 2019-2024**¹⁸⁹, whereby investment in skills and education continues to be a strategic priority, in line with supporting economic and business growth, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship¹⁹⁰. The objectives of the Recommendation are also directly relevant to the **European Pillar of Social Rights** principles¹⁹¹ (in particular Principles 1 (on education, training and lifelong learning) and 4 (on active support to employment)) and action plan¹⁹², including the headline target to ensure that at least 60% of all adults participate annually in training and at least 80% of those aged 16-74 have basic digital skills¹⁹³.

In particular, the Recommendation is directly relevant to the 2030 headline target set at the EU Social Summit in Porto¹⁹⁴ which aims that at least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year. As stated by President von der Leyen at the Social Summit: "*skilling, training and upskilling is one of the most urgent necessities for the whole workforce to meet the transformation – the green transformation and the digital transformation*".¹⁹⁵ In order to reach this ambitious goal, and given the lower participation in education and training of low-

186 Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030 ((2021/C 504/02), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G1214\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G1214(01)&from=EN)

187 Communication - European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9723>

188 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: a New Skills Agenda for Europe - Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381&from=EN>

189 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/eu-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/>

190 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/20/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/>

191 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

192 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

193 Ibid.

194 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2301

195 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_2342

skilled adults (as noted above), increasing the participation of this target group in training will be fundamental to achieving this goal.

The objectives are also of particular **relevance to a number of key EU policy measures** such as the Council Recommendations on individual learning accounts¹⁹⁶ and micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability¹⁹⁷, and recent new initiatives such as the Pact for Skills¹⁹⁸.

Q3.2 To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to achieve the objectives?

Key findings

The measures defined in the recommendation are still very relevant in order to achieve its objectives. The **three-step approach remains a very useful framework** to guide both policy and implementation of upskilling measures, and each step remains relevant in light of needs and also the ongoing development of upskilling measures in different member states. The accompanying measures - including outreach, guidance, support measures and effective coordination – also remain essential components of approaches to upskilling, in particular when targeting low-skilled adults. The research highlighted however the need to ensure that the different measures set out in the recommendation form part of an integrated whole, with clear permeability and pathways for low-skilled adults between each step, with outreach to attract participants and wrap-around support and throughout the entire process. The fact that low-skilled adults remain a vulnerable group that is further away from the education system – and often the labour market – as whole (see section 3.1), means that such an integrated three-step approach remains necessary for effectively supporting this group through learning pathways that can increase their skills.

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation specifically targets low-skilled adults and sets out a three-step approach to offering low-skilled adults access to upskilling pathways, through a skills assessment, a tailored and flexible learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills and competences. Key components of this approach include outreach, guidance and support measures for learners, as well as effective coordination between relevant public and private actors in education and training, employment, and social policy.

The evidence indicates that **all three steps defined in the Recommendation remain relevant to achieving its objectives**. Respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that the measures defined in the Recommendation were still relevant for achieving its objectives: 93% (38 of 41 responses) of respondents said that this was true to a great (61%, 25 responses) or fairly large (32%, 13 responses) extent. A smaller share, though still a majority (69%, 35 out of 51 responses) of respondents to the survey of organisations representing the low-skilled agreed with this statement to large or fairly large extent. The vast majority of stakeholders consulted - including EU and national level policymakers, social partners, representatives of learning providers, representatives of and employers' organisations - considered that the three-step approach set out in the Recommendation provided a useful structure and guidance that Member States can adopt and adapt to address specific needs at the national or regional level through upskilling measures, and remains highly relevant to needs, including the green and digital transition. The fact that low-skilled adults remain a vulnerable group that is further away from the education system – and often the labour market – as whole (see section 3.1), means that such an **integrated three-step approach remains necessary** for effectively supporting this group through learning pathways that can increase their skills. This was confirmed by

196 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022H0627%2803%29>

197 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0770&qid=1643389173614>

198 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1517&langId=en>

stakeholders consulted who shared the view that, while each step is relevant individually, the steps need to be part of a whole integrated process to meet the diverse needs of the target group. Other stakeholders, in particular representatives of disadvantaged adults and lifelong learning providers, underlined that the **three steps are not sufficient alone** to meet needs, and that the **different accompanying and outreach measures** are essential in order to reach in particular low-skilled adults.

In terms of the individual steps of the three-step approach, developing **skills assessments** is still considered to be a very relevant measure for achieving the goals of the Recommendation in many Member States. During the expert group meeting held in the framework of this study in February 2022, the relevance of a range of skills assessment measures was discussed, with stakeholders highlighting that this is a crucial first step in the provision of support to low-skilled adults. Examples mentioned included exams and accreditation of skills provided by lifelong learning centres for non-formal education in **Greece**, entrance exams for VET, open exams for adults in lower secondary level in **Spain**, and skills assessments that are clearly integrated into the next steps of support in **Ireland** (see the box below).

Box 31 Skills assessment in Ireland

There are national examinations for upper secondary level and equivalent arrangements for individuals who have not completed upper secondary level education in Ireland. The stakeholders involved in skills assessment in Ireland include public employment services, education system actors, life-long learning centres, employers, and NGOs. Participants in the expert group held in February 2022 highlighted that skills assessment are highly relevant to supporting the low-skilled particularly when linked holistically to the entire learning and employment process.

A **tailored and flexible learning offer** is also found to be highly relevant to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation. This is indicated in particular when examining the success factors in effectively supporting the low-skilled and achieving the objectives of the Recommendation. Respondents to the survey of organisations representing the low-skilled indicated that tailored learning offers remain crucial especially in relation to more vulnerable groups such as people with a migrant background and low-skilled adults. Interviewees consulted from a range of stakeholders equally stressed the importance of individualised approaches for achieving the objectives of the Recommendation.

The findings also identified that it has become increasingly relevant to tailor the learning offer not only to the individual learners, but also to the skills demands of the economy. This was particular evident in the case of **digital skills**. As noted above, since 2020, the impact of the pandemic has reinforced the need to address the development of these digital skills in order to enable providers to continue to deliver and students to continue to participate in education. In **Spain**, for example, it was reported that adults who lacked digital skills and/or resources could not participate in online education during the pandemic, therefore increasing differences in educational attainment level based on socio-economic factors. Digital learning was also seen as an area of increasing relevance in countries such as **Bulgaria** and **Estonia**.

Validation and recognition of skills and competences is a measure of the Recommendation that is still relevant to achieving its objectives. In the context of a changing labour market with new demands for specific skill sets (as highlighted above) validation is key in ensuring that employers have access to individuals with the right skills. This was highlighted by stakeholders as particularly relevant for refugees, for whom validation of skills can offer a pathway into employment and active participation in society in their country of refuge, given incompatibilities between education and qualification systems which mean they may not be able to have their qualifications otherwise recognised.

Whilst this is outside the reference period of the evaluation study, it is important to recognise that in light of the Ukraine war and the influx of refugees into Europe, this further increases the relevance of validation to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation.

The relevance of validation is also further evident in the fact that Member States have made concerted efforts over the past years – and are continuing to do so – to establish well-functioning validation systems. Validation has been the one step out of the three-step approach that has seen the biggest change in degree of implementation since 2016, as outlined in Section 3. Examples of efforts to set up and improve validation systems are present in many Member States, including Sweden as seen in the box below (for more examples, please see Section 4.1 on effectiveness):

Box 32 Validation of skills and competences in Sweden

A concerted effort has been made in recent years in **Sweden** to improve both the validation of previously acquired competences (skills assessment) and validation after completed courses offered by organisations such as the Swedish municipalities. A National Delegation for Validation was appointed in 2015, and a proposal to improve validation was presented in February 2022, on the grounds that validation needs to take place more often and more thoroughly. The proposal therefore introduces a responsibility for the municipalities to undertake a validation where this is requested by the student for the courses offered by them, and to ensure that validation is also provided for externally provided course. The proposal states that the definition of a validation should be clarified, and that the documentation required following a validation should be defined.¹⁹⁹

This focus on the role of the Swedish government shows that the Recommendation's objectives related to the three different steps in general, and to validation in particular, are highly relevant in the Swedish context and further improvement work is ongoing. Interviews conducted in Sweden also indicated that validation should be further focused on the individual's needs and include skills gathered through non-formal and informal training, as well as through professions for which there is no formal training available.²⁰⁰

Outreach, guidance and support measures for learners were highlighted as key success factors in providing effective upskilling measures, as highlighted in Section 4, showing their ongoing relevance. Respondents to the survey of organisations representing the low-skilled stressed the importance of time, ongoing support and active guidance in ensuring the target group can effectively benefit from upskilling opportunities, indicating the continued relevance of the hands-on, holistic approach to adult learning put forward in the Recommendation in achieving its objectives. The widespread nature of outreach and support measures to learners in well-established upskilling measures across Member States is further evidence of the relevance of this aspect of the Recommendation to achieving its objectives. In **Sweden**, for example, municipal authorities are responsible for the provision of adult education and related outreach activities. In **France**, local outreach offices provide guidance and support to young people during their training and upskilling journey, which includes periods of immersion in companies, participation in training, and skills assessment.

Coordination between the relevant public and private actors in education and training, employment, and social policy is still relevant to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation. Evidence clearly shows that coordination is a crucial aspect of designing and delivering effective upskilling initiatives to support the target group, with many Member States incorporating stakeholder coordination into current programmes. In the **Netherlands**, although coordination is deemed to be complex, given the number of partners

199 Validering för kompetensförsörjning och livslångt lärande, Regeringens proposition (2021/22:123), <https://www.regeringen.se/492449/contentassets/971dd7fe52ab4c9f8d23354b74a4621c/validering-for-kompetensforsorjning-och-livslangt-larande-prop.-202122123>

200 Interview (Skånes kommuner);

and fragmentation around the implementation of initiatives, collaboration between Ministries is an integral part of the upskilling approach in the country. There is also reported to be close collaboration with municipalities, particularly on the basic skills policy agenda. For more examples of approaches to coordination and collaboration, please see Effectiveness Section 4.1.

Q3.3 To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to the needs of the target groups/economic sectors (e.g., tourism; textile, construction, mining etc.)?

Key Findings

The measures defined in the Recommendation are still **very relevant to the needs of the priority target groups** across the EU. In line with the findings noted above, the Covid-19 pandemic has heightened the relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the needs of the target groups, due to higher levels of vulnerability to the impacts of the pandemic. This includes, for example, older low-skilled adults and low-skilled adults working in sectors strongly affected by the crisis. Adult learners themselves, however, highlighted areas in which the relevance of the measures could be further increased for them, including: more ICT courses (computer and smartphone), support for wider aspects of their life, help in combining learning with job seeking, more practical exercises, other types of learning (e.g., accounting, financial management) and more support with transport or work-related issues.

The **measures are still also relevant to the needs of different economic sectors**, in particular as they can be implemented flexibly to adapt to differing and evolving needs. There was clear evidence of regional and sectoral needs being addressed by specifically targeted upskilling initiatives as required based on skills forecasting and analysis. Organisations representing low-skilled adults also noted that there was a need to take into account the geographic (rural/urban) context and training needs that are specific to certain regions.

Relevance to the needs of target groups

Evidence confirms that, overall, the measures defined in the Recommendation are **still very relevant to the needs of the priority target groups across the EU**: 85% (57 out of 67 responses) of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that the measures defined in the Recommendation were still relevant to the needs of the target groups in their country or region to a great (55%, 37 responses) or fairly large (30%, 20 responses) extent. Of particular note, 97% (65 out of 67 responses) of respondents agreed to a great (69%, 46 responses) or fairly large extent (28%, 19 responses) that low-skilled adults are still in need of targeted measures to help them gain skills.

This view was strongly confirmed by respondents to the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults, 98% (50 out of 51 responses) of whom agreed to a great (76%, 39 responses) or fairly large (22%, 11 responses) extent that low-skilled adults are still in need of targeted measures. A total of 69% (35 responses out of 51) of respondents to this survey also agreed to a great (37%, 19 responses) or fairly large (31%, 16 responses) extent that adult learning measures were still relevant to the needs of the target groups that their organisation represents. Most of the respondents to this survey specified that targeted measures are still needed for their target group, especially for people with a migrant background and low-skilled adults.

Nonetheless examining responses from adult learners to the survey does identify some areas through which the **relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the target groups could be increased**. 7% (n=5) of all respondents to the survey of adult learners mentioned that they would have needed ICT courses (computer and smartphone), whilst the same number stated that they did not receive the support they needed with other areas of life, continuing to study or to find work during their participation in the adult learning measure. Others mentioned needing more practical exercises, knowledge in business administration and accounting, or support with transport or work-related issues. The case study research highlighted the need to focus further on certain groups of individuals, such as the foreign-born population with low levels of competence in the host country's language.

Overall, in line with the findings noted above, the **Covid-19 pandemic has heightened the relevance of the measures** defined in the Recommendation to the needs of the target groups, due to higher levels of vulnerability to the impacts of the pandemic. This includes, for example, older low-skilled adults and low-skilled adults working in sectors strongly affected by the crisis. In fact, older workers were most frequently selected by respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations as one of the target groups that should have been targeted in the implementation of upskilling measures but was not - indicating that the measures defined in the Recommendation are increasingly relevant for specific cohorts of individuals. This is also given the disruption in the delivery of existing upskilling measures through the pandemic, as new, online ways of learning needed to be rolled out, which in turn further increased the relevance of strengthening digital literacy skills of the priority groups as defined by the measures in the Recommendation, both as a means of access to the labour market, but also as a way of accessing upskilling measures themselves.

The impacts of the pandemic on the relevance of the Recommendation were confirmed by the majority of survey respondents. When asked to what extent the Covid-19 pandemic had reduced or increased the relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the needs of the target group, 55% (21 out of 38 responses) of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, said that it had to a great (39%, 15 responses) or fairly large (16%, 6 responses) extent. See the box below for the specific impact of the pandemic on skills development in Spain.

Relevance to needs of sectors and regions

The measures set out in the Recommendation remain **relevant to the needs of sectors as they can be implemented flexibly** to respond to specific skills demands in certain sectors as the need arises. The study findings show that approaches to targeting the needs of sectors through upskilling pathways measures vary across Member States. A cross-sectoral approach is common, but there is also clear evidence of sectoral/regional needs being addressed by specifically targeted upskilling initiatives as required based on skills forecasting and analysis. This is the case in, for example, in **Hungary** where initiatives have focused on the development of skills in the digital sector, responding to a specific sectoral need for skilled workforce. In addition, in **Estonia** a comprehensive system of skills forecasting and analysis identifies priority sectors that guides the development of adult learning courses in the country, as seen in the box below:

Box 33 The OSKA skills forecasting and analysis system for priority sectors in Estonia

In **Estonia**, the skills forecasting and analysis system OSKA, based on an annual analysis of the need for labour and skills, makes recommendations for training requirements across key priority sectors. In 2020, the priority economic sectors were: business education; the financial sector; the manufacturing industry; personal services; and public administration.

The adaptability of the measures proposed in the Recommendation thus supports its relevance to the needs of sectors. This is confirmed by the survey of coordinating and

implementing organisations in which 88% (36 out of 41 responses) of respondents agreed to a great (44%, 18 responses) or fairly large (44%, 18 responses) extent that the measures of the Recommendation were still relevant to sectoral needs. Further, 82% (55 of 67 responses) agreed to a great (48%, 32 responses) or fairly large (34%, 23 responses) extent that adult learning measures were still relevant to the needs of economic sectors in their country or region. Respondents to the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults also noted that there was a need to take into account the geographic (rural) context and training needs that are specific to certain regions, a need to adapt and tailor training to the changes of the labour market and new skills required at European level.

*Q3.4 To what extent are the **target groups** addressed by the Recommendation and those defined by the Member States **still relevant**?*

Key Findings

The evidence confirms that the **broad target group of the Recommendation remains highly relevant** across Member States. Low-qualified adults remain further from the labour market than those with higher educational attainment levels as seen in Section 3. The focus on this target group has become even more relevant in recent years due to the evolving socio-economic conditions, particularly due to the pandemic and rapidly accelerating digital transition, and demographic factors. In terms of specific priority groups within the broader group of low-skilled adults, **the flexible framework provided in the Recommendation supports its continued relevance** as it allows Member States to identify their own priority groups in light of national, regional or local needs. The most frequently selected priority groups were the long-term unemployed and the inactive. The study showed that other priority groups however also remained relevant, including people with disabilities, older workers, nationals with a migrant background and third country nationals.

The evidence confirms that the **broad target group of the Recommendation**²⁰¹ remains highly relevant across Member States. Low-qualified adults remain further from the labour market than those with higher educational attainment levels as seen in Section 3. The focus on this target group has become even more relevant in recent years due to changing socio-economic or other contextual conditions, as outlined above, particularly through the pandemic and the acceleration of the digital transition. Demographic changes in Europe also increase the relevance of the target groups of the Recommendation. Respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that the target groups specified in the Recommendation were still relevant: 95% (39 of 41 responses) of respondents said that this was true to a great (59%, 24 responses) or fairly large (37%, 15 responses) extent. Similarly, 82% (42 of 51 responses) of respondents to the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults agreed to a great (59%, 30 responses) or fairly large (23%, 12 responses) extent that the target groups were still relevant.

In terms of the **target groups defined by Member States**, beyond the broad target group of the 'low-skilled', the groups defined by Member States vary but can all be considered as groups that are most in need. The most frequently selected groups by respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations were the long-term unemployed and the inactive (see the box below for an example from **Bulgaria**). These groups continue to be at a clear disadvantage when it comes to accessing lifelong learning, with the inactive participating the least in education and training, and very little progress in increasing participation of this subgroup between 2016 and 2020. The disadvantage of foreign-born

²⁰¹ The Recommendation focuses on adults with a low level of skills, such as those without upper secondary education and who are not eligible for support from the EU's Youth Guarantee. These individuals may be in employment, or they may be unemployed or economically inactive, and have a need to strengthen basic skills. The Recommendation does not further define sub-target groups but outlines that Member States should define priority target groups based on national circumstances.

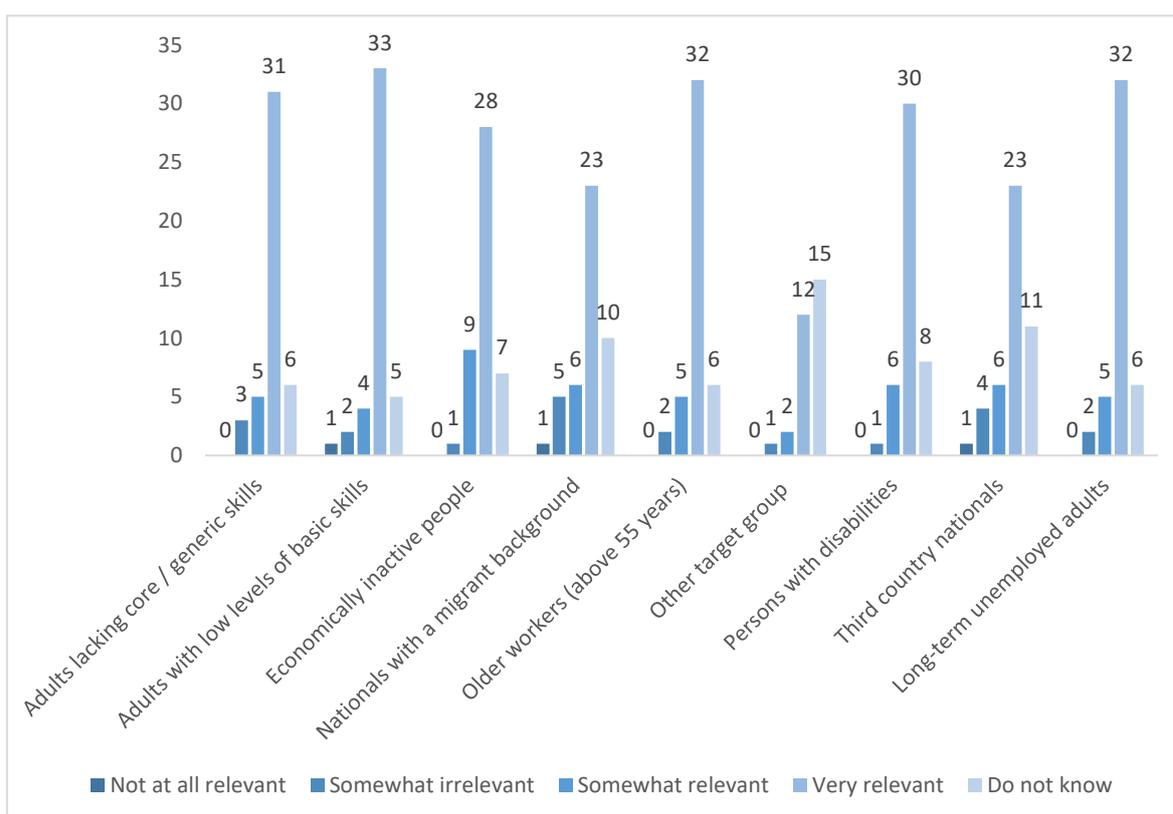
adults also persists, and in fact the discrepancy has widened between migrant and native-born adults from 14 percentage points in 2016 to 15.3 percentage points in 2020. Older workers have also been a key target group of Member States' approaches and remain a group in need of support: Based on analysis of the Eurostat data, a recent JRC report has identified that an EU average of 58% of 55-64-year-olds have low digital skills, again confirming the relevance of this target group.

Box 34 Priority target groups in Bulgaria

The focus in terms of skills development in Bulgaria is on trying to increase the motivation for inactive people to participate in training and to increase the attractiveness of the training offer. Measures put into place in order to achieve this include removing restrictions on enrolment onto vocational courses for people with low levels of education and motivating older people to participate in training. The focus on older people as a priority target group is in the context of a declining Bulgarian population and a labour shortage in some sectors and regions. Older adults are therefore an important labour market resource in Bulgaria.

The ongoing relevance of the target groups addressed by the Recommendation is confirmed by responses to the public consultation. Figure 17 below shows that nearly all target groups were considered to be very relevant by respondents.

Figure 17 Degree of relevance of target groups of the Recommendation (absolute numbers, N=45)



Source: Ecorys/3s

The **flexible framework** put forward in the Recommendation that allows Member States to identify their own priority groups in light of national/ regional/ local needs evidently supports the continued relevance of the Recommendation. Measures can be adapted to focus on groups most in need and the mapping shows evidence of such adaptation within Member States' upskilling pathways measures. There are also recurrent policy changes that indicate

the upskilling measures are being reviewed and adapted to remain relevant (see several examples from **Belgium**, **Croatia** and **France** outlined in the box below).

Box 35 Evidence of adaptation

- Get up Wallonia in **Belgium** was developed in 2020 to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, targeting young people and adult learners. In particular, it has been adapted to focus on vocational training and digital training, the development and updating of skills in connection with emerging and technical professions (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), and essential professions such as those related to the health, social work and food sectors. It also focuses on requalification, re-skilling, skills improvement and upskilling. It also encourages self-employment.
- The Strategic Plan for Literacy 2017-2024 in **Belgium** sets out the guidelines for the literacy policy for the coming years and is the third plan of the Flemish Government for the promotion of literacy of individuals. It is targeted specifically at individuals with low literacy competences at and below level 2.
- The Basic primary education for adults in **Croatia** was mainstreamed as a regular programme, after being a project for ten years. Adult career counselling (EE) grew in scope (establishing more career centres). The focus of this measure is low-skilled individuals aged 15 and above, and those with little or no education.
- The Plan for investment in skills 2018-2022 in **France** has an updated target: to train 2 million low or unskilled job seekers and far from the labour market.

Nonetheless, the **evidence identified some target groups alongside low-skilled/ low-qualified adults that may benefit from upskilling pathway measures**, but who may not always align with the definition of the 'traditional' target groups foreseen in the Recommendation. This includes for example those already employed who are looking to reskill and upskill (see section 4.1, Q1.2a). Stakeholder consultations indicated this as an area where the relevance of the Recommendation to target groups at national level could be further enhanced, whilst bearing in mind the fact that the focus of the Recommendation is on the low-skilled.

The research also found that there is **room for increasing relevance to specific target groups that have been less emphasised** in the Recommendation and in national level upskilling pathway measures. Consulted stakeholders emphasised repeatedly that, while the main target groups indicated in the Recommendation are still relevant, there is a need to emphasise (in particular through the targeting of measures at the national level) the **heterogeneity of priority groups** (e.g., a share of migrants and refugees are highly skilled/ highly qualified and would not be part of the priority group for accessing upskilling pathways measures) although this should be carried out with sensitivity. Relatedly, aspects related to the **intersectionality of multiple disadvantages** for individuals who have several socio-demographic characteristics that may trigger enhanced vulnerabilities (skills/qualifications level, age, gender, disability conditions) should be taken on board.

4.4. Coherence

*Q4.1 To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways as defined in this Council Recommendation been **coherent with education and training, employment and social policies** at national and regional level?*

Key Findings

There is overall a **good level of coherence** between the objectives, target groups and measures defined in the Recommendation and relevant policies, legal frameworks (where they exist) and strategies at national and regional level. Evidence from the study shows that the nature of coherence with national and regional policies falls into three main categories. Firstly, in several Member States (e.g., AT, DK, EE, FR, HU, IE, SE), existing national and regional policies, as well as the legal frameworks (where relevant), for upskilling adults already aligned well with the Council Recommendation when it was published. Secondly, in another set of Member States (e.g., BG, CY, EL, HR, SK), the publication of the Recommendation led to national and regional policies targeting low-skilled adults, as well as in some cases (e.g., EL, HR) the legal framework governing VET, being adjusted to ensure coherence. Thirdly, some Member States (e.g., PL) have introduced new policies to ensure coherence with the Recommendation; although these national and regional policies are often broader (e.g., the Polish Integrated Skills Strategy does not only focus on low-skilled adults), they incorporate the key lines of the Recommendation and have provided important impetus to the policy focus in this field.

Even though overall coherence with national and regional policies is good, the case studies have shown that there are **areas on which the Recommendation focuses which could be further developed or prioritised** in the policies in specific Member States (e.g., training of trainers (FR) or validation of learning (AT, EE)). It is also important to note that, in some countries, while all three steps of the Recommendation can be found in the national offer of training and support for low-skilled adults, they are not necessarily combined in a single programme (please see examples Q1.3 in the effectiveness section).

Challenges and obstacles to aligning national and regional policies with the Recommendation include: a focus on other key policy priorities, the time needed to progressively align national policies with the Recommendation, resistance to from certain stakeholders who fear that the existing VET/dual training systems could be undermined), the ongoing absence of a specific national adult learning strategy or system, frequent changes in government slowing down the implementation of new measures, ensuring a tailored approach for low-skilled adults without creating a parallel system or fragmentation, lack of sufficient coordination at national level and the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on adult learning. **Factors which have facilitated coherence** with national and regional policies include: ensuring that all key national stakeholders have representatives on the board of the national training agency and implementing joint measures, integrating the objectives, target groups and measures into the broader government's programme at the inter-institutional level, setting up an upskilling pathways working group chaired the by the Ministry for Education or the Ministry of Employment, the existence of specific national policies or strategies for upskilling low-skilled adults and the availability of specific EU funding for upskilling measures.

There is overall a **good level of coherence between the objectives, target groups and measures defined in the Recommendation and relevant policies and strategies** at national and regional level. In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, 87.80% (36 responses out of 41) of respondents considered that the objectives, target groups and measures to implement adult learning measures (as defined in the 2016 Recommendation) have been coherent with education and training, employment and social policies at national/regional level to a fairly large (43.90%, 18 responses) or great (43.90%, 18 responses) extent. In the public consultation (see Annex 6), more than half of the respondents (25 out of 44) considered that the measures set out in the Recommendation were to a fairly or very large extent coherent with their national policies. Although caution must be taken due to the low response rate and ensuing lack of representativity, the countries for which the responses were most positive about coherence with national policies were **Lithuania, Ireland and Estonia**, while those for which responses were least positive

were **Germany** and **Italy** (of the two Italian respondents, one chose 'Not at all in line' and the other chose 'In line to a small extent').

Evidence from the study shows that the nature of coherence with national and regional policies falls into three main categories.

Firstly, in several Member States (e.g., AT, DK, EE, FR, HU, IE, SE), existing national and regional policies, as well as legal frameworks (in countries where these exist), for upskilling adults already aligned well with the Council Recommendation when it was published. This was the case for example in **Austria** where the Recommendation reinforced and reaffirmed the importance of the pathway already taken in the national LLL:2020 Strategy and Initiative for Adult Education. In each of these Member States, although policies already existed prior to the Recommendation, it was underlined that the Recommendation provided an important boost to these policies, confirming the importance of the policy focus on low-skilled adults and giving the policies greater focus, visibility, power and resources. Consultees also underlined in several cases that the Recommendation confirmed the importance of focusing on upskilling for low-skilled adults not only for labour market needs, but also for wider societal and individual wellbeing.

Secondly, in another set of Member States (e.g., BG, CY, EL, HR, SK), the publication of the Recommendation led to national and regional policies targeting low-skilled adults being adjusted to ensure coherence.

Box 36 Greece and Croatia: adaptation of national policies and the legal framework to the Recommendation

- **Greece:** the new VET law (Law 4763/21.12.2020, art.9), introduced by the Ministry of Education, concerning the National System of Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning includes several measures directly related to the Recommendation, e.g. Level 3 is foreseen to be provided by the Vocational Training Schools and the Apprenticeship Vocational Education Schools and the aims of these Schools include to upgrade the basic skills of compulsory education or equivalent degrees' holders and their inclusion in labour market.
- **Croatia:** The Ministry of Science and Education recently (2021) adopted a new law (The Croatian Qualifications Framework Act ([Zakon o Hrvatskom kvalifikacijskom okviru, NN 22/13, 41/16, 64/18, 47/20, 20/21](https://www.zakon.hr/z/566/Zakon-o-Hrvatskom-kvalifikacijskom-okviru)²⁰²)) which recognises non-formal and informal learning and skills validation and recognition obtained through those types of learning. The Law ensures further alignment with the Recommendation, particularly in terms of validation of learning.

Thirdly, some Member States (e.g., PL) have **introduced new policies to ensure coherence with the Recommendation**. Although these national and regional policies are often broader (e.g., the Polish Integrated Skills Strategy does not only focus on low-skilled adults), they incorporate the key lines of the Recommendation and have provided important impetus to the policy focus in this field.

Box 37 Poland: introduction of new policies to ensure coherence with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation

- **Poland:** the SZANSA (*Nowe możliwości dla dorosłych*) programme, which aims to develop innovative models to support adults gain basic skills, was introduced as a

²⁰² <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/croatia/64-validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning>;
<https://www.zakon.hr/z/566/Zakon-o-Hrvatskom-kvalifikacijskom-okviru>

specific response to the Recommendation. The Recommendation was also one of the main sources for designing the Integrated Skills Strategy 2030.

Even though overall coherence with national and regional policies is good, the case studies have shown that there are **areas on which the Recommendation focuses which could be further developed or prioritised** in the policies in specific Member States. For example, in **France**, while there is overall very strong coherence between national and regional policy with the Recommendation, there are certain points which could be developed further at national and regional level, including a more specific focus on diversity, gender equality and training of trainers in relation to upskilling. Similarly, in **Estonia**, although overall coherence with national and regional policy is strong, there are some gaps in provision, for example in relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning for low-skilled adults. In **Austria** too, there has been a less strong priority on validation measures, which has meant that this aspect of the Recommendation has taken more time to be aligned.

It is also important to note that, in some countries, while all three steps of the Recommendation can be found in the national offer of training and support for low-skilled adults, they are not necessarily combined in a single programme. In **Germany** for example, the measures set out in the Recommendation are covered by a range of national programmes including *Alphadecade* (aiming to improve stakeholder coordination), *Qualifizierungschancengesetz* (skills matching), *Bildungsprämie* (providing assessment, lifelong guidance and tailored training), and *Valikom* (aiming to improve validation). Other examples of integrated and non-integrated steps within different Member States are provided in the effectiveness section (Q1.3).

Challenges and obstacles to aligning national and regional policies with the Recommendation which were raised by certain stakeholders include for example: a focus on other key policy priorities (e.g. CZ), the time needed to progressively align national policies with the Recommendation (e.g. IT), resistance to some measures from certain stakeholders (e.g. craft trade unions) who fear that the VET/dual training systems could be undermined²⁰³ (e.g. DE), the ongoing absence of a specific national adult learning strategy or system (e.g. CZ, LV), frequent recent changes in government slowing down the implementation of new measures (e.g. AT), ensuring a tailored approach for low-skilled adults without creating a parallel system (e.g. DE). fragmentation and lack of sufficient coordination at national level (e.g., EL). In Hungary, coherence has been hindered by delays in setting up and implementing the national validation system, lack of policy and accessibility on lifelong guidance for adults, limitations of existing programme finances and bottlenecks in terms of capacity of the Vocational Education Centres. In several Member States, the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on adult learning was highlighted, with the policy focus shifting to other areas and the education and training of other target groups (e.g., children, young people), as well as the lack of a specific EU funding line to accompany the implementation of the Recommendation.

Factors which have facilitated coherence with national and regional policies include for example ensuring that all key national stakeholders have representatives on the board of the national training agency and implementing joint measures (e.g., BG), integrating the objectives, target groups and measures into the broader government's programme at the inter-institutional level (e.g., LT) and setting up an upskilling pathways working group chaired by the Ministry for Education (e.g. MT). Stakeholders also underlined that better coherence can be observed in Member States where specific national policies or strategies for upskilling low-skilled adults exist, but that there is much less coherence where they do not. In the countries where specific strategies did not exist, and in which adult education was often covered under wider strategies or policies or was not a major priority (e.g., CZ,

203 Durazzi, Niccolo, & Geyer, Leonard. (2019). Social inclusion in the knowledge economy: unions' strategies and institutional change in the Austrian and German training systems. *Socio-Economic Review*, 18(1), 103-124 Social inclusion in the knowledge economy: unions' strategies and institutional change in the Austrian and German training system

SK), it was much more difficult to establish links with relevant national and regional policies as the mechanisms and responsible actors were not in place. Since the implementation of the Recommendation, some strategies have been put in place, such as the introduction in 2020 of the National Skills Strategy²⁰⁴ in the Slovak Republic, which is likely both (a) to be a result of the Recommendation and (b) to facilitate coherence with national policy, however no evidence is yet available given the recent implementation. The research also clearly showed that EU funding specifically targeted at upskilling measures for low-skilled adults was a strong factor in driving alignment with the Recommendation and ensuring a focus on the low-skilled.

*Q4.2(a) To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways as defined in this Council Recommendation **been coherent with other related EU level policies?***

Key Findings

The objectives, target groups and measures of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation have a **good degree of coherence overall with other related EU level policies** in the fields of training and employment, adult learning, equality strategies and other fields (e.g., recovery or digital strategies). These other EU policies are complementary to the Recommendation and do not duplicate it, with limited potential for overlap. Our analysis shows a general trend of an increasing specific focus and recognition of the importance of upskilling under other relevant EU policies over time, most likely linked to the influence of the Recommendation.

Despite the overall positive assessment of coherence with other EU policies, **potential areas for improvement** include: creating better linkages and synergies with policy fields outside the sphere of employment (e.g. education, social policy, health, environment); developing a more comprehensive, systematic and strategic approach to gender and equality mainstreaming within the Recommendation; and providing more guidance to national and regional stakeholders about how the multiple different EU policies, strategies, and recommendations in the fields of training, adult learning, skills/competences, and labour market integration work together.

Evidence of coherence in the texts

In the sections below, we set out the evidence from an analysis of relevant texts on the coherence of the Recommendation with: (i) relevant EU training and employment policies; (ii) other EU initiatives in the field of adult learning; (iii) EU equality strategies, and (iv) other relevant EU policies.

i. Relevant EU training and employment policies

below sets out the evidence related to the coherence of the key related training and employment policies with the Recommendation.

204 OECD (2020), OECD Skills Strategy Slovak Republic: Assessment and Recommendations, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bb688e68-en>.

Table 16 Coherence of key related EU training and employment policies with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation (UP Recommendation)

Related EU level policies	Evidence relating to coherence
<p>Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030²⁰⁵</p> <p>European Agenda for Adult Learning²⁰⁶ (2011)</p> <p>New Skills Agenda for Europe²⁰⁷ (2016)</p> <p>European Skills Agenda²⁰⁸ (2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All these broader policy frameworks in the field of adult learning are in close coherence with the UP Recommendation. • The European Agenda for Adult Learning of 2011 sets the direction of travel, specifically mentioning in its preamble that ‘adult learning provides a means of up-skilling or reskilling those affected by unemployment, restructuring and career transitions, as well as makes an important contribution to social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.’ • The New Skills Agenda of 2016 also underlines the importance of skills as a pathway to both good-quality jobs and allowing individuals to fulfil their potential as active citizens, and the need to support low-skilled adults to increase their skills levels. It invites Member States to put in place pathways for upskilling via a Skills Guarantee (p.5), providing broadly the same three steps confirmed in the UP Recommendation (§4-9). • The European Skills Agenda of 2020 builds on these previous strategic documents, underlining throughout the importance of upskilling adults, and making specific reference to the UP Recommendation (p.14). It also announces other key complementary EU initiatives such as the Pact for Skills²⁰⁹ and Individual Learning Accounts²¹⁰.
<p>European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) principles²¹¹ and action plan²¹²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EPSR outlines individuals’ rights to inclusive education, training and lifelong learning (Principle 1) as well as to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment and employment prospects (Principle 4). • Investment in reskilling and upskilling aims to support achieving key EU targets by 2030, including at least 60% of all adults participating in training every year, and that at least 80% of those aged 16-74 should have basic digital skills²¹³.

205 Council Resolution on a new European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030 ((2021/C 504/02), [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G1214\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021G1214(01)&from=EN)

206 Council Resolution on a renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011/C 372/01), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32011G1220%2801%29>

207 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: a New Skills Agenda for Europe - Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381&from=EN>

208 Communication - European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9723>

209 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1517&langId=en>

210 https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/measures/12876-Adult-skills-Individual-Learning-Accounts-a-tool-to-improve-access-to-training_en

211 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

212 Ibid.

213 Ibid.

<p>Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning²¹⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preamble (§9) specifically refers to the renewed European agenda for adult learning, which 'defined as one of its priority areas for the period 2012-14 the putting in place of fully functional systems for validating non-formal and informal learning and promoting the use by adults of all ages and at all qualification levels'. • The recommendation states that Member States should 'have in place, no later than 2018, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning' (§1.1). The UP Recommendation specifically cites this Recommendation in its preamble (§18) and states that Member States should build on the arrangements put in place in accordance with it (§9).
<p>Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning²¹⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preamble (§18) of the 2018 Recommendation on key competences states that: 'in addressing the development of key competences in a lifelong learning perspective, support should be ensured at all levels of education, training and learning pathways: to develop quality early childhood education and care, to further enhance school education and ensure excellent teaching, to provide up-skilling pathways to low-skilled adults [...]' and makes specific reference to the UP Recommendation. • The UP Recommendation specifically cites (§1(b)) the (original) Recommendation on key competences from 2006²¹⁶, stating that low-skilled adults should be offered the possibility to 'acquire a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences, <i>relevant for the labour market and active participation in society, building on Recommendation 2006/962/EC on key competences for lifelong learning [...]</i>'
<p>Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market²¹⁷</p> <p>(LTU Recommendation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LTU Recommendation underlines that 'among the most vulnerable to long-term unemployment are people with low skills or qualifications' (preamble §4). • It recommends that Member States offer individual assessments to long-term jobseekers and then job-integration agreements which can include the validation of non-formal and informal learning, education and vocational education, in clear coherence with the three-step approach in the UP Recommendation. • The UP Recommendation cites the LTU Recommendation in its preamble (§20).

214 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

215 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2018:189:TOC

216 Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32006H0962>

217 Council recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016H0220%2801%29>

<p>Council Recommendations on the Youth Guarantee²¹⁸</p> <p><i>(YG Recommendations)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preamble (§19) of the UP Recommendation cites the YG Recommendation (2013). • Similarly, the preamble (§4) of the YG Recommendation (2020) cites the UP Recommendation. Its preamble (§24) also underlines the importance of upskilling for young people, particularly to address the digital skills gap: ‘Targeted upskilling helps young people respond to the growing demand for digital skills and addresses the digital divide.’ • The Youth Guarantee Recommendation (2013) includes a strong emphasis on the importance of enhancing skills (§11-15). • The YG Recommendation (2020) makes specific recommendations around upskilling, recommending that Member States should ‘ensure that the preparatory phase facilitates upskilling and re-skilling where deemed appropriate, geared mainly towards digital, green, language, entrepreneurial and career management skills.’ • To avoid/limit any overlap in beneficiaries, the preamble (§9) to the UP Recommendation states that the upskilling pathways “would target adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences who are not eligible for support under the Youth Guarantee”. The avoidance of overlap is also clearly emphasised in Article 1, which recommends that access to upskilling pathways should be offered for example to those ‘who are not eligible for support under the Youth Guarantee’. • Given that the YG focuses on young people and that the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation focused on ‘adults’, in principle the target groups should be largely complementary. However, since the age of those considered to be ‘adults’ is not specified in the UP Recommendation and since the reinforced Youth Guarantee²¹⁹ raised the age limit of eligibility to 29 years, there is still potential for some overlap. • The approach taken in both YG Recommendations is coherent with the UP Recommendation: for example, both put a strong emphasis on enhancing skills, the low-skilled, the need for partnerships and cooperation, and developing effective outreach strategies. Also, although they do not specifically mention a ‘three-step approach’, the recommended approach for supporting young people is closely aligned, comprising the key elements of the three-step approach in the UP Recommendation.
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Source: *Ecorys, 2022*

As can be seen, the **Recommendation has a good degree of coherence with all key related EU training and employment policies**. In most cases, the relevant policies cite and acknowledge the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, and vice versa. Where other policies focus on the skills enhancement of different groups (i.e., the Youth Guarantee Recommendations, the LTU Recommendation) or address elements of the approach recommended in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation (e.g., the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning), the approaches described are closely aligned, comprising the key elements of the three-step approach, as well as outreach and

218 Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, and Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee 2020/C 372/01,

219 Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee 2020/C 372/01

support measures. Each of these Recommendations also includes specificities relative to the specific group targeted (e.g., young people, long-term unemployed, low-skilled adults).

Most of these policies do not show any potential for duplication. The main exception is the Youth Guarantee, where there is a potential overlap between the target group of low-skilled adults under the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and low-skilled young people under the Youth Guarantee, in particular since the age limit was raised to 29 years of age. The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation does however include a clear recommendation to target those who are not eligible for support under the Youth Guarantee.

Other EU initiatives in the field of adult learning

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation is also coherent with other EU initiatives in the field of skills. These include for example the National Coordinators for the **Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning**²²⁰ (funded by Erasmus+), the **Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE)**²²¹, the **Network of independent experts in the area of adult skills and learning located in the 27 EU Member States**, as well as the **ET 2020** and subsequent **European Education Area (EEA) Strategic Framework Working Groups on Adult Learning**²²². Although relatively few specific references to the Recommendation are made in the texts and outputs relating to these initiatives, they are all in clear coherence with its aims and are likely to support the achievement of its goals.

Other mutual learning activities, for example the Mutual Learning Programme peer reviews²²³, do not appear to have had a direct focus on upskilling, although certain events focus on different forms of training, for example entrepreneurship training for the unemployed²²⁴.

ii. Relevant EU equality strategies

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation is also broadly coherent with EU equality strategies, although there is clear scope for a stronger emphasis on the importance of prioritising specific target groups and gender equality. A summary overview of the evidence of coherence with EU equality strategies is provided in Table 14 below.

220 https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20210122142416/https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/selection-results/national-coordinators-for-the-implementation-of-the-european-agenda-for-adult-learning_en;
<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/national-coordinators-implementation-european-agenda-adult-learning>

221 <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en>

222 <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=3797>

223 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1070&furtherNews=yes>

224 E.g. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1070&newsId=9429&furtherNews=yes>

Table 17 Coherence of EU equality policies with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation

Related EU level policies	Evidence relating to coherence
<p>Gender equality strategy (2020-2025)²²⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While the Gender equality strategy does not specifically refer to upskilling, it links to the 2020 Skills Agenda, stating that: ‘The Updated Skills Agenda for Europe will help address horizontal segregation, stereotyping and gender gaps in education and training’ (p.10). It also notes (p.7) the importance of increasing women’s participation in the workforce ‘in the context of a shrinking workforce and skills shortages’, underlining the importance of upskilling women. §2 of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation highlights the need to consider the gender perspective when identifying target groups for upskilling initiatives. It recommends that Member States: ‘[...] identify priority target groups for the delivery of upskilling pathways at national level. In doing so, take also into account the gender, diversity and various sub-groups in the targeted population.’
<p>EU Roma strategic framework²²⁶ and EU anti-racism action plan²²⁷</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Roma strategic framework specifically refers to the benefits of upskilling for the Roma population: ‘Progress in socioeconomic inclusion for the Roma has the potential to reduce labour and skills shortages in times of adverse demographic developments and reduce social expenditure. Investment in better education and upskilling of a previously excluded labour force can positively affect productivity growth.’ (p.9) The EU anti-racism action plan also refers to the importance of upskilling and equal access to upskilling opportunities. It states that: ‘[...] having the right skills means being able to more easily get a job, stay employed and navigate job transitions. This requires equal access to additional upskilling opportunities for all people, regardless of racial or ethnic origin as well as other grounds of discrimination’ (p.10). Similarly to the Gender equality strategy, it makes specific reference to the European Skills Agenda stating that it has ‘[...] social fairness as a cornerstone’ (p.10). The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation makes no specific mention of a focus on Roma or people of diverse ethnic origins. However – as seen above (see Gender equality strategy) - it makes a general reference in §2 to taking into account ‘diversity and various sub-groups’ when identifying priority target groups.
<p>EU disability strategy (2010-2020²²⁸, 2021-2030²²⁹)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new EU strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities (2021-2030) places a very strong emphasis on the importance of developing new skills (p.12-13) and digital skills (p.11). It references several EU policies relating to skills, including the European Skills Agenda and the Pact for Skills, as well as national skills strategies. The previous EU disability strategy (2010-2020) makes less direct mention of the importance of gaining new skills, focusing more on employment, but refers to the Agenda for new skills and jobs²³⁰. As in relation to Roma and anti-racism (see row above), the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation makes no specific mention of a focus on people with disabilities. However, it makes a general reference in §2 to taking into account ‘diversity and various sub-groups’ when identifying priority target groups.

Source: *Ecorys, 2022*

As the evidence in the table shows, the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation provides only a general recommendation in relation to identifying priority target groups. To encourage

225 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>

226 https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/new-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation-full-package_en

227 https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/union-equality-eu-action-plan-against-racism-2020-2025_en

228 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM%3A2010%3A0636%3AFIN%3Aen%3APDF>

229 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e1e2228-7c97-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

230 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7f39a8c6-068e-434d-a7ce-a9665bf227f9>

Member States to consider specific groups of disadvantaged adults more actively, these groups should be more clearly specified (e.g. people with disabilities, people with a migrant background, people from national minority groups, women, etc.). **In order to ensure better coherence with EU equality strategies and ensure the adequacy of the upskilling measures implemented to real needs, it will be essential to have greater gender and equality mainstreaming within the Recommendation.** As seen in section 4.1 (effectiveness) above, most upskilling measures implemented by Member States broadly target low-skilled adults in general, with the most common priority group being ‘adults with low levels of basic skills’. Women represent half of the EU population and, without identifying and addressing their specific needs (e.g., digital skills, reskilling after career breaks, etc.), upskilling measures will not be fit for purpose. In our mapping analysis (see Annex 3), only four measures identified across all 27 Member States make a specific mention of women as a target group: the *AULA Mentor* programme (ES), the *Training courses for unemployed adults* (IT), *National Vocational Training Plan of ANOFM policy* (RO) and the ‘Competence with a system’ (*Kompetenz mit System*) policy (AT). Similarly, as seen in section 3 above, the educational disadvantage of the foreign-born population has increased since 2016, and there remains a disadvantage in terms of digital skills for this group which needs to be recognised and tackled. Across all priority groups, there is a need to include a focus on a gender perspective to take intersectionality into account.

iii. Other relevant EU policies

The Recommendation is also in good coherence with the planned support for public investments in reskilling and upskilling (with an emphasis on supporting digital skills) as part of the **Recovery Plan for Europe**²³¹ and **NextGenerationEU (2021-2023)**²³², as well as the increased need to invest in developing digital skills set out in key EU policies such as the **European Digital Strategy**²³³ and the **Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)**²³⁴. The Digital Education Action Plan for example emphasises at least twice the importance of upskilling in digital competences for adult learners from a point of view of both competitiveness (p.9) and inclusiveness (p.10). In the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, the preamble (§1, 2, 5, 9, 15, 17, 21) repeatedly underlines the importance of digital skills for low-skilled adults, and digital competence is also systematically addressed throughout the Recommendations (§1(a), 3, 17, 20, 25).

Evidence on coherence from consultations

Almost all EU stakeholders who took part in individual consultations considered that the **Recommendation has a high degree of coherence with other related EU policies** and that there is no or very limited duplication or overlap at the EU policy level. It was considered overall that the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation shines a light on a very important topic which is not the main focus of other EU policies (e.g., recommendations on long-term unemployment, Youth Guarantee, etc.) but is rather complementary to them. The European Agenda for Adult Learning, the New Skills Agenda for Europe (2016) and the European Skills Agenda (2020) were mentioned as being particularly coherent, alongside which the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation provides an essential focus on low-skilled adults. Some stakeholders also mentioned other policy measures which they considered particularly aligned with the Council Recommendation was, including Individual Learning Accounts and Micro-credentials.

Consultees at national level overall echoed the view of EU level stakeholders that there is a good degree of coherence between the Recommendation and other relevant EU policies. The EU policies that were mentioned most frequently by national consultees as being particularly coherent with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation were the

231 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en

232 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new_en

233 <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies>

234 https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

Recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, long-term unemployment and the Youth Guarantee. Some stakeholders indicated that any small overlaps (e.g., with the Youth Guarantee) positively reinforce the importance of upskilling for low-skilled adults (of all ages) rather than risking duplication or double funding.

In the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, 62% (25 out of 40 respondents) considered that adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways have created synergies with and complemented other EU policies on skills to a fairly large (40%, 16 responses) or great (22%, 9 responses) extent. Reflecting potentially the multiplicity of EU policies in this area, 30% of respondents (12 responses) indicated that they did not know.

'Do not know' was also the most common response to the question in the public consultation (see Annex 6) about the complementarity and synergies between the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and eight other EU policies. The EU policies which respondents most frequently considered as complementary to a fairly large or a very large extent to the Recommendation were the European Pillar of Social Rights and the 2020 European Skills Agenda (25 respondents out of 46 each), the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (24) and the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (23). The EU policies with which respondents to the public consultation felt had the greatest overlap with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation were the 2020 European Skills Agenda (20 out of 45) and the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (19 out of 45). Conversely, the Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee was the policy least frequently perceived as overlapping with the Upskilling Pathways actions (14 out of 45 responses). Responses to open questions however indicated that respondents did not feel that these other EU policies were duplicating the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, but rather tackling the same issue at a different or complementary level. For example, it was stated that the European Skills Agenda looks at the issue of skills more holistically, and that the Youth Guarantee works in combination with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation to ensure that all target groups are given support to access the labour market.

Despite this overall positive assessment of coherence, **potential areas for improvement** which emerged from the consultations included:

- Creating **better linkages and coherence** with policy fields outside the sphere of employment, e.g., education, social inclusion, health, environment. Lifelong learning is not only about skills for the labour market, but also life skills, social competences, financial management, integration, justice, managing climate change, health and wellbeing. Going forwards, there is a need to ensure greater coherence with policies tackling the green and digital transitions. The linkages between enrolling in upskilling programmes and social benefits must also be considered to avoid the risk that adults do not take up upskilling opportunities due to fears about losing financial support.
- Ensuring a more **holistic and systematic approach to gender and equality/diversity mainstreaming** within both the Recommendation and the upskilling measures implemented to achieve the aims of the Recommendation. Without specific consideration of the needs and challenges of different groups - and the specific needs of women across all groups – upskilling approaches will not address actual needs and be less effective.
- **Providing more guidance to national stakeholders** about how the multiple different EU policies, strategies, and recommendations in the fields of training, adult learning, skills/competences, and labour market integration work together. There were concerns among both EU and national stakeholders that there can be some confusion at implementation level over which policies prevail and keeping up to date on the latest policies. Reflecting the views of several consultees, one national stakeholder stated for

example that 'it is difficult to pay equal attention and focus to each recommendation in the national context'. To address this issue, there could be more monitoring and evaluation of implementation at national level, and more policy guidance to avoid differing interpretations of texts and priorities and help national stakeholders to embed EU policies in national policies

*Q4.2(b) To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways as defined in this Council Recommendation been **coherent with EU funding mechanisms**?*

Key Findings

The Council Recommendation has a **high degree of coherence with relevant EU funding mechanisms**, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF(+)), Erasmus+, EaSI, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP), the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Upskilling measures which are coherent with the aims of the Recommendation have been funded under these different EU funds. To further enhance coherence with EU funding, clearer signposting could be provided to national and regional stakeholders of the EU funds available to support upskilling pathways.

An overview of the specific measures of the funding instruments which allow support for the implementation of upskilling pathways is set out in Table 10 and Table 14 in Q.2.2 (see Efficiency section above). The table, as well as our analysis (set out below), shows that there is an **increase in the specific focus on the implementation of upskilling measures in EU funding mechanisms** over time, for example with increased and more specific funding possibilities under the new Erasmus+ and ESF+ programmes compared to previous programming periods.

There is **clear coherence between the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation with the ESF and ESF+**. As seen in Section 4.2 (Efficiency) above, the ESF is the predominant funding source for national and regional policies and programmes which align with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. As shown in Table 10 (see Efficiency section), several of the investment priorities specified in Article 3.1 of the 2013 ESF regulation²³⁵ show clear coherence with the Recommendation. The priorities from the ESF 2013 regulation are also largely continued (with slight variations in wording) as specific objectives cited in Article 4.1 of the 2021 ESF+ regulation²³⁶ (see Table 18 above). Of particular relevance in the new regulation are the increased specific references to priorities for upskilling, reskilling and adult education under the following specific objectives: (f) promoting equal access to and completion of quality and inclusive education and training, in particular for disadvantaged groups, from early childhood education and care through general and vocational education and training, to tertiary level, as well as adult education and learning, including facilitating learning mobility for all and accessibility for persons with disabilities; and (g) promoting lifelong learning, in particular flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all taking into account entrepreneurial and digital skills, better anticipating change and new skills requirements based on labour market needs, facilitating career transitions and promoting professional mobility. An example of an upskilling measure funded by the ESF is provided below.

²³⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1304>

²³⁶ Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1057>

Box 38 ESF-funded project on upskilling women to return to the labour market in Ireland²³⁷

The ESF provided EUR 300,000 to support the WISE (Women's Integration Skills and Employment) project based in Donegal, Ireland from 2017 to 2019. The aim of the project was to help women furthest from the labour market return to employment, undertake training or become self-employed. WISE provided a range of free services that give women of all ages the skills and confidence they needed to get into working life. Each WISE client was assigned a dedicated personal employment adviser who provided practical support such as helping to write effective CVs and brushing up on interview skills. The advisers offer guidance on accessing suitable training and education opportunities. WISE assessed any previous work experience and transferable skills. The beneficiaries then completed a personal development plan which highlighted their goals. More than 280 women have accessed WISE services. Around 70 have gone on to find a job, and eight others have unlocked their entrepreneurial talents to become self-employed. About 60 women have applied for self-accredited training courses; of these, 30 have successfully completing such courses so far.

Priorities of the 2013²³⁸ and 2021²³⁹ **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** regulations are also coherent with the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation (see Table 11 in the Efficiency section). Article 5(10) of the 2013 regulation refers to investments in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure. The 2021 regulation offers support both to improve equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training (Article 3.1 (d.ii) and preamble §22), as well as support in the form of training, lifelong learning, reskilling and education activities for developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship (Articles 3.1 (a.iv) and 5(3)). An example of an ERDF-funded project is provided below.

Box 39 ERDF-funded project on Enhancing digital skills for adults in Poland²⁴⁰

The 'Flying Academy of Digital Education' project in Poland, which ran between 2016 and 2019 and was managed by the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association, received EUR 1,255,543 of funding from the ERDF to train adults of all ages to get the most from their computers and the internet. The goal was to strengthen basic digital competences so that adults with low levels of digital skills could deal with everyday matters such as managing their bank accounts online, creating social media entries, using instant messaging and making purchases via the internet. In addition, participants were taught how to produce content for their own blogs and websites. Implementation of the project was complemented by the creation of a network of public internet access points in each of the communes covered. A total of 4,370 people – including pensioners and those with special needs – participated in the training across 39 communes in Świętokrzyskie and two communes in Śląskie. A transregional network of 70 digital leaders was also set up.

There is also clear coherence with the adult learning strand of **Erasmus+**: in the 2014-2020 funding period²⁴¹. As seen in Table 11 (see Efficiency section), 5% of the budget allocated to education and training (3.9% of the overall budget) was dedicated to adult learning. The

237 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/Ireland/wise-giving-women-in-donegal-ireland-the-skills-and-confidence-to-return-to-the-labour-market

238 REGULATION (EU) No 1301/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and job's goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1301&from=EN>

239 REGULATION (EU) 2021/1058 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1058&from=EN>

240 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/Poland/enhancing-digital-skills-in-swietokrzyskie-and-slaskie-poland

241 Article 18 of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (see below)

preamble (§18) of the Erasmus+ regulation²⁴² specifically mentions that '*Particular attention should be paid to improving learning opportunities for the high number of low-skilled Europeans, in particular by improving literacy and numeracy and by promoting flexible learning pathways and second-chance measures*'. Similarly to the ESF+ regulation, the new (2021) Erasmus+ regulation²⁴³ also makes specific reference to upskilling and reskilling (preamble §26). For this new funding period (2021-2027), there is also an increase in the proportion of funding for adult education (5.9% of the total amount²⁴⁴). The new Erasmus+ programme allows the possibility not only to have cooperation projects but also partnerships, and there is a mobility strand specifically for low-qualified adults. There is also a specific Lot (Lot 3 – Adult education) dedicated to supporting upskilling pathways under the Forward-Looking Projects²⁴⁵ of Erasmus+, with a call for projects from 25 November 2021 until 15 March 2022²⁴⁶. Erasmus+ also funds the National Coordinators for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning²⁴⁷. An example of an upskilling pathways measure funded under Erasmus+ is set out below.

Box 40 Erasmus+-funded project on Upskilling Pathways for Adults through ICT and Social Media (UPA)²⁴⁸

Erasmus+ provided EUR 59,146 funding to support the [Upskilling Pathways for Adults through ICT and Social Media \(UPA\)](#) project. The project, which ran from 2017-2019, aimed to train adult teachers and trainers in the effective use of ICT and Social Media to find job opportunities and develop entrepreneurial spirit in adult learners, to promote the inclusion of adults, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups with low skills and promoting equality between women and men, and to enhance the adult learners' upskilling, promoting the acquisition of their key and transversal competences, adapted to the digital era and the job market requirements. The project was led by Alphabet Formation in Brussels, with partners in Portugal, Poland, Spain and Italy.

There is also very good coherence with the **European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)**. Although the 2014-2020 regulation does not specifically mention low-skilled adults, the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis targets '*vulnerable persons who have lost or are at risk of losing their job or have difficulty in entering or re-entering the labour market, or are at risk of social exclusion, or are socially excluded*' and funding is available for mentoring and training programmes to support the creation of micro-enterprises²⁴⁹. In addition, there have been several specific calls for proposals for activities on different dimensions of upskilling pathways (e.g., tailored learning provision²⁵⁰, skills assessments²⁵¹, awareness-raising²⁵²), specifically to support the

242 Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?amp;qid=1395671967554&uri=CELEX%3A32013R1288>

243 Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/>

244 Article 17.3 of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013

245 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/forward-looking-projects>

246 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/erasmus-edu-2022-pi-forward-lot3>

247 https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20210122142416/https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/selection-results/national-coordinators-for-the-implementation-of-the-european-agenda-for-adult-learning_en;

<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/national-coordinators-implementation-european-agenda-adult-learning>

248 <https://www.upa-project.net/>

249 Article 26, Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on a European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") and amending Decision No 283/2010/EU establishing a European Progress Microfinance Facility for employment and social inclusion, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R1296>

250 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=629&langId=en&callId=551&furtherCalls=yes>

251 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en&callId=537&furtherCalls=yes>

252 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en&callId=515&furtherCalls=yes>

implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. An example of a relevant project funded by EaSI is set out below.

Box 41 EaSI-funded project on Basic Skills Learning Strategies for Employment Pathways in Spain²⁵³

The [Basic Skills Learning Strategies for Employment Pathways \(FORLAN\)](#) project in Spain received funding of EUR 527,364 for the period 2019-2022 from the EaSI programme. The aim of the project was to reduce the number of adult jobseekers with low basic skills. Spain is one of the EU Member States with the highest rates of low-skilled adults. FORLAN has improved the initial skills assessment system for adults and made recommendations to redesign adult learning policies at the national and regional levels. It targeted long-term, low-skilled unemployed adults on minimum income schemes and low-skilled workers with temporary or precarious jobs. The project also supported digital transformation plans in the service, construction and manufacturing sectors, providing IT training to workers with low levels of digital skills.

Although the funds are only recently established, good coherence can also be noted with:

- **The Just Transition Fund (JTF):** the JTF regulation²⁵⁴ specifies that the JTF should support the territories most negatively affected by climate transition, including by covering *‘the upskilling and reskilling, including training, of the affected workers, irrespective of whether they are still employed or have lost their job due to the transition’* (preamble §13) of and that the funds should support among others *‘the upskilling and reskilling of workers and jobseekers’* (Article 8.2(k)).
- **The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF):** the RRF regulation²⁵⁵ specifies that *‘reforms and investments in the next generation, children and the youth are essential to promote education and skills, including digital skills, upskilling, reskilling and requalification of the active labour force’* (preamble §16).
- **The Technical Support Instrument (TSI) 2021-2027:** the same preamble as in the RRF regulation (see above) can also be found (also §16) in the Technical TSI regulation²⁵⁶. The TSI provides technical support to EU Member States to support them in their reform agendas in specific areas which include *‘education, life-long learning and training, vocational education and training, youth policies, labour market policies, including social dialogue, for the creation of jobs, increased labour market participation of under-represented groups, up- and re-skilling in particular digital skills, media literacy, active citizenship, active ageing, gender equality, civil protection, border and migration policies, the promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty, income inequality and all forms of discrimination’* (Article 5(d)). The TSI also builds on the support provided under the predecessor Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP)²⁵⁷ from 2017-2020.

Almost all stakeholders consulted, at both EU and national level, considered that there was **good coherence between the Recommendation and relevant EU funding mechanisms**. They emphasised in particular the high degree of coherence with the ESF which allows funding for national and regional measures corresponding to all fields of the

253 <https://forlan.navarra.es/en/el-proyecto>

254 Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1056>

255 Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241>

256 Regulation (EU) 2021/240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 February 2021 establishing a Technical Support Instrument, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2021:057:FULL&from=EN>

257 Regulation (EU) 2018/1671 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 amending Regulation (EU) 2017/825 to increase the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme and adapt its general objective, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018R1671&from=EN>

Recommendation, but also Erasmus+ and EaSI, as well as more recently the Just Transition Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. For national stakeholders, there was more clarity on how the relevant EU funding instruments can be used to implement the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation than on how the (more numerous) EU policies in the field complement each other. Nonetheless, coherence with EU funding could be further enhanced by clearer signposting for national and regional stakeholders of the EU funds available to support upskilling pathways. Some EU stakeholders (NGOs and social partners) suggested that the introduction of conditionalities (e.g., for funding from the European Structural and Investment Funds) could be helpful to ensure coherence and that an adequate proportion of funding is directed to low-skilled adults.

*Q4.3 To what extent have objectives, target groups and measures been **internally coherent**?*

Key Findings

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation shows a **very good degree of internal coherence**. There is clear coherence between the general, specific and operational objectives, inputs, activities and expected outputs, results and impacts in the intervention logic. The measures proposed in the Recommendation (three-step approach, coordination and partnership, outreach, guidance and support measures, follow-up and evaluation) provide a comprehensive and complementary policy framework which is internally coherent.

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation shows a **very good degree of internal coherence**. As demonstrated in the intervention logic (see Section 2 of this report), there is clear coherence between the general, specific and operational objectives, inputs, activities and expected outputs, results and impacts.

The three-step approach proposed (§2-10) (skills assessment, tailored and flexible offer, validation and recognition), combined with the recommendations for coordination and partnership (§11), outreach, guidance and support measures (§12) and follow-up and evaluation (§13) provide a comprehensive and complementary policy framework which is internally coherent. The recommendations for the European Commission are also coherent and complementary to the recommendations for Member States.

Stakeholders consulted at both EU and national level confirmed that they considered that the Council Recommendation is internally coherent, and that the objectives, target groups and measures complement each other providing a comprehensive and cohesive policy framework for providing effective upskilling measures for the specific population of low-skilled adults.

4.5. EU added value

*Q5.1 What has been the **added value of this Council Recommendation** in promoting, informing and supporting a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled/qualified adults, in terms of their objectives, design, target group and coordination and support measures?*

Key findings

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation **generated EU added value in four main areas**. It informed the design and a common framework for national upskilling policies including a three-step approach. It promoted the focus on low-skilled/qualified adults as

a key target group for upskilling measures and raised awareness about multiple vulnerable groups among the low-skilled/qualified population. It provided an impetus for more structured coordination, knowledge sharing and mutual learning activities among key stakeholders, contributing to a more joined-up approach, synergies in searching for solutions, sharing good practice and lessons learnt and increased peer support for tackling labour market needs across the EU. Finally, it offered financial support by leveraging funding at EU and national/regional level for delivering upskilling measures in the Member States.

The study also identified **some ways through which EU added value of the Recommendation could be increased**. These include: Improving visibility of the Recommendation at the national level by strengthening the linkages between the national and regional support measures and the Recommendation; further acknowledging the diversity of the target group and encouraging implementation of measures targeting sub-groups of low-skilled; continuing to tailor and adapt the Recommendation to the specific policy context and institutional frameworks of each country; and continuing to provide supervision and support at EU level with room for increasing mutual learning and knowledge-sharing.

Informing the design of national upskilling policies

Evidence shows that the overarching EU added value of the Recommendation has been in informing a systematic approach to the design of upskilling policies. Based on the mapping exercise, case studies and consultation results, the Recommendation set out a clear three-step approach that countries could follow, allowing for a re-framing of existing measures and initiating some new measures in line with this approach.

As expected, the Recommendation brought higher added value to countries that had **less developed systems** than to those that already had strong systems before 2016. The added value of the Recommendation is particularly evident in countries that had high need for change in their upskilling approaches, in particular, Cyprus, Hungary, Portugal, and Croatia. In these countries, consultations confirmed that the Recommendation was key in providing a clear approach to follow in supporting the low-skilled. For example, in **Croatia**, the adult education system was adopted according to the Recommendation whilst in **Greece**, it prompted debate which resulted in the new VET law.

In countries where policy measures in line with the Recommendation had already been largely in place before 2016 (AT, BG, CZ, DK, DE, ES), the Recommendation was perceived more as a **strengthening and supporting instrument**. It provided additional political importance to the need to improve key features of the overall adult learning systems or expand the provision of integrated packages based on labour market needs. For example, in **Austria**, they further developed their approach with new initiatives in the fields of educational guidance, literacy and provision and validation of basic skills.

In terms of the specific steps, the Recommendation has likely contributed to an **increased provision of validation and recognition of skills**, particularly the certification and validation of competences acquired through informal and non-formal training. Five countries have introduced systems for validation and recognition of prior learning (BG, DE, IT, LV, NL) and three have improved their existing systems by reforming existing policies (CY, EL) or introducing new measures (BE). For example, in **Cyprus**, validation of informal and non-formal learning is provided based on a new Action Plan for validation, approved by the Council of Ministers in 2018. The Recommendation has also provided a stimulus to launch the Valikom project in **Germany**.²⁵⁸

258 In the area of validation, both the Council Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2012 and the Council Recommendation in 2016 acted as an important stimulus in launching the project.

The Recommendation also served to underline the importance of supporting the low-skilled by offering **individualised and tailored approaches**. It encouraged the continuation of existing activities (for example in **Germany** and **Czechia**) or the development of new targeted measures in adult learning (e.g., in **Poland** via the LOWE (Local Knowledge and Education Centres) project).

Box 42 Austrian initiative for adult education (Initiative Erwachsenenbildung. Länder-Bund-Initiative zur Förderung grundlegender Bildungsabschlüsse für Erwachsene inklusive Basisbildung)

Since 2012, the initiative for adult education provides education courses free of charge to adults with low levels of basic skills and qualifications. The key aim is to ensure equal access to opportunities in the programme areas of basic skills training and attainment of a lower secondary education certificate. The programme has been funded in three-year circles, including ESF co-financing. During the years, the initiative has been improved with the required qualifications for trainers and counsellors, the definition of target groups, and the curriculum for basic skills courses.

The Recommendation also acted as a **stimulus to develop a common approach and cooperation** between all key stakeholders. Stakeholders across the consultation activities highlighted the importance of involving all relevant actors at all levels in different stages of policy design and implementation. In **Ireland**, a new youth strategy targeting literacy and numeracy includes a detailed consultation process supported by actors including NGOs and private organisations. In **Czechia**, a joint statement by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has been adopted.

Evidence also shows that upskilling pathways arrangements in Member States **are converging to some extent**. The framework provided by the Recommendation - in particular the three-step approach and the focus on the specific target group of low-skilled - has led to greater similarities between the approaches adopted in Member States. 37% of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations indicated that the Recommendation helped adult learning measures to converge with other EU Member States to a fairly large (24%) or a great extent (13%). The fact that challenges were discussed jointly during various EU level network meetings or Working Groups, such as the Working Group on Digital Education (under the Education and Training strategic framework for European cooperation on education training, now closed)²⁵⁹ and the Working group on Adult learning²⁶⁰ (still active under the European Education Area 2025) was highlighted as creating a common language which supported this convergence of approaches.

Nonetheless, some **challenges to greater convergence** were highlighted by EU and national level stakeholders consulted:

- Differing political priorities in different Member States, including contextual factors such as the migration crisis, Covid-19 pandemic, etc.
- Pre-existing similar measures in some countries which determine the direction of travel.
- Regional differences in terms of a level of implementation of upskilling policies. For example, Nordic countries have similar approaches and traditions that differ from Member States in the South Mediterranean region.
- National and local characteristics in terms of funding opportunities, stakeholder engagement, and economic development.

²⁵⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=3407>

²⁶⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=3797>

- The range of different stakeholders involved in the coordination and implementation process at national level, including the tradition of working with wider stakeholder groups to implement education and training policies at national level. For example, a strong involvement of social partners in Denmark.

Focusing on low-skilled and low-qualified adults as a target group

Another key added value of the Recommendation identified in the evidence was the increased **focus on low-skilled and low-qualified adults** as a priority target group. Evidence shows that the Recommendation increased awareness of the needs of low-skilled/low-qualified adults and created a strong understanding of the importance of basic skills among Member States and key stakeholders. According to the mapping, around 45% of all measures target low-skilled adults and a majority of measures focus on improving their basic skills in general. Challenges in relation to reaching the low-skilled target groups are however still present, as detailed in section 4.1.

Moreover, according to the mapping and consultation results, the Recommendation helped to increase awareness of the **importance of recognising the heterogeneity of the target group** and the different skills needs of specific subgroups of low-skilled adults. This was particularly evident for the group of people in the **current labour force** who require tailored training to increase productivity. Within the broad target of low-skilled adults Member States have also prioritised key vulnerable groups including people with disabilities or migrants (as seen in Section 4.1 on effectiveness). In **Croatia**, the new law aims to increase the participation rates of adult learners, especially of the low-skilled from low socioeconomic status. In **Poland**, due to a lower degree of low-skilled adults, they have applied a more tailored approach to basic skills in order to understand the individual needs in terms of numeracy and literacy.

Providing an impetus for increased knowledge-sharing among Member States

The Recommendation also brought added-value in terms of encouraging **knowledge-sharing and mutual learning** across the countries. EU and national stakeholders considered that the activities organised by the European Commission to promote mutual learning have supported in providing a common reference for discussing upskilling pathways measures at both EU and national level. The mutual learning workshops organised by the European Commission in 2017 and 2018, were identified by stakeholders as very useful in both raising awareness and knowledge of what other countries were doing in this field and transferring learning and good practice across Member States. In **Greece**, the study visits that were undertaken as part of BASIC (Building Alternative Skills' Innovative Schemes) project²⁶¹, e.g., to **France** (e.g. CléA²⁶²) and **Ireland**, have helped inform BASIC's approach to upskilling. In **Bulgaria**, regional and local plans are being developed as a direct result of knowledge sharing activities by the Association for Adult Learning. In **Cyprus**, the new Lifelong Learning Strategy 2021-2027 has been partially influenced by the needs analysis, learning from good practices across Europe and aligned with wider European strategies linked to the green and digital transition. In **Spain**, a current assessment framework is being implemented with support from DG REFORM.

261 Building Alternative Skills' Innovative Schemes (BASIC) is an EaSI-funded pilot project for the implementation of Upskilling Pathways in Greece. See: <https://digiskillsmap.com/en/projects/basic-building-alternative-skills-innovative-schemes>

262 CléA is a national inter-professional certificate attesting to proficiency in basic knowledge and vocational skills in France. See: <https://www.certificat-clea.fr/>

Leveraging funding at EU level

Evidence shows significant EU added value supporting upskilling measures through various **EU funding streams** (see section 4.2). Results from the consultations indicated that the EU funding is seen as an important enabler in ensuring the continuation of existing upskilling measures as well as in supporting novel large-scale projects. For example, the REFLEX (REcommending FLEXible learning for low-skilled adults) project in **Greece** funded by EASI or Lifelong learning programme in Amsterdam, the **Netherlands**: towards a skills-oriented labour market, co-financed by the ERDF²⁶³. Stakeholders also highlighted that as a result of the use of EU funds (particularly the ESF) upskilling measures also benefited from the data collection, monitoring and evaluation requirements and the focus on impacts for specific target groups such as elderly or refugees.

Box 43 Technical support from the Structural Reform Support Programme to improve the relevance and quality of adult education, 2019

The Commission has provided technical support to Belgium, Spain, Hungary, the Netherlands and Portugal to upgrade their adult education systems. In these Member States, international expertise and exchange of practices have contributed to designing:

- quality assurance systems for adult education provision.
- models for the recognition, validation and accreditation of skills.
- national strategies and measures to improve basic skills.
- monitoring systems and skill forecasting systems.
- governance models for adult training provision.

The technical support is expected to contribute to increasing the integration of low-skilled adults in relevant education programmes, and to improving the quality and recognition of adult learning programmes to eventually increase adults' skills levels.

Box 44 Cursos TesP - Technical training and courses expanded in Bragança, Portugal with support of ERDF

With the help of the European Regional Development Fund, the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança in the north-east of **Portugal**, has developed a range of 44 short, higher education technical courses, aimed at responding to demands for specific professional skills and the needs of local businesses. The Polytechnic Institute of Bragança acquired new equipment and adjusted classrooms, laboratories and workshops throughout its facilities to the specific requirements of the courses, due to their technical nature. The EU funds helped cover the cost of the teachers and trainers. The two-year courses focus on the needs of the labour market and those of companies, which substantially improves the chances of employment for students after graduation. In doing so, the project is closing the gap between the country's educational offer and employment needs.

263 See: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/Netherlands/lifelong-learning-programme-in-amsterdam-towards-a-skills-oriented-labour-market#:~:text=Disclaimer-.Lifelong%20learning%20programme%20in%20Amsterdam%3A%20towards%20a%20skills%20oriented%20labour,in%20the%20Amsterdam%20Metropolitan%20area.

Increasing EU added value

The evidence also identified some ways through which EU added value of the Recommendation could be increased. **Visibility of the Recommendation** at the national level could be improved, particularly among key stakeholders, by strengthening the linkages between the national and regional support measures and the Recommendation. Further **acknowledging the diversity of the target group** (see Relevance section on target groups) and encouraging implementation of measures targeting sub-groups of low-skilled were also identified as ways through which the Recommendation could bring further added value. Further involvement of regional and local stakeholders, better civil society engagement, and more diversified EU funding sources were also often identified as areas for further improvement.

Stakeholders across frequently emphasised the importance of flexibility in the way that Member States implement specific objectives of the Recommendation, highlighting that there is no “one size fits all” approach due to different policy frameworks already in place or uneven financial recourses. EU added value can be brought by tailoring and adapting the Recommendation to the specific policy context and institutional frameworks of each country. Nonetheless, supervision and support at EU level and the ability to compare levels of implementation with other Member States were praised, with room for increasing the possibilities for the latter through EU level data collection on implementation also identified.

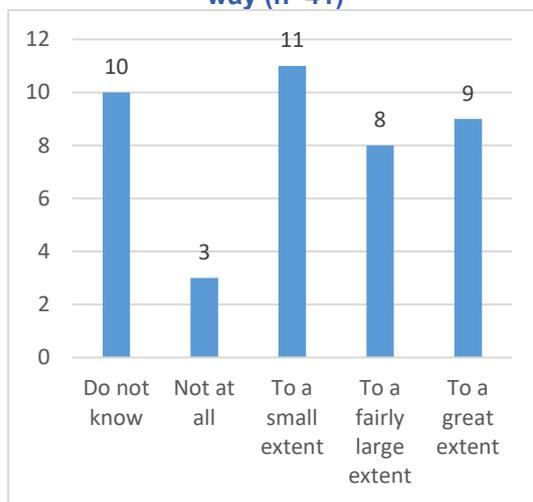
*Q5.2 Could the objectives of the Recommendation have been **achieved sufficiently by the Member States acting alone**?*

Key Findings

Evidence from the study indicates that **the objectives of the Recommendation could not have been achieved to the same extent without the EU level intervention**. Despite education being a national competence, there were changes or reforms in national approaches following the Recommendation’s adoption and the mutual learning activities that followed. Countries expanded the implementation of existing upskilling measures to low-skilled adults and strengthened their focus on the three-step approach (see Section 3 for further analysis).

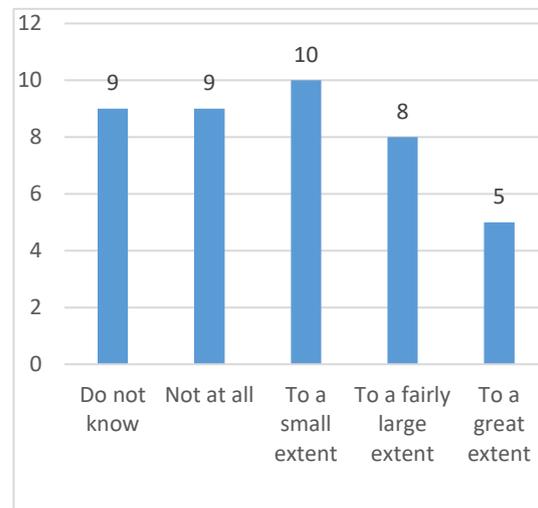
Results of the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations show that stakeholders view positively the contribution of the Recommendation to the upskilling situation in their country. 45% of all respondents did not agree or agreed to a small extent that the objectives of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways could have been achieved without EU level intervention (see Figure 19). However, views on whether the absence of the Recommendation would have had an impact on the approach taken are somewhat more mixed. 41% (17 of 41) of respondents reported that measures would have been implemented in the same way to a great extent and to a fairly large extent, and 35% to a small extent or not at all (14 of 41) (see Figure 18).

Figure 18 Without the Council Recommendation, adult learning measures in my country/region in the past five years would have been implemented in the same way (n=41)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

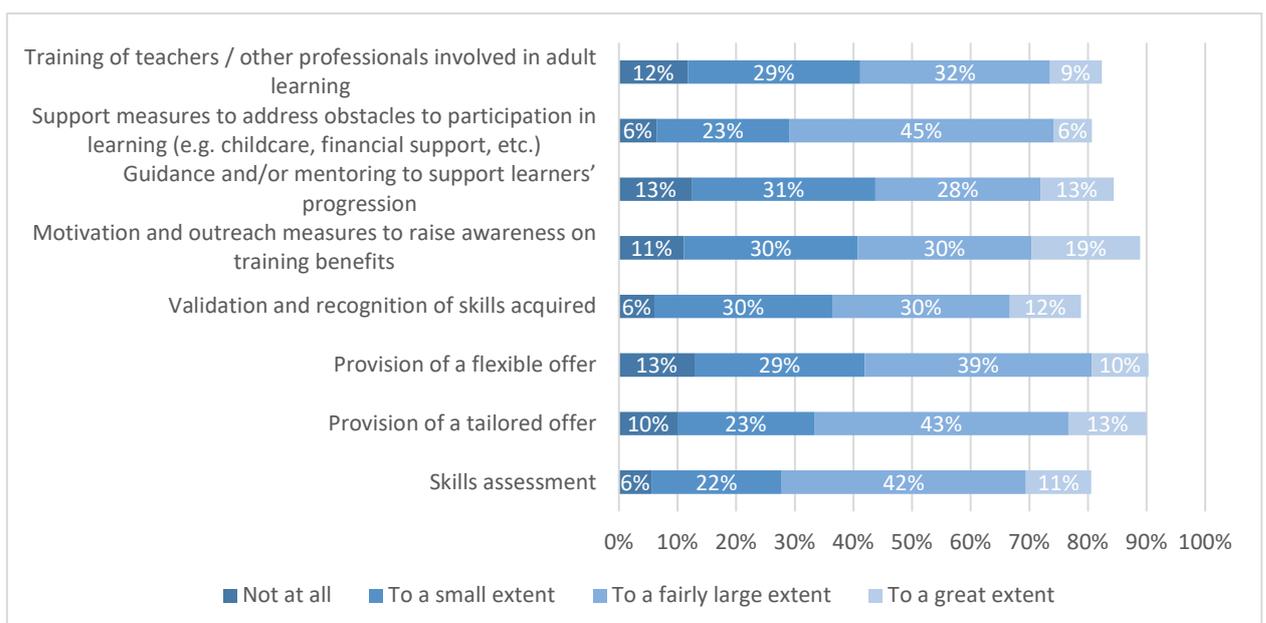
Figure 19. The objectives of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways could have been achieved without EU level intervention (n=41)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

The increased impact of the Recommendation in terms of a common approach and a policy design was also confirmed by the results of the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations. Figure 20 shows that 50% of survey respondents considered that the Skills assessment, Provision of a tailored offer and Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning were key features of adult learning measures which would not have been improved in terms of use and quality if Member States had acted alone.

Figure 20 In your opinion, to what extent has the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways led to improved use and quality of the following features of adult learning measures, which would not have happened if Member States had acted alone? (n=36)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

Q5.3 To what extent do the objectives and measures addressed by the Recommendation continue to require action/support at EU level?

Key findings

The objectives addressed by the Recommendation **continue to require action and support at EU level**. Although some progress has been achieved regarding the implementation of the Recommendation, some countries are only at the beginning of their reform process, meaning that knowledge-sharing, guidance and collaboration will still be valuable at EU level. Securing financial resources, support in building new and stronger partnerships among Member States by broadening existing mutual learning activities to a wider group of stakeholders, providing a framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of upskilling measures and EU action support in improving outreach measures are areas that would bring key added value moving forward.

Based on the evidence from the study, the objectives addressed by the Recommendation **continue to require action and support at EU level**. Although some progress has been achieved regarding the implementation of the Recommendation, research has shown that some countries are only at the beginning of their reform process, meaning that **knowledge-sharing, guidance and collaboration** will still be valuable at EU level.

The need for continued support is particular evident in cases of newly adopted policies which will require time, funding and training to ensure that they are fully implemented. For example, Project UpSkilling CZ – Systemic environment to strengthen competencies in **Czechia**²⁶⁴ or CITO Skills Checker in **Malta** which are in the initial stages of implementation²⁶⁵. The majority of respondents to the public consultation (39 out of 45) agreed that EU policy guidance is still required to a fairly large/very large extent. Similarly, more than 80% of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations indicated that the objectives of the Recommendation still require action and support at EU level to a fairly large/great extent.

The **target group of low-skilled adults will also continue to require support and more targeted approaches**, with increased attention to those target groups with multiple vulnerabilities (e.g., Roma adults, migrants, people with disabilities), as indicated in Section 4.1 on effectiveness. This is particularly the case because of external factors, namely the Covid-19 pandemic which has had a damaging impact on both the adult learning sector and the population of low-skilled adults across Europe, and whose effects are only beginning to become clear. The slower implementation of national adult learning policies and the immediate impact this had on participation in adult learning (as seen in Section 3.1) as well as the more long-term changes in skills demands particularly digital skills mean that the group of low-skilled adults will continue to warrant targeted policy attention across the EU.

A clear message emerging from the qualitative evidence is that **securing financial resources** is one key area where action/support at EU level to address the objectives of the Recommendation will continue to be required. The widespread use of EU funding to implement novel approaches to Upskilling Pathways as well as to upscale and reform existing measures (as outlined in Section 3.2) shows the important role that EU funding plays in supporting implementation of the Recommendation. Some stakeholders interviewed further suggested to develop a common strategy with dedicated direct funds for implementing the Recommendation. EU level stakeholders also emphasised the importance of ensuring that upskilling and reskilling of low-skilled adults is increasingly linked to the Skills Agenda, green and digital transition. Multiple funding streams should be ensured, including via the Recovery and Resilience Plans.

264 See: <http://archiv-nuv.npi.cz/projekty/up.html>

265 See: <https://citoproject.eu>

In terms of additional EU action/support in the future, some key areas were suggested by stakeholders. **Building new and stronger partnerships** among Member States by broadening existing mutual learning activities to a wider group of stakeholders including social partners, education providers and local actors was suggested. In fact, increasing the involvement of key stakeholders in the implementation process emerged strongly as an area where EU action/support would bring added value, including through enhancing synergies between the private and public sectors. Providing a **framework for monitoring and evaluating** the implementation of upskilling measures was also identified as an area where EU action/support would be welcome. Finally, EU action support in **improving outreach measures** would also be welcome, particularly in order to reach more vulnerable target groups more effectively.

5. Conclusions and lessons learnt

In this section, we present the main conclusions (section 5.1) and the lessons learnt (section 5.2) from the study.

5.1. Conclusions

We set out below the main conclusions emerging from the study in relation to each of the five evaluation criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value.

Effectiveness

The evidence shows that Member States have made **moderate efforts to facilitate access to upskilling pathways since the Recommendation was adopted**. 10 Member States out of the 14 that had a high need for change in 2016 – based on their existing adult learning provision and the size and needs of the target group – implemented change in response to the Recommendation. However, of the 13 Member States where no change in response to the Recommendation was identified (AT, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, PT, RO, SI, NL, SE), four Member States (HU, IE, RO, ES) had high need for change and three had medium need for change in 2016 (LT, LU, SI), showing that even in countries where change to upskilling pathways in line with the Recommendation would have been needed, change has not always occurred. [See section 4.1, question 1.1]

The **indicators relevant to upskilling pathways also show moderate progress**: since 2016, there has been an overall improvement in the educational attainment level of adults across the EU, with the share of low-qualified decreasing in all Member States (except Germany) in that time and the EU average falling from 23.4% to 20.7%. However, there is **limited evidence which shows that this improvement is the result of upskilling pathways implemented in response to the Recommendation**. Firstly, long-term trends show that improvements in the quantitative indicators are principally due to long-standing improvements in initial education. Secondly, the direct effects of the measures taken in response to the Recommendation on the proportion of the low qualified at the macro level will become fully apparent in the longer term, given that individual upskilling journeys usually take a number of years to complete. [See section 4.1, question 1.1 and question 1.6a].

However, even if a causal link between the Recommendation and the improvements in the shares of low-qualified cannot be ascertained, the evidence shows that **Recommendation has contributed indirectly to renewing the focus on the low-skilled target group and outlining what is effective in supporting them**. [See section 4.1, question 1.6a]. Furthermore, on the **micro level**, progress on the objectives of the Recommendation is evident: results from participation in specific measures/programmes linked to the Recommendation show that qualification levels of participating low-skilled adults increased. Consultations with stakeholders undertaken for this study held the view that **the Recommendation has contributed to changes in an indirect way by acting as a catalyst** for a renewed policy focus on the target group of low-skilled adults. In Member States that had high need for change in particular, the Recommendation is viewed consistently by stakeholders as having made a contribution to highlighting the challenge, revealing issues with current provision, setting out a way forward for improving the upskilling provision for the target group of low-skilled adults and stimulating cooperation between actors on this topic that did not previously exist. [See section 4.1, question 1.1 and 1.6a].

This discrepancy between progress on the macro-level due to the Recommendation (limited) and progress on the micro-level due to the Recommendation (more evident) cannot be explained fully by the results of this study. However, it may suggest that measures to facilitate access to upskilling pathways are either **taking place on too small a scale to be reflected on the macro-level or have not been implemented for a long enough period of time** for their results to be reflected in the quantitative data trends.

Implementation of the three-step approach

Overall, **there have been efforts in the majority of Member States to implement the three-step approach** in upskilling measures, though with variations by step and by country. Progress is noticeable in all steps of the Recommendation but measures for validation and recognition of prior learning have seen the biggest increase since 2016, though they remain challenging to implement. There is also less evidence of clear efforts to ensure a smooth integration and improved permeability of the three steps (and accompanying measures) into one comprehensive pathway. *[See section 4.1, question 1.3]*

- Eight Member States have made changes in their upskilling approaches since the Recommendation to better implement the step of **validation** (BE, BG, CY, DE, EL, IT, LV, SK). Even though there have been efforts to improve the system of validation, establishing fully functioning validation systems remains a challenge across all Member States, linked to certain key obstacles including the diversity of actors required to cooperate so as to integrate the validation system into the adult learning system as a whole, and the lack of take-up of validation amongst both the low-skilled and employers. *[See section 4.1, question 1.3]*
- Seven Member States have made changes to **skills assessment approaches** (BE, BG, HR, CZ, LV, MT, PL.) The limited number of Member States that have made changes in this step can be explained by the fact that it was the step that was most implemented before the Recommendation. However, **meaningful skills assessments are not always implemented**. Challenges include lack of specific skills of staff, lack of awareness of the benefits of skills assessments, and lack of a formal process underlining how a skills assessment should be undertaken. *[See section 4.1, question 1.3]*
- Six Member States have made changes in their **provision of tailored learning offers** since the Recommendation was adopted (BE, BG, DK, EE, MT, PL). The provision of a tailored learning offer is relatively widespread now across EU Member States. Barriers remain, however, and include difficulty in identifying/adapting to diverse training needs of disadvantaged adults, insufficient funding for tailored programmes, lack of information about tailored programmes and insufficient offers in rural areas. *[See section 4.1, question 1.3]*

All Member States have identified priority target groups for upskilling pathways. However, Member States have remained broad in their definition of the priority target groups of upskilling measures, identifying the low-skilled in general as their target, or specifying the target group purely in terms of employment status. Vulnerable groups are generally addressed by initiatives within these broader groups with the long-term unemployed, older workers, people with disabilities, nationals with a migrant background or third country nationals most often targeted. However, there is **less evidence of concerted, tailored efforts to reach these vulnerable groups through individual measures that are designed for them specifically**. *[See section 4.1, question 1.2]*

There is also clear evidence from the study that **even when the right target groups have been identified, challenges remain in effectively reaching them**. These challenges

include lack of awareness of opportunities amongst the group itself, financial barriers to participation, and stigma/motivation of the target group. [See section 4.1, question 1.2]

Cooperation with stakeholders

In line with the Recommendation, **Member States have delivered upskilling pathways in cooperation with relevant stakeholders to a high degree**. Social partners, Public Employment Services and actors on the regional and local level are most often involved. **There is however room across the EU to involve social partners more** in upskilling pathways, in particular in evaluation and monitoring of measures. Coordinating bodies for adult learning policies and measures support cooperation, but there is also room to improve cooperation, which is in part hampered by cumbersome administrative processes and a lack of clearly defined responsibilities and roles, exacerbated by the multiplicity of actors responsible for and involved in adult learning. [See section 4.1, question 1.4]

Outreach and guidance to learners, employers and staff

There is **widespread evidence of outreach to potential learners** in upskilling pathways measures in all 27 Member States. Success factors include local level cooperation, sufficient funding to ensure comprehensive outreach, and outreach that is embedded into the broader system of support to adult learners. However, more holistic types of support including psychological support are less common and more tailored outreach is still needed, particularly for those with complex needs. For this to occur, more funding and human resource capacity are needed. [See section 4.1, question 1.5]

Guidance services to learners are also widely available across all Member States. However, one of the main obstacles to accessing guidance services is the low level of awareness of the offer of support. Furthermore, **provision of outreach and guidance services to employers is inconsistent and piecemeal**, even though many Member States engage with employers in some way in the design of upskilling pathways. Systematic provision of guidance to encourage employers to support employees is limited, with a particularly detrimental effect on SMEs. [See section 4.1, question 1.5]

Evidence of providing **training and continuous professional development** to staff involved in delivering adult learning measures was identified in the majority of Member States, though the degree of effectiveness of such support and the level of tailoring to the needs of the target group vary substantially. In some Member States, training is provided but it is not tailored to working with adult learners; in others, there is a focus on training of staff but only on a project-basis, with limited evidence of systematic provision. [See section 4.1, question 1.5]

EU support to implement the Recommendation

EU support to implement the Recommendation has contributed to bringing adult learning to the attention of numerous institutional and non-institutional actors and stimulating cooperation between actors on this topic. The three series of **mutual learning events** funded by the EaSI programme and organised by the European Commission on upskilling pathways²⁶⁶ have been beneficial in terms of supporting the sharing of best practices. The Commission's publication of a stocktaking report on implementation of the Recommendation in 2019 also allowed for an understanding of progress in Member States' implementation of the Recommendation. **EU funding** has also been identified as an important contribution, with the ESF in particular supporting some structural changes in

²⁶⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>

Member States, particularly those with less developed adult learning systems, even though the need to upscale ESF-funded upskilling projects and embed them in institutional structures with long-term sufficient funding remains. [See section 4.1, question 1.6b and section 4.2, question 2.2].

Monitoring and evaluation of upskilling pathways

Finally, whilst measures related to upskilling pathways are **monitored** by Member States and some have been the subject of **evaluations**, the degree to which the results have impacted the design and delivery of the measures is limited. The lack of a systematic data collection process on the implementation of the Recommendation on the EU level was also identified as a challenge in this regard. Even though efforts were made to gather information on how Member States were implementing the Recommendation, as seen in the 2019 stocktaking report on implementation published by the European Commission²⁶⁷, the lack of monitoring of these plans has made it difficult to assess and compare progress EU-wide. [See section 4.1, question 1.7]

Efficiency

There are **clear challenges to assessing the efficiency of the Recommendation**, given the difficulty in separating out the costs and benefits that arose as a *direct* result of the Recommendation, from those that might have occurred in the absence of the Recommendation. Stakeholders and experts consulted struggled to quantify, and therefore place monetary values on, the costs and benefits linked to the Recommendation. Despite these limitations, **the evidence available does suggest that the Recommendation overall has been efficient.**

The scale of both costs and benefits seen is influenced by the **extent to which Member States pre-existing adult education measures and their planned direction of travel aligned already with the Recommendation** at the time of its adoption. In countries that were already operating measures largely in line to the Recommendation, meaning no major changes in policy or legislation were required, stakeholders confirmed that they incurred no additional cost as a result of the Recommendation, or that these costs were very low. In countries where adult learning systems were overall less in line with the type of provision put forward in the Recommendation costs were higher. However, stakeholders from these countries also felt that benefits were likely to be relatively large, mainly due to the Recommendation increasing awareness of the importance of adult education, providing a framework to improve the provision of adult education, and stimulating cooperation between stakeholders [See section 4.2, question 2.4 and 2.5].

Costs of upskilling pathways

Costs for the state and municipal administrative bodies in implementing measures linked to the Recommendation include **adjustment costs** from designing, delivering, and monitoring upskilling measures often occurred at the national level and, for countries with devolved education systems, at the local administration level. Costs also arose to the state and municipal administrative bodies from providing **financial incentives** to encourage the provision and take up of adult education. Incentives to education providers are most common, followed by incentives to employers and then incentive to learners. **Learners** can also be expected to face some costs as a result of engaging in upskilling measures, including costs for travel, accommodation, and any equipment such as textbooks and costs

267 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf

in the form of forgone earnings. Overall though these costs are likely to be relatively low. [See section 4.2, question 2.1]

Benefits of upskilling pathways

Adult learning measures introduced in the last five years have contributed to a range of benefits. The **main benefits for learners** are increased learning opportunities, allowing both unemployed adults and employees to gain and adapt their skills and/or gain a qualification to become more productive in the labour market as well as to be able to participate more actively in society. At the **employer** level, the adult learning measures introduced in the last five years have contributed to additional funding for training, fewer skills shortages, and more motivated staff as well as higher levels of productivity. In addition, the Recommendation enabled a common framework on which to base discussions and support cooperation across different stakeholders. At the level of **society**, upskilling measures can contribute to the aim of increasing income tax and VAT as a result of increased wages and consumer spending and to lowering the cost of welfare payments, though this cannot be quantified or confirmed in this study and at this stage of implementation. Furthermore, an increase in adult learners can also bring about an increase in country productivity, especially when training is developed with country or local skills gaps and shortages in mind. [See section 4.2, question 2.2]

Proportionality of costs and benefits

Overall, evidence indicates that the **costs and benefits are proportionate**. This is due to the belief in the role of the Recommendation in raising awareness at a political and stakeholder level of the importance of, and availability of, adult learning and basic skills provision. This is seen as a large-scale benefit, due to the established link between participation in learning and resulting benefits for the individual in the form of increased wages and/or moving into stable employment, which in turn lead to a societal impact in terms of lowering the cost of welfare payments, increased income tax and VAT and increased country productivity [See section 4.2, questions 2.2 and 2.6]

Based on the data available, the study has also found that is **unlikely that benefits of the Recommendation could have been achieved at a lower cost**. [See section 4.2, question 2.4]. However, there are some **factors that have negatively impacted efficiency of delivery**. Covid-19 is noted as having a negative effect on efficiency through slowing down delivery. This meant fewer adults undertook training than originally planned reducing the scale of the benefits seen by wider society. Other **challenges to delivery** have also impacted efficiency including the lack of staff that are specifically trained to support adult learners with low-skills (and who thus have different learning needs to younger learners in initial formal education) and the difficulty of reaching the target group which meant that more funding for outreach, along with better integration of NGOs and other actors with existing links to the target groups, was required to bring these people on board. Overlaps identified between other measures focused on skills and adult learning was also noted as limiting efficiency as it has at times caused some confusion among potential learners on where to go to access training and who was eligible for support [See section 4.2, question 2.4].

EU funding

A range of different **EU programmes and funding mechanisms** have provided funding to support implementation of the Recommendation, alongside national funds principally from the state budget for education which typically funds adult education programmes. For the purposes of this study, we have examined the contribution of EU funding in particular. By far the largest source of EU funding was the European Social Fund (ESF), with over EUR

42 billion allocated to investment priority 10.iii (enhancing equal access to lifelong learning) for the period 2016-2020. Funding was also available under strands of Erasmus+ and EaSI, including specific calls for proposals related to upskilling pathways and under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Horizon 2020, the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) and the Technical Support Instrument (TSI). Stakeholders in certain Member States (e.g. AT, DE, DK) highlighted however that some upskilling pathways measures are funded solely using national or regional funds. *[See section 4.2, question 2.3]*

The scale of EU funding available suggests that **significant resources were available to meet the needs targeted by the Recommendation**. Nonetheless, there is a **risk that an over-reliance on EU funding can hinder the large-scale impact of the measures**, with project-based measures introduced, as opposed to large-scale reform. This is particularly the case for adult learning, also because national funding for this policy area is often included within broader budget lines for education investments as a whole and can thus remain scattered and insufficient *[See section 4.2, question 2.3]*. Furthermore, as highlighted by the ESF evaluation of Thematic Objective 10, mass-funded operations risk focusing on ‘low hanging fruit’, supporting people who are easier to attract into upskilling measures and need less support. Lastly, much of the EU funding, in particular via the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), relies on co-financing at national or regional level. This may have provided an obstacle to some Member States in accessing the full degree of EU funding available.

The use of funding from EU programmes has been **cost-effective**. The use of existing funds has allowed the use of existing structures and administrative mechanisms to distribute and manage the funds which has led to economies of scale. The main concerns expressed about cost-effectiveness, in particular in relation to the ESF and ERDF, relate to the administrative burden, particularly for smaller beneficiaries. Evidence from the Commission’s ESF evaluation however concludes that, for most stakeholders, the benefits outweigh the costs. *[See section 4.2, question 2.3]*

Relevance

Relevance to socio-economic needs and policy

The key **objectives of the Recommendation continue to be highly relevant** to the current EU socio-economic context and the EU policy context. Challenges which were faced across Member States when the Recommendation was adopted in 2016 (i.e. high shares of low-skilled population, low shares of digital skills) have persisted, whilst new challenges – those resulting from the Covid-19 crisis, the ongoing transformation of jobs and work, and the acceleration of the green and digital transition – have in fact **heightened the relevance of the Recommendation’s objectives**. Low-skilled adults in particular are highly vulnerable to the evolution of the socio-economic context, including the acceleration of the need for digital skills, and require increased policy attention. Despite variation across the Member States, the share of adults with low educational attainment remains high, and participation in adult learning is significantly below the target (60% of all adults participating in training every year) set at the EU Social Summit in Porto. To increase relevance, the Recommendation could have put more explicit emphasis in addressing the needs generated by the digital and green transition. *[See section 4.3, question 3.1]*

Relevance of the measures of the Recommendation

The **measures defined in the Recommendation are still very relevant to achieve its objectives**. The three-step approach remains a very useful framework to guide both policy

and implementation of upskilling measures. Each step remains relevant in light of the needs of the target group of low-skilled adults as well as the broader socio-economic needs in EU countries (i.e. changing world of work, digital and green transitions etc.) as well as in view of the ongoing state of development of upskilling measures in different Member States. The accompanying measures - including outreach, guidance, support measures and effective coordination – also remain essential components of approaches to upskilling, in particular when targeting low-skilled adults that are in need of a diverse range of holistic support from a range of actors. The research highlighted however that there is a need to ensure the different measures set out in the Recommendation form part of an integrated whole. This entails ensuring there is clear permeability between each step, including a 'step zero' that involves active outreach to attract participants and wrap-around support available throughout the entire process. *[See section 4.3, question 3.2]*

The **measures defined in the Recommendation are also still very relevant to the needs of the priority target groups across the EU**. These priority groups include for example older low-skilled adults and low-skilled adults working in sectors strongly affected by the crisis who have higher levels of vulnerability to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Organisations representing low-skilled adults and training providers consider that the measures are very relevant to address the needs of the target group of low-skilled adults. Adult learners themselves however highlighted areas in which the relevance of the measures could be further increased for them, including: more ICT courses (computer and smartphone), support for wider aspects of their life, help in combining learning with job-seeking, more practical exercises, other types of learning (e.g. accounting, financial management) and more support with transport or work-related issues to be able to participate in training. *[See section 4.3, question 3.3]*

The **measures are still also relevant to the needs of different economic sectors**, in particular as they can be implemented flexibly to adapt to differing and evolving needs. There is clear evidence of regional and sectoral needs being addressed through skills forecasting and analysis. Organisations representing low-skilled adults noted that there was a need to take into account the geographic (rural/urban) context and training needs that are specific to certain regions. Going forwards, it will be important to continue to foster and support the flexibility of the upskilling approach so that it can be adapted to different sectors and regions. *[See section 4.3, question 3.3]*

Relevance of the target group of the Recommendation

The **broad target group of the Recommendation remains highly relevant** across Member States and has become **even more relevant over time**. Low-qualified adults remain further from the labour market than those with higher educational attainment levels and participate less in adult learning (see Section 3). As seen above, the focus on this target group has become even more relevant in recent years due to the evolving socio-economic conditions, particularly due to the pandemic and rapidly accelerating digital transition, and demographic factors. In terms of specific priority groups within the broader group of low-skilled adults, **the flexible framework provided in the Recommendation** that allows Member States to identify their own priority groups in light of national, regional or local needs clearly supports the continued relevance of the Recommendation. *[See section 4.3, question 3.4]*

Coherence

Coherence with national and regional policies

There is overall a **good level of coherence between the objectives, target groups and measures** defined in the Recommendation and relevant policies, legal frameworks and strategies at national and regional level. Evidence from the study shows that the nature of coherence with national and regional policies and legal frameworks falls into three main categories:

- Firstly, in several Member States (e.g., AT, DK, EE, FR, HU, IE, SE), existing national and regional policies, as well as the legal frameworks (where relevant), for upskilling adults already aligned well with the Council Recommendation when it was published.
- Secondly, in another set of Member States (e.g., BG, CY, EL, HR, SK), the publication of the Recommendation led to national and regional policies targeting low-skilled adults, as well as in some cases (e.g. EL, HR) the legal framework governing VET, being adjusted to ensure coherence.
- Thirdly, some Member States (e.g., PL) have introduced new policies to ensure coherence with the Recommendation; although these national and regional policies are often broader (e.g., the Polish Integrated Skills Strategy does not only focus on low-skilled adults), they incorporate the key lines of the Recommendation and have provided important impetus to the policy focus in this field.

Factors which have facilitated coherence with national and regional policies include: ensuring that all key national stakeholders have representatives on the board of the national training agency and implementing joint measures, integrating the objectives, target groups and measures into the broader government's programme at the inter-institutional level, setting up an upskilling pathways working group chaired by the Ministry for Education or Employment, the existence of specific national policies or strategies for upskilling low-skilled adults and the availability of specific funding (including EU funding) for upskilling measures. *[See section 4.4, question 4.1]*

Despite good overall levels of coherence with national and regional policies, there are **areas on which the Recommendation focuses which could be further developed or prioritised** in the policies in specific Member States e.g. training of trainers or validation of learning. In addition, in some countries, while all three steps of the Recommendation can be found in the national offer of training and support for low-skilled adults, they are not necessarily combined in a single programme. **Challenges and obstacles to aligning national and regional policies with the Recommendation** include: a focus on other key policy priorities, the time needed to progressively align national policies with the Recommendation, resistance from certain stakeholders who fear that the existing VET/dual training systems could be undermined, the ongoing absence of a specific national adult learning strategy or system, frequent changes in government slowing down the implementation of new measures, ensuring a tailored approach for low-skilled adults without creating a parallel system or fragmentation in their learning pathway, lack of sufficient coordination at national level and the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on adult learning. *[See section 4.4, question 4.1]*

Coherence with EU policies

The objectives, target groups and measures of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation have a **good degree of coherence overall with other related EU level policies** in the

fields of training and employment, adult learning, equality strategies and other fields (e.g. recovery or digital strategies). These other EU policies are complementary to the Recommendation and do not duplicate it, with limited potential for overlap. Our analysis shows **a general trend of an increasing specific focus and recognition of the importance of upskilling under other relevant EU policies over time, most likely in part due to the Recommendation.** Despite the overall positive assessment of coherence with other EU policies, **potential areas for improvement** include: creating better linkages and synergies with policy fields outside the sphere of education and employment (e.g. social policy, health, environment); developing a more comprehensive, systematic and strategic approach to gender and equality mainstreaming within the Recommendation; and providing more guidance to national and regional stakeholders about how the multiple different EU policies, strategies, and recommendations in the fields of training, adult learning, skills/competences, and labour market integration work together. *[See section 4.4, question 4.2(a)]*

The Council Recommendation has a **high degree of coherence with relevant EU funding mechanisms**, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF(+)), Erasmus+, Employment and Social Innovation Programme (EaSI), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP), the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Upskilling measures which are coherent with the aims of the Recommendation have been funded under these different EU funds. **To further enhance coherence** with EU funding, clearer signposting could be provided to national and regional stakeholders of the EU funds available to support upskilling pathways. *[See section 4.4, question 4.2(b)]*

Internal coherence

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation shows a **very good degree of internal coherence**. There is clear coherence between the general, specific and operational objectives, inputs, activities and expected outputs, results and impacts in the intervention logic. The measures proposed in the Recommendation (three-step approach, coordination and partnership, outreach, guidance and support measures, follow-up and evaluation) provide a comprehensive and complementary policy framework which is internally coherent. In order **to improve internal coherence**, more precise monitoring and evaluation of measures implemented in order to loop into the feedback cycle to ensure continuous improvements and adjustments. *[See section 4.4, question 4.3]*

EU added value

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation generated **EU added value in four main areas:**

- It informed the design and a common framework for national upskilling policies including a three-step approach.
- It promoted the focus on low-skilled/qualified adults as a key target group for upskilling measures and raised awareness about multiple vulnerable groups among the low-skilled/qualified population.
- It provided an impetus for more structured coordination, knowledge sharing and mutual learning activities among key stakeholders, contributing to a more joined-up approach, synergies in searching for solutions, sharing good practice and lessons learnt and increased peer support for tackling labour market needs across the EU.

- It offered financial support by leveraging funding at EU level which in turn contributed to leveraging national support through co-financing requirements for delivering upskilling measures in the Member States. *[See section 4.5, question 5.1]*

The study also identified some ways through which **EU added value of the Recommendation could be increased**. These include: improving visibility of the Recommendation at the national level by strengthening the linkages between the national and regional support measures and the Recommendation; further acknowledging the diversity of the target group and encouraging implementation of measures targeting sub-groups of low-skilled; continuing to tailor and adapt the Recommendation to the specific policy context and institutional frameworks of each country; and continuing to provide supervision and support at EU level with room for increasing mutual learning and knowledge-sharing. *[See section 4.5, question 5.1]*

Evidence from the study indicates that the objectives of the Recommendation **could not have been achieved to the same extent without the EU level intervention**. Despite education being a national competence, there were changes or reforms in national approaches following the Recommendation's adoption and the mutual learning activities that followed. Countries expanded the implementation of existing upskilling measures to low-skilled adults and strengthened their focus on the three-step approach. *[See section 4.5, question 5.2]*

The objectives addressed by the Recommendation **continue to require action and support at EU level**. Although progress has been achieved regarding the implementation of the Recommendation, research has shown that some countries are only at the beginning of their reform process, meaning that knowledge-sharing, guidance and collaboration will still be valuable at EU level. Securing financial resources, support in building new and stronger partnerships among Member States by broadening existing mutual learning activities to a wider group of stakeholders, providing a framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of upskilling measures and EU action support in improving outreach measures are areas that would bring key added value moving forward. *[See section 4.5, question 5.3]*

5.2. Lessons learnt

In this section, we set out the key lessons learnt from the study related to the conclusions set out above. The lessons learnt are organised by key sub-theme.

Improving targeting of and outreach to low-skilled adults

- There is a clear need to ensure that the good practices that have been implemented since the Recommendation was adopted to support low-skilled adults are **upscaled into system-level reforms to ensure structural, and long-term improvement of adult learning systems** that can support this target group.
- It is essential to **continue to develop awareness of the need for specific upskilling measures for low-skilled adults** at EU, national and regional level. The Recommendation has acted as a catalyst in accelerating the implementation of upskilling measures by bringing adult learning to the attention of numerous institutional and non-institutional actors [see section 4.1, question 1.6b]. Given the ongoing (and indeed heightened) relevance of upskilling measures for the target group and for different economic sectors [see section 4.3, question 3.3], further awareness-raising efforts are needed to ensure that more upskilling measures are implemented for this group. Awareness-raising activities could include targeted communications campaigns, the provision of examples of good practices from across the EU, as well as communicable overviews of the benefits of upskilling for all actors (individuals, employers, wider society).
- There is **considerable scope for improvement in the outreach methods** and channels used to attract low-skilled adults, as well as the effort dedicated to this preliminary step – ‘step zero’ – in any upskilling pathway. Low-skilled adults, particularly those facing additional disadvantage, will often have had very negative experiences of education and training and are thus among the hardest target groups to reach and convince of the benefits of entering upskilling pathways [see section 4.1, question 1.2]. Low-skilled adults also have a much higher probability (five times higher than high-skilled adults) of having low levels of digital skills [see section 2.2.1] so may not easily access online information or communication. While many upskilling pathways do include outreach measures, to be effective, **outreach needs to focus on eliminating the barriers to participation** which are faced (e.g., raising awareness of upskilling opportunities, tackling financial barriers, psychological support) [see section 4.1, questions 1.2 and 1.5]. This requires first identifying the barriers through consultation with adult learners and organisations working closely with them, and then working out how best to tackle them.
- **Working with NGOs** and other actors such as schools who have experience and relationships of trust with specific groups of low-skilled adults can facilitate access to adult learning and foster greater participation levels [see section 4.1, question 1.2]. **Further funding directly earmarked for outreach and human capacity in terms of expertise** in outreach would also support the improved targeting and outreach of this group.
- Member States and training providers should be encouraged to make **greater effort to target and tailor upskilling pathways for specific priority groups of adults** (e.g., long-term unemployed, older workers, third country nationals, workers in SMEs), whose needs may not always be sufficiently addressed by wider measures targeting low-skilled adults in general.

Awareness-raising about the need for upskilling measures for low-skilled adults

- Most Member States have remained broad in their definition of target groups (e.g., ‘low-skilled’) and, while certain vulnerable groups are indicated as being targeted within these wider definitions, the study showed that **some groups would benefit from further attention**, including employed workers with low skills, older workers, women, and refugees or newly arrived migrants [see section 4.1, question 1.2]. The study has also shown that some large-scale upskilling measures (e.g., funded by ESF) tend to benefit adults who face fewer complex disadvantages [see section 4.4, question 4.2(b)]. Specific targeting of more vulnerable groups would contribute to reaching the Porto target (60% of all adults participating in training every year) by helping to reach individuals who would not be reached by more general approaches. Given the scale of the increase needed in adult learning to reach the Porto target, it remains however important to ensure that wider target groups also continue to be targeted.
- Particular attention is needed to **avoid the stigmatisation of low-skilled adults** [see section 4.1, question 1.2]. Rather than focusing on deficits of the individual, outreach should focus on the benefits to be achieved and the existing strengths of the individual’s skillset [see section 4.1, question 1.5]. Initial skills assessments should not only focus on gaps in skills profiles, but also the skills and competences which adults do have, including those gained through experience which may not have been validated and recognised, and how these can be developed and enhanced through developing other skills [see section 4.1, question 1.3].

Improving the effectiveness of the three-step approach

- It is important to **ensure that sufficient time and resources are dedicated to this first step of the upskilling pathway**. Skills assessments are a crucial gateway to understanding the needs of every adult and tailoring their pathway appropriately to ensure both adequacy to their needs but also the efficiency of the process. Staff delivering skills assessments need to be adequately trained and sensitised to the diversity of profiles likely to be present, and appropriate tools and methods need to be in place. Skills assessments are also often particularly complex in the case of low-skilled adults due to the potential multiplicity of situations (age, education background, work experience, types of skills deficits, migrant or non-migrant status, etc.). Our study has shown that assessments conducted within many upskilling measures did not thoroughly assess the skills of the individual and/or did not in practice lead to a tailored offer on the basis of these skills, and that insufficient emphasis was placed on this step of the process in many cases. [see section 4.1, question 1.3]
- There is **considerable room for improvement in the implementation of tailored learning offers**, including a need for a greater focus on identifying and adapting the training needs of low-skilled adults facing different forms of additional disadvantage, more funding for tailored programmes and greater offer in rural areas. Although the study showed that the provision of a tailored learning offer in upskilling pathways is more widespread than previously, the extent of tailoring remains too often insufficient. [see section 4.1, question 1.3]
- **Establishing fully functioning validation systems continues to require a concerted policy effort**. Among others, it is important to consider how transversal competences can be better taken into account in qualifications/learning outcomes, since these are crucial for low-skilled adults but not generally very well addressed in validation schemes. Validation measures are the least prevalent in practice of the three steps set out in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation [see section 3.2.3]. Yet, in order to ensure that adults can benefit from the skills obtained through learning, validation is a

crucial step. It is however a complex issue and there is a question about how far **qualifications systems might need some re-engineering to increase the value of training offered**. In some sectors company-specific credentials (e.g., vendor credentials in the technology sector) are the currency and may have no relationship to state-managed qualification systems. *[see section 4.1, question 1.3]*

- Although there has been an improvement in the implementation of all three different steps set out in the Recommendation, there is less evidence of the **smooth integration and improved permeability of the three steps** (and accompanying measures) into one comprehensive pathway. This should be a key focus of future action *[see section 4.2, question 3.2 and section 4.4, question 4.1]*.
- Improvement of the implementation of all steps outlined in the Recommendation will need to be underpinned by **better quality, more consistent and more systematic initial and continuous professional development for staff** delivering the upskilling measures including ensuring that staff are specifically trained in teaching adults with low-skills who are in need of a different approach to stimulate learning and commitment to the upskilling process *[see section 4.1, questions 1.2, 1.3 and particularly 1.5]*

Gender and equality measuring

- When designing and implementing upskilling pathways, it is crucial to **actively recognise the intersectional nature of different disadvantages** (e.g., age, disability, migrant status, gender, socio-economic status) often faced by low-skilled adults. The study did not identify a strong awareness in upskilling policy or practice of the potential for multiple disadvantages, particularly prevalent among low-skilled adults. *[see section 4.3, question 3.4 and section 4.4, question 4.2(a)]*.
- The quality and adequacy of upskilling pathways would benefit strongly from **integrating a holistic gender and equality or diversity perspective into all steps**. The study found limited evidence of an explicit gender or equality perspective in either the Recommendation or the upskilling measures implemented by Member States *[see section 4.4, question 4.2(a)]*. Taking into account the specific needs of different genders and specific groups will help to make the activities implemented more relevant and more effective for all individuals *[see section 4.3, question 3.3]*.

Cooperation with other key stakeholders

- The emphasis on **encouraging wide-ranging cooperation with key stakeholders** – including policymakers, training providers, social partners, employers, NGOs and researchers – should continue and be reinforced. Good examples of existing cooperation mechanisms could be shared more widely with national and regional policymakers. Where cooperation and coordination mechanisms were introduced at national or regional level to oversee the design and implementation of upskilling pathways, they were shown to have a positive effect. *[see section 4.1, question 1.4]*.
- As part of this, **eliminating cumbersome administrative processes and defining clear responsibilities and roles** can help in promoting more effective cooperation between key stakeholders *[see section 4.1, question 1.4(b)]*.
- The Recommendation could be used more extensively as a tool to **bring together key EU or national level stakeholders around upskilling for low-skilled adults**. Policymakers, social partners, NGOs and the research community could be brought together for example for monitoring the Recommendation *[see section 4.1, question*

1.7)] or for designing programmes [see section 4.1, question 1.4]. In the study research, social partners in particular expressed a wish to be more involved in monitoring of measures [see section 4.1, question 1.4(a)].

- There is **substantial scope for improvement in the outreach and guidance for employers**, particularly SMEs, which is often piecemeal and inconsistent. The involvement of employers and their representatives can help in targeting particular economic sectors, both in terms of identifying relevant employment opportunities for adults and ensuring that businesses in these sectors can access the skills which they need. [see section 4.1, question 1.5]

Monitoring and evaluation of the Recommendation and the implementation of upskilling pathways

- The implementation of upskilling pathways at national and regional level could benefit from **increased monitoring and evaluation of the approaches implemented**. Although some measures identified in the study were monitored and evaluated, this was not the case for the majority of initiatives. Implementing organisations could be encouraged and guided in developing appropriate indicators to monitor progress, and funding could be made available to support monitoring and evaluation. It is essential to ensure that the voice of low-skilled adults is heard when carrying out monitoring and evaluation. [see section 4.1, question 1.7]
- More **disaggregated data on individual beneficiaries** would be helpful in order to allow better monitoring and benchmarking across Member States. Longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of measures to achieve desired outcomes would provide important learning for future policy measures. [see section 4.1, question 1.7]
- To support monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking of upskilling pathways, the **establishment of relevant EU-wide benchmarks and indicators** would be very helpful. There is a clear lack of monitoring data on upskilling pathways at EU level to date which has hampered the understanding of progress as well as of what works and does not work. [see section 4.1, question 1.7]
- **Further mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the Recommendation at EU level could be introduced**. These could include a regular review in appropriate committees as done for example for the Youth Guarantee in the Employment Committee (EMCO) or in a specific committee dedicated to this Recommendation. [see section 4.1, question 1.7]

Increasing efficiency of implementation

- Although the study has found that the Recommendation had an overall good degree of efficiency of implementation, it also identified **areas in which efficiency of implementation could be increased**. These include ensuring specific training for staff delivering upskilling measures, better cooperation with NGOs who can reach out and better understand the needs of specific groups, providing more guidance and support to employers and providing better signposting of the upskilling opportunities available to channel individual learners more efficiently and avoid any confusion [see section 4.2, question 2.4].

Funding for upskilling pathways

- It would be beneficial to explore **mechanisms to encourage the mainstreaming and transferability of successful approaches** developed using EU funding into more permanent national funding mechanisms. This would help to avoid that approaches are funded only for the duration of the specific project and ensure that necessary structural changes are made. *[see section 4.4, question 4.2]*
- **Ongoing cooperation and dialogue with the different authorities** (at EU and national level) which design, manage and allocate EU funds will be very important to ensure that specific objectives, priorities and calls for projects continue to be targeted at supporting upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. There has been a very positive impact in terms of using existing EU funds (e.g., ESF, ERDF, Erasmus+, EaSI, etc.) to support the implementation of upskilling pathways, however, there remains a risk that authorities choose not to introduce specific mechanisms or targets for low-skilled adults, especially as higher-skilled adults may be easier to attract into pathways *[see section 4.2, question 2.2]*.
- It could be helpful to **attach clear guidelines, targets, and even conditionalities, to EU funding** which is targeted at upskilling to ensure that the low-skilled, and those most in need (and most difficult to reach), benefit from funding. These mechanisms could avoid the risk that the majority of funding for adult learning/upskilling is directed to target groups which are closer to the labour market and less low-skilled. *[see section 4.4, question 4.2]*
- Given the wide range of sources of EU and national funding available to support upskilling pathways, it could also be helpful to provide **more signposting to the funding sources available for organisations implementing upskilling measures**. This could specify for example what types of activities can be funded, conditions for funding (e.g., match funding requirements, eligibility requirements) and contact points/sources of information for different funds. *[see section 4.4, question 4.2]*

Increasing the relevance of the Recommendation to emerging needs

- To increase its relevance and future-proof the Recommendation, it must include a **greater transversal emphasis on upskilling that can help adapt to the green and digital transitions**, as well as the impacts of demographic change. As underlined by President von der Leyen at the 2021 Porto Social Summit, upskilling is one of most urgent necessities to meet the needs of the green and digital transformations *[see section 4.3, question 3.1]*. These transformations are profoundly altering skills needs across the EU and often having a particularly detrimental effect on low-skilled adults, who tend to be the least well equipped to adapt to the demands of these rapid transformations *[see section 4.3, question 3.1]*.
- To ensure ongoing relevance for different target groups and economic sectors, it will be essential to ensure the **ongoing flexibility and adaptability of the Recommendation**. *[see section 4.3, questions 3.1 & 3.4]*
- Given the ongoing prevalence of low skills amongst adults across the EU *[see section 2.2.1]*, it will be **essential that communication from the EU level reinforces the policy prioritisation** on basic skills and the need for up- and re-skilling which remains highly relevant for low-skilled adults. The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened the relevance of the focus on low-skilled adults and underlines the need to continue with specific measures for this group. The study has clearly shown that the adult learning sector, as well as low-skilled adults themselves, have been particularly negatively

affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and have generally not been prioritised compared to other education or training sectors or other target groups in the recovery. Many low-skilled adults have higher levels of vulnerability to the impacts of the pandemic, including for example older low-skilled adults and low-skilled adults working in sectors strongly affected by the crisis [see section 4.3, questions 3.1 & 3.3].

- The measures defined in the Recommendation have been shown to provide a relevant and comprehensive framework for the implementation of upskilling pathways which meets the needs of low-skilled adults; however **other measures could also be further promoted**. These include for example measures which address wider aspects of the lives of low-skilled adults, including skills to foster greater social and financial inclusion (e.g., money management, online banking, etc.), support measures for attending training (e.g., transport, support for care responsibilities) and also a focus on basic skills, including digital skills, as the gateway to other forms of learning. Whilst these are covered by the Recommendation, they warrant further attention in implementation [see section 4.3, question 3.3].

Coherence and synergies with other relevant EU and national policies

- The Recommendation could be **more closely linked to EU policies covered by other Directorate-Generals (DG) of the European Commission**. This includes in particular relevant education and training policies of DG Education and Culture (DG EAC), but also policies relating to the competitiveness of business from e.g., DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) or policies relating to social justice e.g., DG Justice and Consumers (DG JUST). It could also benefit from greater linkages with social welfare policies within DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) [see section 4.4, question 4.2(a)].
- **More joined-up guidance and presentation of EU policy relevant to upskilling pathways** would be welcomed by many national stakeholders, in order to negotiate the policy landscape and develop priorities for action. The study highlighted that national and regional policymaker sometimes feel overwhelmed by the wide range of EU policies in the fields of training, employment, social inclusion and education [see section 4.4, question 4.2(a)].
- The study highlighted a number of factors which have facilitated coherence with national and regional policies which can be useful pointers for successful implementation. These include ensuring that all key national stakeholders have representatives on the board of the national training agency, implementing joint measures, integrating the objectives, target groups and measures into the broader government's programme at the inter-institutional level, setting up an upskilling pathways working group, and the existence of specific national policies or strategies for upskilling low-skilled adults [see section 4.4, question 4.1].

Mutual learning

- There is scope for **more mutual targeted mutual learning focusing on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults**. Where this has featured in EU mutual learning activities, they have been beneficial in terms of sharing good practice and raising awareness. Other fora where mutual learning in this field could be promoted include the European Education Area Working Groups, the Adult learning National Coordinators, the Network of Experts on Adult Learning, the Mutual Learning Programme or the Pact for Skills Support Services. It would also be beneficial to broaden the scope of participants in mutual learning activities to local level organisations and social partners

involved in implementing upskilling on the ground. Upskilling pathways could also be a focus of major EU events such as the Biennial Pact for Skills Forum organised by DG EMPL, or the EU Education Forums organised by DG EAC [see section 4.1, question 1.6(b) and section 4.4, question 4.2(a)].

Annexes

- Annex 1. Study methodology
- Annex 2. Analysis of the indicators
- Annex 3. In depth country mapping
- Annex 4. Case studies
- Annex 5. Consultation synopsis report
- Annex 6. Public consultation report
- Annex 7. Report on the expert meeting
- Annex 8. Report of the validation workshop
- Annex 9. Interrupted time series analysis
- Annex 10. EU funding overview
- Annex 11. Table summarising costs and benefits

Annex 1 – Study methodology

1. Introduction

This document provides the detailed methodology and analytical models used for the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways. The evaluation study itself is presented in full in the main report, to which this document is annexed.

2. Approach to the evaluation and analytic models

Our approach to the evaluation was based on a theory-based evaluation approach using mixed-method data collection approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods within an overall analytical approach guided by a comprehensive evaluation framework. The objectives and purpose of the study, along with the key issues it focused on, indicated the necessity of an approach able to explore processes linked to the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, as well as their effects and outcomes. Below we set out the theoretical and analytical approach that we have developed to meet these needs.

2.1. Articulation of intervention logic

During the inception phase, we further developed the intervention logic that we articulated in our original tender. Specifically, the intervention logic set out a high-level understanding of the rationale, inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts of the Recommendation and provided a framework for a standardised approach to the evaluation whilst allowing for flexibility to explore the individual provisions called for in the Recommendation. The intervention logic provides an articulation of activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts alongside paying greater attention to the causal links between them. This latter aspect is central to our analytical approach to the study particularly in terms of providing the basis to fully test the intervention logic and explore causality to determine the extent to which the Recommendation led to, and is responsible for, the outcomes and impacts anticipated.

2.2. Assessing processes and outcomes, and exploring

Using the intervention logics as an analytical basis for the evaluation, combined with the evaluation criteria specified in the tender specifications, provided an important underpinning to the required consideration of process-related themes as well as those more concerned with outcomes.

Exploration of processes link to the earlier parts of the intervention logic, for example in exploring the degree to which inputs supported the range and quality of upskilling activities, and led to expected outputs in terms of engagement. Assessment of outcomes and impacts will focus on the later stages of the intervention logic, exploring how and the extent to which the activities supported through the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation led to the intended immediate outputs, longer term results, and broader impacts articulated in the model.

The different methodological approaches including secondary data analysis (Task 1 – Mapping, Task 3 – Case studies), the consultation activities (Task 2 – Targeted consultations and Task 4 – Public consultation support), case studies (Task 3) provided a range of evidence that was triangulated to assess the degree to which process and outcome causal chains detailed in the intervention logic are supported.

However, as far as possible, this analytical approach needed to be complemented by an assessment of causality – i.e., the degree to which the activities implemented in response to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation have in reality led to the immediate and longer-term results they intend to generate. A range of other factors (external to Upskilling Pathways) have influenced the results and impacts of the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, including the pace of digitisation and technological change (leading to more rapid skills obsolescence), other evolutions in skills needs (e.g. green skills, higher skills levels), the economic context (e.g. levels of (un)employment, demand for skilled labour), and other factors, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

We thus also adopted a contribution analysis approach. We operationalised the contribution analysis approach through collating and assessing, in a structured way, the range of evidence gathered from the range of methodologies deployed for the key evaluation Tasks.

Rather than setting out to isolate the effects of a single intervention linked to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation in a Member State context, contribution analysis aims to build a credible ‘performance story’, drawing upon the available sources of evidence to consider the extent to which the Recommendation, alongside other factors, contributed towards the observed outcomes. Situated within a wider theory-based evaluation approach, this is ideal for the proposed evaluation, as it provides a way of explicitly defining and assessing the causal relationships and mechanisms within the intervention logic.

2.3. Modelling and assessing costs and benefits

The study has aimed to ensure the collection and analysis of available data (quantitative and qualitative) on costs and benefits of the actions associated with the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. The sources for the data required to answer the efficiency evaluation questions were set out in our evaluation framework in Section 3.5 below, in the part relating to ‘efficiency’. In particular, the data was captured in the research tools developed for the different data collection tasks: Task 1 (Mapping), Task 2 (Targeted consultations) and Task 3 (case studies). The case studies provided the opportunity for more in-depth analysis of costs and benefits of the implementation of the Recommendation in the selected Member States, using both qualitative and quantitative data.

The description of the costs and benefits in the study is focused on those arising as a result of all adult education programmes introduced over the last five years, rather than those resulting purely from the Recommendation. This approach was taken due to the difficulty in separating out the costs and benefits that arose as a direct result of the Recommendation, from those that might have occurred in the absence of the Recommendation. This challenge arises for two main reasons:

- All Member States had adult education systems in place prior to the Recommendation, and in some cases these systems very closely resembled the system called for by the Recommendation;

- Member States do not operate separate funding streams/budgets for measures introduced as a result of the Recommendation/education measures that are in line with the Recommendation, and those that aren't, noting that expenditures are cross-cutting and funded from the same national budget.

Given this, stakeholders consulted struggled to comment on the size of cost and benefits arising as a direct result of the Recommendation when asked for this information, with the vast majority only able to provide information on costs and benefits in general terms, or at the level of the whole state budget for adult learning. As such costs and benefits should be interpreted with caution, as they are likely to be overestimated.

2.4. Evaluation framework

Drawing together our thinking in designing the initial intervention logic and approach to the evaluation, we developed an overarching evaluation framework which guided the evaluation. It firstly outlines the evaluation criteria and data sources, before summarising our evaluation framework (included in Appendix 1).

Drawing together our thinking in designing the initial intervention logic and approach to the evaluation, we present in this section the initial draft of the overarching evaluation framework which will guide the study. It firstly outlines the evaluation criteria and data sources, before summarising our evaluation framework.

2.5. Evaluation criteria

The study has complied with the requirements for evaluation set out in the Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox. This includes assessing the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation against the five key evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value. An overview of these criteria in the context of this evaluation are set out in Table 1 below. The evaluation framework is included in Appendix 1.

Table A1_119 Overview of evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria	Overview of key points
Effectiveness	The study's assessment of effectiveness has been multi-faceted, covering the extent to which the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation was effectively implemented (i.e. to meet objectives and expected results), but also how it was implemented. It has examined the extent to which the implementation of the Recommendation facilitated access for low-skilled adults to different upskilling opportunities from the baseline situation (in 2016), and the degree to which relevant priority targets were effectively targeted and reached. We have explored the extent to which the recommended three-step approach (skills assessment, tailored and flexible learning offer, validation and recognition) together with support via outreach and guidance services, have been implemented in Member States, and their effectiveness. In addition, the study has explored whether and to what degree relevant national, regional and local stakeholders were involved in the coordination and delivery of the implementation of the Recommendation in different Member States. At Member State level, it has also assessed the extent to which measures implemented in relation to Upskilling Pathways have been monitored and evaluated, and whether the results have contributed to ongoing improvements to their design and delivery. At EU level, the study has examined whether mutual learning has been facilitated, and any relevant outcomes. Finally, the study has used contribution analysis (as set out above) to assess the degree to which the Recommendation contributed to observable changes in Member States in relation to the skills

Evaluation criteria	Overview of key points
	levels of low-skilled adults and developments in lifelong learning opportunities. The contextual dimension has been key in exploring the specific changes in their particular delivery contexts.
Efficiency	The study's examination of efficiency has explored the degree to which the objectives of the Recommendation have been achieved at optimal cost for different relevant stakeholders, and the factors which have contributed to this, including a consideration of the use of different sources of EU funding to fund actions. Addressing the efficiency criterion has involved identifying and using appropriate benchmarks to respond to the different evaluation questions. Quantitative data has been used as far as possible, but supported by qualitative data from the case studies, existing (national/regional) evaluation reports and data generated from the study's own targeted and public consultations. The analysis has comprised an assessment of the costs and benefits associated with the implementation of measures linked to the Recommendation for different stakeholders (including adult learners themselves) and has aimed to explore the factors which influenced efficiency of implementation, ascertaining whether observed benefits could have been achieved at a lower cost. It has also explored the use of financial incentives to encourage participation in upskilling pathways. In addition, the study has assessed which EU programmes (e.g. ESF, Erasmus+) contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation, and the degree of cost-effectiveness of this use of funding sources. Bringing together the results of the different analyses, we have provided an assessment of the overall degree to which the costs of the implementation of actions related to the Recommendation have been proportionate to the benefits to individuals (adult learners), the economy and wider society.
Relevance	Assessment under this criterion has focused on examining relevance at several levels and from several perspectives. Firstly, we assessed the degree to which the objectives set out in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation are still relevant both to the current socio-economic context and to the current EU policy context. Secondly, and in order to achieve these objectives, the study has assessed the extent to which the measures defined in the Recommendation are also still relevant. Thirdly, our assessment has explored the extent to which the measures defined in the Recommendation are still relevant to the needs of both the target groups and economic sectors. Finally, the study has examined whether the target groups specified in the Recommendation and those defined by different Member States remain relevant.
Coherence	Examining coherence implies the need to assess linkages, synergies and potential duplication with related EU, national and regional policies, instruments, initiatives and recommendations (policy and programme coherence). The assessment of coherence has focused on complementarity and coherence from two principal dimensions – 'internal' and 'external' coherence. In terms of 'internal' coherence, we have examined the coherence between objectives, target groups and measures of the Recommendation. Our assessment of 'external' coherence has explored the complementarity and coherence of the implementation of the Recommendation with: (a) relevant (education, training, employment and social) policies at national and regional levels; (b) other related EU level policies (e.g. the Youth Guarantee, the Long-Term Unemployment Recommendation, etc.); and (c) relevant EU funding mechanisms (e.g. ESF, EaSI, Erasmus+, etc.). Evidence to address the coherence criterion has been drawn principally from the mapping exercise and desk-based research within our approach, but also on other sources, notably the stakeholder insights gained from consultation and detailed Member State case studies.
EU added value	As specified in the Better Regulations Toolbox (tool #47), assessing EU added value involves looking for changes which can reasonably be argued are due to the EU intervention, over and above what could have been expected from national actions by the Member States. Building on the evidence gathered and analysis carried out to assess the other criteria, we have assessed the added value of the Upskilling Pathways with a particular focus on the degree to which it supported a common approach (in terms of objectives, design, target group, coordination and support measures) to providing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. We have assessed whether the objectives of the Recommendation could have been achieved solely by the action of the Member States, as well as the degree to which they still require EU level support and action. Detailed evidence from the case studies has been a key way of assessing the relative importance

Evaluation criteria	Overview of key points
	in particular contexts, alongside evidence available from results of the public and targeted consultations, as well as the mapping exercise.

Source: *Ecorys, 2022*

2.6. Data sources

Our methodology was designed to enable us to answer the key evaluation questions using a variety of data sources (a ‘mixed methods’ approach). The below outlines the key data sources that have been used.

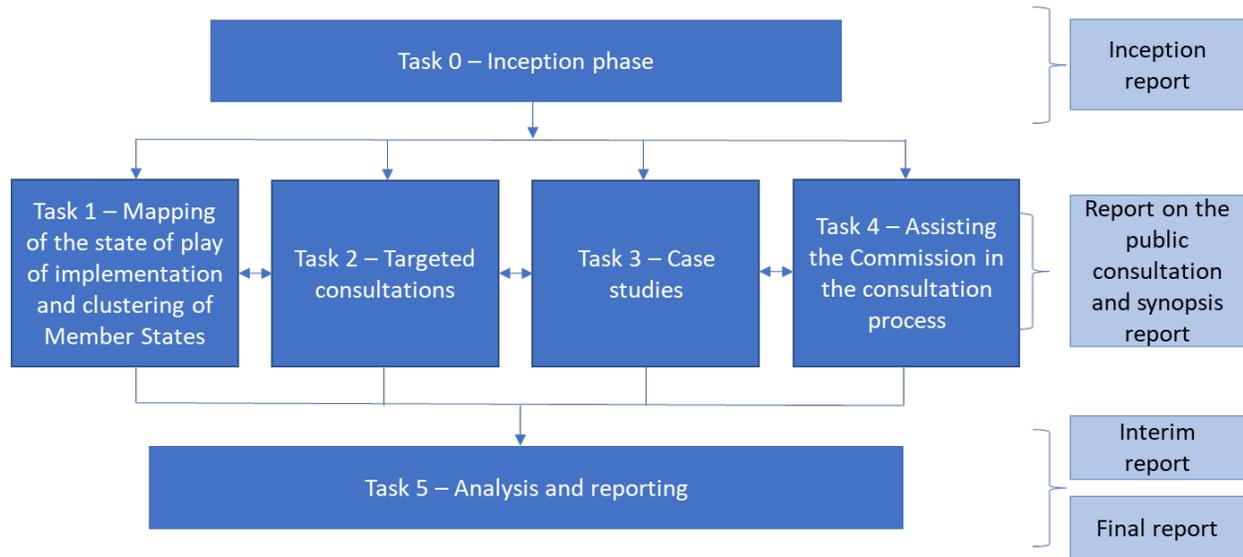
- Analysis of secondary data sources is a key aspect of our methodology. Task 1 (mapping) has drawn on a range of existing quantitative and qualitative data sources, from a vast range of national, European and international datasets, reports and studies (e.g. OECD-PIAAC, Eurostat Digital Skills indicators, the European Labour Force Survey and others).
- However, we have also collected a range of primary data for the specific purposes of the evaluation via the targeted consultation activities (interviews, internet-based surveys, expert and validation meetings) (Task 2), the public consultation (Task 3) and the case studies (Task 4). The primary research data collected from these interconnected Tasks has ensured that the views of the range of relevant stakeholders of upskilling pathways, have been adequately captured in the evidence, enriching our analysis for all evaluation questions.

A process of triangulation has been used to bring together all the relevant evidence for answering key evaluation questions. Across all aspects of data collection, we have been mindful of the range of target groups, geographies and interventions involved and have sought to represent this range across the data collection tasks. In the interview targeted consultation process, we used specific strategies to ensure we reached the full range of stakeholders involved. Similarly, when conducting the surveys, we have sought to obtain responses from participants that represent the range of relevant target groups and beneficiaries.

3. Detailed Methodology

In this section, we set out in detail the methodological approach used in undertaking the evaluation. We begin with an overview of our methodology, followed by a detailed presentation of the methods and tools implemented for each Task. The figure below provides an overview of our study methodology, including the main deliverables.

Figure A1_1 Overview of the study methodology



3.1. Task 0 Inception phase

Literature review: During the inception phase, we built on the review of relevant documentation to undertake a wider preliminary literature review on upskilling pathways. This laid the foundations for the subsequent Tasks of the study. We reviewed a total of 56 documents, selected based on the following criteria:

- **Year:** Resources issued during the evaluation period of the Recommendation (2016-2020/2021) were selected. Resources with information for the year 2015 were considered baseline references.
- **Content:** Resources with content mentioning or relevant to upskilling pathways were prioritised. Keywords used to assess the relevance of the reports were: Upskilling, reskilling, adult learning, lifelong learning, training, skills, and skills development.
- **Issuer:** Key authors included were the European Commission (DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG REFORM), European Commission agencies (CEDEFOP, EACEA), national authorities from Member States, networks representing different groups of adult learners and expert groups on the topic of skills.

Once a document met the selection criteria, it was assessed across the following analytical specifications and inputted into our literature review tool to allow for systematic collection and organisation of relevant information:

- Description of upskilling measures, including any information on strategic policies and significant measures in place in Member States by the end of 2020.
- Evidence of outputs, outcomes and/or results, including factors which may have a causal link to the Recommendation.
- Financial information, including funding at system and stakeholder levels.

- Quantitative data, for example administrative and programme monitoring/evaluation data, beneficiary data, data from National Statistical Offices or national adult education and VET registers.

Finally, the overall **relevance** of the resource to the objectives of the study was rated across a scale of low-medium-high while considering both selection criteria and the four analytical specifications.

Quantitative data mapping: We also mapped the quantitative datasets relevant to the study. We focused specifically on datasets available at least from the year 2015, to establish the baseline for the evaluation, and until the year 2021, to also allow us to make a comparison over time. We gathered data on indicators linked to adult skills and education level, the participation of adults in continuous vocational training, employment and unemployment rates, as well as economic indicators related to economic structure and economic growth. Where data was disaggregated by gender, education level, age etc. this was also included.

Based on these criteria, we identified and mapped 21 datasets from the European and international data sources, as presented in the table below.

Table A1_220 Main quantitative indicators and sources mapped

Indicator	Source
Percentage of individuals with low literacy skills	OECD, PIAAC
Percentage of adults with low numeracy skills	OECD, PIAAC
Percentage of adults 25-64 years old with low, basic, above basic and no overall digital skills, by target group and economic sector	Eurostat
Participation rate in education and training by sex and educational attainment level	Eurostat, LFS
Participation of individuals in formal adult education, by education programme, sex and age	Eurostat, LFS
Participation rate in education and training by occupation, low-skilled in formal education	Eurostat, LFS
Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by ISCED 3-4 upper secondary	Eurostat, LFS
Participation rate in non-formal education job related, ISCED 0-2	Eurostat, LFS
Participation rate in non-formal education job related, Elementary occupations	Eurostat, LFS
Main skills targeted by CVT courses by type of skill	Eurostat, CVT
Estimated adult population aged 25-64 with potential for upskilling by country (%), statistical sources are: EU LFS (2016), CSIS (2015; 2014), PIAAC (2012; 2015) ²⁶⁸	Cedefop
Quarterly data Employment rates by sex, age and economic activity	Eurostat, LFS
Quarterly data Unemployment by sex, age and educational attainment	Eurostat, LFS

²⁶⁸ *In this Cedefop dataset focused on EU28+ population aged 25 to 64, estimating the magnitude of the adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling is done using available data from the following three statistical sources: (a) EU LFS (2016); (b) CSIS (2015; 2014 for IS) anonymised microdata for research; (c) PIAAC (2012; 2015 public use files)

Inactivity population by sex, age and educational attainment level 2011-2020	Eurostat, LFS
Inactive population as a percentage of the total population, by sex and age (%) 2011-2020	Eurostat, LFS
Inactive population not seeking employment by sex, age and main reason 2011-2020	Eurostat, LFS
Public expenditure on labour market policy measures, by type of action: Training, 2011-2019	Eurostat, LMP
Economic structure - Annual enterprise statistics for special aggregates of activities	Eurostat
GDP, economic growth	Eurostat

Source: *Ecorys, 2022*

As part of this mapping exercise, we also collected information on the comparability of data between Member States, the comparability of data over time, the availability of data in each Member State, as well as any potential gaps in the datasets. 19 datasets are available for all Member States and two OECD PIAAC datasets are available only for 17 EU Member States. Additionally, most of the identified LFS datasets present data comparable over time but this is not available for the AES, or OECD PIAAC data. 18 out of 21 datasets are available for at least the period 2015 to 2020.

Scoping interviews were also conducted to gain further insights into the Recommendation. These along with the literature review and quantitative data mapping were taken on board in the refinement of the evaluation framework and the research tools. The main refinements to the research methodology included:

- The evaluation framework, with questions, indicators, judgment criteria and source.
- The intervention logic of the Recommendation
- The mapping tool to be used for Task 1 was revised and the methodology finetuned (see Task 1 below)
- The research tools for Task 2 were revised including the draft topic guides for the targeted interviews, the draft survey questionnaires for consultation of national/regional authorities consultation of beneficiaries and the concept note for the expert meeting with national authorities (see Task 2)
- We revised the proposed case study selection and further explored the feasibility of including causal impact evaluation for up to three case studies, proposing a methodology that is appropriate for the data and resources available to us (see Task 3)
- We revised the draft questionnaire for the public consultation further tailoring the questionnaire to specific stakeholders, simplifying the questions when appropriate and shortening the questionnaire focusing on questions which are easy to grasp and answer for a wider public, including ultimate beneficiaries (i.e. low-skilled adults) (see Task 4)

3.3. Task 1 Mapping

3.3.1. Mapping of key indicators relevant to upskilling pathways

As expressed by the intervention logic, the need and potential impact of the Recommendation can be deduced from indicators measuring the **needs for upskilling** and the **capacity of countries adult learning systems** to provide opportunities to low-skilled adults. The following indicators were explored in the mapping to measure these two elements and how they have developed over time since the Recommendation was developed.

The needs for upskilling: in order to assess the need for upskilling pathways in each Member State, the following indicators were explored:

- Share of 25-64 year olds with low educational attainment (ISCED 0-2). Low levels of formal educational attainment imply a higher probability of having lower levels of basic skills.
- Share of 25-34 year olds with low educational attainment (ISCED 0-2). A proxy for understanding the demands and needs for upskilling in each Member State is the proportion of 25-34 year olds with highest educational attainment at ISCED 0-2 level (based on ELFS 2016). Using the level of educational attainment of 25-34 year olds, instead of the attainment of the adult population, can capture more recent changes in the performance of initial education systems and qualifications awarded by them. It also reflects the fact that most efforts to overcome a low level of skills/educational attainment take place before the age of 45. Using this indicator helps to downplay previous cross-country differences resulting from the past setup of initial education systems which have since been reformed. For these reasons, the educational attainment levels of younger cohorts are an additional proxy to help understand the demand for upskilling pathways.
- The proportion of adults – irrespective of the educational attainment level –with gaps in their basic skills, understood as gaps in literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills.
- The proportion of adults working in elementary occupations who are likely to face limited opportunities to use their skills at work – following the ‘use it or lose it’ paradigm²⁶⁹ – who are taken as a group at risk as they might need upskilling to move on to more skill demanding work.
- Indicators, such as the (long-term) unemployment rate of adults with low-education attainment, which capture the level of imbalance in demand and supply of low-skilled labour; In countries with low levels of low qualified or adults with gaps in their basic skill set, the difficulties to gain a job might be severe, making the availability of upskilling pathways an urgent matter.

The capacity of countries’ adult learning systems to provide the opportunities to participate in adult learning pathways that allow individuals to overcome gaps in basic skills and low levels of formal educational attainment: Indicators that allow for capturing differences in the capacity of adult learning systems include:

- Indicators on the **participation in adult learning**, in particular the European Labour Force Survey (LFS) structural indicator on Lifelong learning, complemented by the results of the Adult Education Survey (2016)

²⁶⁹ Desjardins, R. and Rubenson, K. (2011). An Analysis of Skill Mismatch using Direct Measures of Skills. Paris: OECD Education Working Paper No. 63,

- Indicators on the availability and/or use of services supporting participation in adult learning, including skill assessment, lifelong guidance and validation of skills are available from the Adult Education Survey²⁷⁰
- Indicators on public expenditure for adult learning. Cross-country comparative data on public spending on adult learning are scarce, with the latest attempt to compile data for Member States already quite dated²⁷¹. Only for one subsegment, that is, spending on training within Active Labour Market Policy, current data are available.

These comparative sources were used to understand the situation in 2016 in terms of both the need for upskilling and the systems already in place to support it across the EU27 and how this situation evolved by looking at 2021 data (where available). This analysis was then combined with the analysis of the mapping of types of measures in place up until November 2021 (see 3.2.2), to present a baseline situation for 2016 against which the Recommendation's implementation will be assessed.

3.3.2. Mapping of key measures in place

To better understand the relevant initiatives in place both at the baseline and since the adoption of the Recommendation, a mapping was conducted starting with a **systematic review of EU and national level sources**. On this basis, the research team developed a longlist of relevant upskilling pathways measures in each Member State, over the period considered for the evaluation, using primarily the following key sources:

- European Commission (2019). Staff Working Document 'Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures'²⁷² (including a supporting table of measures provided by the European Commission)
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2015). Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning Opportunities: This is a report on the opportunities for adult learning for the low qualified and the low-skilled provided by the Eurydice network with the year of reference 2014, providing the starting point for constructing the base line scenario in 2016²⁷³;
- The update of the Eurydice report published in September 2021, with the year of reference 2019/2020 on Adult Education and Training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications²⁷⁴;

Once the longlist of measures was finalised, national stakeholders consulted during the interviews were asked to provide their views on which measures from the longlist were considered to be most relevant to upskilling pathways in their country. Specifically national authorities were requested to confirm:

²⁷⁰They are presented in Annex 2 and have been used within the country mapping.

²⁷¹ European Commission (2013). The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC): Implications for education and training policies in Europe. Luxembourg.

²⁷² [implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁷³ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-europe-widening-access-learning-opportunities_en

²⁷⁴ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/node/11855_en

1. Whether measures selected were relevant to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and;
2. Whether any relevant measures were missing and therefore should have been added to the mapping.²⁷⁵

Following the selection and validation of the most relevant measures, the Research Team then conducted an in-depth mapping of these measures in each Member State to represent:

- Policies **predating the Recommendation** but continued in 2017 and later, which support in an exemplary way the implementation of the Recommendation
- **Post-Recommendation policies** initiated or at least supported by the Recommendation (up until November 2021)

Data on the measures was collected including on stakeholders involved, coordination mechanisms, priority target groups, evidence of outputs/results, financing and costs and the level of implementation of each of the three-steps (skills assessment, tailored learning offer and validation) through the measure. The information was identified through secondary sources as well as the results from the national interviews undertaken as part of Task 2.1 to date.

The in-depth mapping was then sent to the National Experts for final validation, as well as their expert assessment on the degree of implementation of the Recommendation. The assessment provides an overview of the degree of implementation of the three-step approach (i.e. skills assessment, provision of tailored learning, and validation and recognition) in measures selected by Member States' national authorities as relevant to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, its aims and target group. The assessment does not provide an overall judgement of adult learning measures in Member States or a complete overview of all existing measures that could be potentially linked to the three main steps of upskilling pathways.

The following four **levels of implementation** were used for the assessment:

- Measures identified implement the step fully or to a large extent (changes are visible throughout the system/scheme)
- Measures identified implement the step to some extent (some changes are visible)
- Measures identified do not implement the step, but (some) discussions have started
- Measures identified do not implement the step and no action is foreseen (yet).

While the examples of measures cannot be a representation of all relevant measures in place, they provide further insight into the key upskilling policies already in place in 2016 as well as the policies implemented after the Recommendation so as to understand the expected impact of the Recommendation and degree of implementation since.

3.3.2. Synthesis of indicators and mapping of measures to establish need for change and actual change

²⁷⁵ This validation by national authorities could not be conducted for Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland. This will be done in the next phase of the study. The mapping and assessment for Greece and the Netherlands is pending.

The four levels of implementation described above (section 3.2.2) were used to assess the need for change **for each step**. Where the step was already fully or to a large extent implemented before the introduction of the Recommendation, the country was considered to have **low need** for change in this particular step, whilst where relevant measures implementing the step did not exist, the country was considered to have **high need** for change in this step.

On the basis of this framework, the following three **levels of need for change** were identified:

- Measures implement the step fully or to a large extent → Low need for change
- Measures implement the step to some extent → Medium need for change
- Measures do not implement the step (either whether (some) discussions have started or no action is foreseen) → High need for change.

This assessment per step was then contextualised and further refined through the use of **two key indicators** showing the need for upskilling and the capacity of national upskilling systems to support the low-skilled (see section 3.2.1), namely, the share of low-qualified aged 25–64 and the share of participation of low-qualified aged 25–64 in education and training in 2016. The use of this contextual data is considered essential to the assessment of potential change as even countries with measures addressing the three steps could be characterised by a high share of people with low educational attainment or low participation in education and training, hence indicating the need for further action.

Taking into account this contextual data and the analysis of existing measures, an **overall assessment of the need for change** in each country was conducted. This assessment was based on three levels:

- **Low need for change:** The three steps are already fully implemented or, at least two out of the three steps are fully implemented and one is implemented to some extent; Countries in this category are characterised by a low share (first quartile) of low-qualified (25–34-year-olds), and/or high level of participation in education and training by low-qualified (fourth quartile).
- **Medium need for change:** A good level of implementation of the three steps is already present, but further progress in the implementation is possible; Countries in this category are characterised by a medium share (second and third quartile) of low-qualified (25–34-year-olds), and/or a medium level (third and second quartile) of participation in low-qualified in education and training by low-qualified.
- **High need for change:** The three steps are not yet implemented or only some of them are implemented to a low extent; Countries in this category are characterised by: a high share (fourth quartile) of low-qualified (25–34-year-olds), and/or a low level (first quartile) of participation in education and training by low-qualified.

The **overall assessment** is conducted by assigning a numeric value to each contextual indicator based on quartiles as shown in the table below. The total value ranges from a minimum of 0.5 (countries with a small share of low qualified and high participation in education) to a maximum of 2 (countries with a large share of low qualified and small participation in education).

Table A1_21 Contextual indicators value reference table

Contextual indicators	Value quartile 1	Value quartile 2	Value quartile 3	Value quartile 4
Low-qualified 25–64-year-olds – 2016 (%)	0.25	0.5	0.75	1
Participation of low-qualified in education and training 25–64-year-olds - 2016 (%)	1	0.75	0.5	0.25

This total value is then summed up with the ***coefficient of implementation***. The coefficient of implementation is calculated based on the degree of implementation of each of the three steps prescribed by the Recommendation. A numerical value is assigned to each level of implementation:

- Measures identified implement the step **fully or to a large extent** (changes are visible throughout the system/scheme): 0.33
- Measures identified implement the step **to some extent** (some changes are visible): 0.25
- Measures identified **do not implement the step, but (some) discussions have started**: 0.17
- Measures identified **do not implement the step and no action is foreseen** (yet): 0.08

The coefficient can range from a minimum of 0.24, where no measures implementing any of the three steps were identified, to a maximum of 1, where measures identified implement all steps fully or to a large extent.

The values resulting from the sum of the coefficient of implementation and the value resulting from the analysis of contextual indicators are then used to group the countries in Low, Medium, High need for change.

The difference between the coefficients of implementation for 2016 and 2021 also provides a ***degree of actual change***:

- ‘Significant change’ (change range between 0.25 and 0.334) indicates that new measures have been implemented that improve either the degree of provision of all three steps or that fully introduce one step where there was previously no provision of that step;
- ‘Moderate change’ (change of 0.16) indicates a change in the degree of provision of two steps or the full introduction or change in the degree of provision of one step where there was previously no provision of that step;
- ‘Modest change’ (change of 0.08) indicates limited change in the degree of provision of one step only;
- ‘No change’ (change of 0) indicates that no significant changes to better align the country’s existing approach to the three-step approach of the Recommendation were identified.

Finally, countries were clustered on the basis of the overall assessed need for change. This was then examined in relation to the actual change, as determined from the assessment of

degree of implementation of each step in measures identified in 2021. An **additional indicator of change** is provided by using:

- ‘=’ sign, which indicates that no substantial changes to the level of implementation of the step have been identified²⁷⁶;
- ‘+’ sign, which indicates that positive changes in relation to the level of implementation of the step have been identified since 2016.
- As countries were at different level of implementation prior to 2016, as indicated by the use of four categories (i.e. Measures implement the step fully or to a large extent; Measures do not implement the step and no action is foreseen; etc.), countries that underwent major changes in their approach to the three steps, moving them across more than one category, are marked by multiple ‘+’ signs. One ‘+’ sign indicates that the country made some improvements on their measures; two ‘+’ signs indicate that the country made moderate changes and improvements; three ‘+’ signs indicates that the country made significant improvements on their measures. A maximum of three ‘+’ signs were used. This assessment was conducted on the basis of the triangulation of results from the mapping of measures, the national interviews conducted for the study and the expert assessment of the national experts.

The full analysis of this assessment is presented in Section 3 and in **Annexes 2, 3 and 9** of the main report.

3.4. Task 2 Targeted consultations

We undertook a set of interlinked targeted consultation activities to help gather the views and opinions of a wide range of relevant stakeholders of upskilling pathways. This was based principally on the consultation strategy of the evaluation (see **Appendix 2**). The subtasks are outlined below.

3.4.1. Task 2.1: Interview programme

We carried out in-depth interviews with the following stakeholders:

- The **main national stakeholders** in charge of implementing the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation at the strategic level in each Member State. We focused on national level policymakers with overall responsibility for the implementation of national approaches, including designing and overseeing the implementation of actions. This includes national authorities responsible for adult learning/training/VET/skills policies: e.g. Ministries of education, Ministries of employment/ social affairs, Directors-General of VET, national agencies responsible for education and training that are not Ministries, etc.
- The **key relevant EU level stakeholders** (including EU institutions, social partners – including the business sector – civil society organisations and other relevant organisations). We interviewed EU policymakers responsible for education, training, and adult learning policy and funding; EU level social partners; and other relevant EU level stakeholder

²⁷⁶ An ‘=’ sign does not necessarily mean that a country has not implemented any new measure over the period 2016 onwards. It means that, even if a new measure has been implemented this is not considered to have marked a substantial improvement in relation to the country approach to a specific step of upskilling pathways.

organisations including representatives of education and training providers and third sector organisations; organisations representing adults in education and training/low-skilled adults.

The interview programme provided us with one of the main sources of qualitative data for the study. This fed into the triangulation of data to answer all the evaluation questions. Specifically, the interviews provided information on:

- The rationale, focus and choice of national approaches to upskilling pathways;
- The degree to which the Recommendation was effectively implemented, and how it was implemented;
- The costs and benefits associated with the implementation of the Recommendation;
- The Recommendation’s relevance to and coherence with national policies; and
- The EU added value of the Recommendation in promoting upskilling pathways to low-skilled/ qualified adults at national level.

The following interviews were conducted:

EU level interviews

Table A1_22 Overview of EU level stakeholder interviews

Category	Organisation/Institution	Interview status
EU level institutions and policymakers	DG EMPL, Unit G1 (ESF)	Completed
	DG EAC	Completed
	Eurofound	Completed
	European Training Foundation	Completed
	Cedefop	Completed
EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	European Federation of Education Employers	Completed
	SME United	Declined (suggested contacting national members)
	European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)	Declined (suggested contacting national social partners)
	Business Europe	No response
	European SME Digital Alliance	No response
	European Small Business Alliance (ESBA)	No response
	Eurocommerce	No response

EU-level representatives of education and training providers	European Vocational training Association (EVTA)	Completed in writing
	European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (EFVET)	Declined (suggested contacting national members)
	European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB)	No response
Organisations representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups	European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)	Completed
	European Roma Grassroots Organisation Network (ERGO)	Completed in writing
	European Basic Skills Network (EBSN)	Completed
	Lifelong Learning Platform	Completed
	EARLALL	Completed
	All Digital	Completed
	European NGO Platform on Asylum and Migration (EPAM)	Declined (no knowledge of the Recommendation)
	Red Cross (EU office)	No response
EU level advisory groups, with national membership (EQF)	Eurochambers	Completed
	European University Association	Completed
EQF Advisory Group	National agency for vocational education and training (NAVET)	No response
	Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland	No response
	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, France	Followed up by the national expert for France

Source: Ecorys, 2022

Additional contact details of potential interviewees were received from the EQF Advisory Committee, and ACVT and DGVT national networks. The representatives of the EQF Advisory Committee were contacted and interviewed by Ecorys while members of the ACVT and DGVT

national networks were targeted by the national experts where relevant and/or used to disseminate the surveys (see Task 2.2).²⁷⁷

National-level stakeholder interviews

National experts conducted 3-5 interviews per country with relevant national stakeholders. The national experts were asked to prioritise the stakeholders depending on the relevance of each stakeholder type for each national context in relation to the implementation of the 2016 Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and the objectives of the study.

Table A1_5 23 List of stakeholder categories for national level interviews

Stakeholder category	Organisations/ networks to consult	Level of priority for interviews
National and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies.	Ministries of education (including, as relevant in each Member State, Directors-General of VET)	High priority
National and/ or regional ministries and government bodies responsible for employment policies.	Ministries of employment/labour	High priority
Other national and regional public authorities or bodies responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies; and where relevant, private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	National agencies responsible for education and training that are not direct Ministries (e.g. Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Germany), Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (Croatia) National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (Italy) etc.).	High priority
	ACVT national social partners representatives	If relevant to each country context
	ESF Managing Authorities	If relevant to each country context
EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	EQF Advisory Group	If relevant to each country context
EU-level representatives of education and training providers	National Coordinators for the implementation of European Agenda for Adult Learning	If relevant to each country context

Source: *Ecorys, 2022*

The following stakeholders were consulted in each Member States:

²⁷⁷ For some countries, the contact information of national authorities (ACVT+DGVT national networks) was shared with the national experts who requested support in identifying relevant stakeholders to be interviewed. They were requested not to share these contacts with anyone else, and not to use them for any other research than Upskilling Pathways project. They were instructed to delete the contacts after they have ended the interviews and send us a confirmation that they have done so.

Table A1_624 Overview of national level interviews

Country	Stakeholder category	Total contacted	Interviews completed
Austria	National government (adult learning/training)	1	1
	National government (employment policies)	3	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	2	1
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	0
Belgium	National government (adult learning/training)	2	2
	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	3
Bulgaria	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	1	1
	EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	1	1
Croatia	National government (adult learning/training)	1	0
	National government (employment policies)	1	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	2
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	1	0
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	0
Cyprus	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	1	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	5	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	1	0
Czechia	National government (adult learning/training)	3	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	2
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	1
Denmark	National government (adult learning/training)	3	1

	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	1
Estonia	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	2	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	4	0
Finland	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	1
	EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	1	0
France	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	4	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	4	1
Germany	National government (adult learning/training)	1	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	2	1
Greece	National government (adult learning/training)	3	0
	National government (employment policies)	3	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	3
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	1	0
Hungary	National government (adult learning/training)	2	2
	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	2
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	0
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	2	0
Ireland	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1

	National government (employment policies)	2	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	4	3
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	1
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	1
Italy	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	6	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	0
	EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	1	0
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	0
Latvia	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	3
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	1	0
	EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	1	0
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	0
Lithuania	National government (adult learning/training)	2	2
	National government (employment policies)	1	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	1	1
Luxembourg	National government (adult learning/training)	2	2
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	1	1
Malta	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	1
	EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	2	1

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	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	1
The Netherlands	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	1	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	6	2
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	0
	EU level social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	1	0
Poland	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	1	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	2	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	1
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	1
Portugal	National government (adult learning/training)	3	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	9	4
Romania	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	2	2
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	2	2
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	1	0
Slovakia	National government (adult learning/training)	1	0
	National government (employment policies)	1	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	1
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	4	2
Slovenia	National government (adult learning/training)	2	1
	National government (employment policies)	1	0
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	5	1
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	0
Spain	National government (adult learning/training)	3	2

	National government (employment policies)	2	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	3	2
	Private and third sector organisations that provide education and training at national level	2	1
	EU-level representatives of education and training providers	1	0
Sweden	National government (adult learning/training)	1	1
	Other national/regional public authorities or bodies	5	3

Source: Ecorys, 2022

Once finalised, to bring together the findings of the interviews, the research team undertook a **thematic analysis**, drawing out key issues and findings under each of the main topic headings corresponding to the five evaluation criteria and the questions in the interview topic guides. Coding of the themes allowed for filtering and searching, to compare the views of stakeholders and to distinguish areas of consensus, explore the degree of concurrence in viewpoints between different types of stakeholders, and also identify any country differences.

3.4.2. Task 2.2 Targeted Surveys

As part of the targeted consultation task of this evaluation, the team conducted three internet-based surveys targeting the following groups of stakeholders relevant to upskilling pathways:

- **National and regional institutions and organisations in charge at operational level of upskilling pathways**, and organisations involved in the implementation of upskilling pathways (referred to as the ‘survey of coordinating and implementing organisations’)
- **Organisations representing low-skilled adults** and people within the priority target groups. (referred to as the ‘survey of organisations representing the low-skilled’)
- **Beneficiaries of upskilling pathways interventions** (i.e. adult learners) (referred to as the survey of adult learners’)

The questionnaires were designed in a modular format with routing designed to make sure that respondents were directed to relevant question sets. Closed questions were designed using scales to allow data to be collated and analysed in a consistent way. Open question forms were used to maximise the depth of information that could be collected, recognising the diversity in Member State contexts.

An initial step undertaken by the research team was to amend and finalise the questionnaires based on the feedback from the client at the inception stage (these are included in Appendices 4, 5 and 6). A detailed account of the subsequent activities carried out under each task, including an overview of the stakeholders consulted is provided below.

Dissemination plan

In order to ensure that the survey was disseminated in a sufficiently broad manner to reach a range of relevant stakeholders and low-skilled adults, the research team developed a

comprehensive dissemination plan. The mapping conducted under Task 1 provided an overview of the governance structure in each Member State and allowed us to identify the most relevant respondents to target with the survey. A mapping template was distributed to the national experts who were asked based on their knowledge and networks in each country, as well as desk research, to fill any gaps and collate contact details of the following categories of stakeholders:

- Representatives of national and regional authorities in charge of upskilling pathways
- Stakeholders involved in the implementation of upskilling measures
- Organisations representing adults with low levels of skills

The contact database was further consolidated with sources provided by DG EMPL and suggestions received on an ongoing basis from interviewed stakeholders (as part of Task 2.1). A list of relevant stakeholders was compiled to act as potential multipliers for survey distribution. This included stakeholders from various categories, such as social and economic partners at EU and national level, EU-level representatives of education and training providers, organisations representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups, other national and regional public authorities or bodies responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies and Pact for Skills signatories involved in upskilling and adult learning measures.

Table A1_725 List of stakeholders contacted by Ecorys for dissemination of the surveys with authorities and beneficiaries

Type of stakeholder	Stakeholder category	Total number contacted by Ecorys
National and regional institutions and organisations in charge of upskilling pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministries of Education VET institutions Ministries of Employment/Labour and Social Affairs Public employment services (PES) National Agencies for Vocational Education and Training ESF Managing Authorities 	208
Implementing organisations involved in the delivery of upskilling pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public employment services Regional and local authorities Private bodies Sectorial skills operators Social partners Stakeholders from the civil society in the fields of education and training Community centres Education and training providers and representatives, public and private schools Social enterprises 	2027
Organisations representing upskilling pathways beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups Social enterprises National NGOs Stakeholders from civil society 	100
Multipliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social partners EU level stakeholder organisations National organisations mapped by national experts Pact for Skills signatories involved in upskilling and adult learning 	206

Surveying low-skilled adults who have participated in upskilling pathways measures requires the collaboration of organisations that are in direct contact with these groups (i.e. implementing organisations). To reach out to this group, we asked implementing organisations and representative organisations to act as multipliers and forward the survey invitation to adults benefitting from upskilling pathways.

Survey of coordinating and implementing organisations

108 answers were collected from respondents representing organisations coordinating or implementing upskilling pathways measures in EU Member States.

The data on respondents by **country** showed a somewhat unbalanced geographical distribution. Respondents represented all Member States with the exception of Hungary. A total of 21% (n=23) of respondents selected Bulgaria as the country in which their organisation was active. This was followed by Italy (11%, n=12), Lithuania (8%, n=9) and Portugal (6%, n=6). Furthermore, 5% of respondents selected Belgium (n=5) and Germany (n=5), whilst 6 countries received 4 responses each (CY, DK, EL, IE, PL, and RO), accounting for 4% of the total number of responses, and the remaining 14 countries had 3 or less responses.

The breakdown of respondents by **stakeholder category** indicated that the organisations involved in the coordination of other organisations in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways represented 38% (n=41) of the total number of responses, while the stakeholders involved in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways accounted of 62% (n=67) of the total.

Table A1_826 Respondents by type of coordinating organisation

Type of coordinating organisation	Number (n=41)	Percentage
Ministry or other Government body responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies at national level	21	51%
Regional authority responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies	7	17%
Local authority responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies	1	2%
Other public authority or body involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies	12	29%

Table A1_927 Respondents by type of implementing organisation

Type of implementing organisation	Number (n=67)	Percentage
Regional authorities	1	1%
Local authorities	0	0%
Public employment services	9	13%
Employers' organisations	2	3%
Trade unions/ Employees' organisations	6	9%
Sectorial skills operators	0	0%
Education and training providers and representatives, public and private schools	30	45%
Stakeholders from civil society in the fields of education and training	3	4%
Community centres	0	0%
Social enterprises	1	1%
Private bodies	5	7%
Other	10	15%
Total (N)	67	100.00%

Among the first group (**coordination**), more than half (51%, n=21)) represent a Ministry/Government body responsible for adult learning/training, VET, lifelong learning or skills

policies at national level; 17% (n=7) represent a regional authority, and 2% (n=1) a local authority. Nearly 1/3 of respondents (29%) represent other public authority/body, including national agencies (Erasmus+ and Skillnet), national coordinators, and grant project coordinators.

Within the second group (**implementation**), nearly half (45%, n=30) represent education and training providers, public and private schools, whereas 13% (n=9) represent public employment services, followed by 9% (n=6) of respondents representing trade unions/employees' organisations, 7% (n=5) private bodies, and 15% (n=10) other groups, including research centers and institutes, foundations, and chambers of commerce. Majority of respondents involved in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways are involved in skills assessment measures (61%, n=41) and validation and recognition of skills acquired (52%, n=35), while nearly half of respondents are also involved in the provision of a tailored offer (49%, n=33) and flexible offer (48%, n=35) – the three key steps of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways.

Survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults

The total number of complete responses to the survey targeting representative organisations of low-skilled adults was 180. However, in terms of **country** breakdown, 129 responses were submitted by organisations based in Portugal. To ensure an accurate analysis of the responses, the survey team extracted the responses from Portugal and analysed them separately. The results therefore reported are based on the non-Portuguese respondents (n=51).

Out of the 51 responses not from organisations based in Portugal, 18% (n=9) were submitted by representative organisations from Poland. This was followed by 14% (n=7) responses from Austria and Bulgaria, 10% from Germany (n=5). 14 countries had fewer than 10 responses whilst no respondents from Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal or Slovakia participated in the survey.

A breakdown of respondents by the **group their organisation was representing** is included in the table below.

Table A1_1028 Respondents by type of group their organisation represents

Group your organisation represents	Number (n=51)	Share
Adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital)	27	52.94%
Adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork)	22	43.14%
Long-term unemployed adults	23	45.10%
Older workers (above 55)	15	29.41%
Economically inactive people	21	41.18%
Nationals with a migrant background	13	25.49%
Persons with disabilities	19	37.25%

Third country nationals	9	17.65%
Other target group. Please specify:	16	31.37%
Total	51	100.00%

More than half (53%, n=27) worked with adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital), 45% (n=23) with long-term unemployed adults and 43% (n=22) represented adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork). Furthermore, 41% of responses (n=15) showed that economically inactive people were also among the most represented groups. Other group of adults represented were: persons with disabilities (37%, n=19), other target groups (31%, n=16), older workers (29%, n=15), nationals with a migrant background (25%, n=13) and third country nationals (18%, n=9).

Survey of adult learners

The total number of responses received from adults participating in Upskilling Pathways initiatives was 102. The analysis of the respondents' country of residence shows an unbalanced geographical distribution with more than half of responses being submitted from Portugal (40%, n=41) and Poland (32%, n=33). Around 17% (n=17) of participants indicated Italy as their country of residence, 6% (n=6) selected Slovenia and 2% (n=2) Romania. AT, BG and EE received only one response each.

In terms of the highest level of qualification obtained, 29% (n=29) completed lower secondary education or below, 21% (n=21) of participants received an upper secondary certificate and around 18% (n=18) had finalised vocational education (secondary level) and vocational (tertiary level) respectively.

An analysis of respondents' status prior to taking part in adult learning measures showed that 40% (n=40) were employed, 25% (n=25) were in training and 23% (n=23) of adults were looking for work.

Table A1_11 Respondents by highest level of qualification obtained

Your highest level of qualification obtained	Number	Share
Lower secondary or below	29	28.43%
Upper secondary	21	20.59%
Tertiary or above	16	15.69%
Vocational (secondary level)	18	17.65%
Vocational (tertiary level)	18	17.65%
Total	102	100.00%

Table A1_1229 Respondents by status prior to taking part in an adult learning programme

Your status prior to taking part in an adult learning programme:		

In education	4	3.92%
In training	25	24.51%
Employed	40	39.22%
Looking for work	23	22.55%
Not looking for work	10	9.80%
Total	102	100.00%

The analysis of results was carried out using both quantitative methods (to analyse the frequencies of the closed answers) and qualitative methods (for the open questions, to analyse complex concepts as well as to substantiate and interpret the quantitative data with relevant insights). In addition, the Research Team categorised the responses through a range of relevant segments. The results of the survey have been triangulated with the data across other tasks to feed into the final analysis of the study.

3.4.3. Task 2.3 Online expert meeting

We organised an online expert meeting with selected representatives of national authorities with overall responsibility for the implementation of upskilling pathways, and national authorities in charge of implementing upskilling pathways on the ground. The meeting focused on two themes:

- The **collaborative role** of education, training and other labour market and social actors in providing enabling conditions for successful upskilling opportunities for low-skilled adults;
- How measures to implement upskilling pathways use the **three-step approach** outlined in the Recommendation: namely, skills assessment; tailored, flexible, and quality learning offer; and the validation and recognition of skills.

The objectives of the expert meeting were to: present the initial study findings; enable participants to discuss the two key topics outlined above and provide examples of approaches, practices and lessons learnt following the implementation of upskilling pathways, in relation to the 2016 Recommendation; and reflect on enablers, challenges and priorities for the future in relation to upskilling pathways at national and EU level.

The meeting was attended by **25 participants** from Member State authorities and 15 participants from the European Commission and the research team. The results of the discussions fed into the analysis presented in the final report. The meeting report including the participants list is presented in **Annex 7** of the main report.

3.4.4. Task 2.4 Validation workshop

We also organised an online validation workshop with a selection of representatives of national authorities in charge of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, EU-level representatives and associations, social and economic partners. The workshop took place following the submission of the draft Final report and prior to submitting the Final report. **22 participants** from Member States representatives, social partners and academic experts attended.

The objectives of the validation workshop were to present the draft conclusions and recommendations of the study to key national and EU-level stakeholders, validate the analysis undertaken in the study, and exchange ideas about the refinement of policy learnings presented in the draft Final report. Workshop participants were encouraged to provide their feedback and discuss reflections on upskilling pathways for the future.

The results of the discussions fed into the analysis presented in the final report, in particular in the conclusions and lessons learned. The meeting report including the participants list is presented in **Annex 8** of the main report.

3.5. Case studies

To gain deeper insight into the actions taken in response to the Recommendation on the national/regional/local level(s) we carried out ten case studies across ten Member States (one per country). The selection of the case studies was carried out in accordance with a range of criteria (see below) and built on and complemented the information gathered from the mapping exercise (Task 1) and the targeted consultations (Task 2), to gain more in-depth insights into (good and bad) practices of the implementation of the recommendation.

Selection criteria

- The following selection criteria were used:
- Geographical coverage;
- Share of low-qualified adults;
- Participation rates in formal and non-formal education;
- Ranking on the Cedefop European Skills Index (ESI);
- Adult learning coverage in national education and employment laws;
- Adult learning coverage in socio-economic strategies;
- Stage of implementation;
- Area/Type of actions (incl. potential good and bad practices);
- Targeting of priority groups;
- Coverage of specific economic sectors;
- Preliminary assessment of the strength of the response to the recommendation.

The final case study countries selected were:

- Austria
- Bulgaria

- Estonia
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Netherlands
- Spain
- Sweden

The final country selection of case studies aimed at:

- A balanced selection of **countries across regions**, with regions being also a proxy for similarities in the institutional set up of the political economies and shared traditions in adult learning. Countries from one group represent at least some typical features of (most of) the countries within the group, so that the results are of particular relevance within the group (e.g. the results for Hungary are relevant for Poland, the results for Bulgaria are relevant for Romania).
- Representing countries with **high/medium/low participation rates** of the low-qualified (ISCED 0-2) and medium-qualified (ISCED 3-4) in adult learning, with selected countries having markedly different patterns of participation belonging to one group (Germany, Netherlands and Austria, for example)
- Representing countries with **different institutional patterns and a different history of organising formal adult learning** (i.e., the opportunity to acquire a qualification). For example, Sweden is known for being a pioneer in organising a coherent system of upskilling opportunities; Germany is characterised by a scattered offer for general education for adults (with strong development for adult base education since 2011), a specific approach to “higher” adult apprenticeship (as part of regular IVET), a unique formal CVET system, all topics of recent reforms); on the contrary, in countries such as Bulgaria or Hungary, formal adult education opportunities are still a matter of (re-) construction.
- Including countries with **different levels of implementation of the actions outlined in the Recommendation** i.e., the provision of lifelong/career Guidance, skill assessment/audits and validation of skills; different levels of activities in the provision of outreach for low skilled/low qualified adults
- Representing countries with **different institutional set ups in adult learning**, in particular with regard to importance of the (Federal States or) regional level (dominating in Austria, Germany, Spain), and the role of Active Labour Market Policy (e.g., the latter very important in Austria, important in Germany, only of moderate importance in the Netherlands). Moreover, while in a number of countries, the ESF is the sole significant funding source for Adult Learning (as in Hungary or Bulgaria), in others, it plays only a supplementary role, although it can be used to push particular initiatives (e.g., as in Germany in the case of the

'*Bildungsprämie*' or in Austria in the case of 'Initiative *Erwachsenenbildung*'). The importance of the regional level, the active labour market policy or the ESF (or any EU funding) is a key predictor for the form/complexity of government arrangements/stakeholder constellations.

- Allowing for observing either novel activities on a programme or a system level or the evolution (including setbacks) of previously started activities relevant for upskilling pathways initiatives over time. Allowing the observation of broad range of different policies, starting from regulatory reforms (e.g., France, Spain, Germany) going down to the implementation of targeted pilot and development projects.
- **Representing countries in different phases within the 'Policy Cycle'**, with lifelong learning being more prominent an issue in certain years, followed by periods of limited policy attention. e.g. High attention for the field is observable in Germany, Spain, Netherlands, France, Ireland, Estonia; a low level of interest after a phase of high activity is observable in Austria, Bulgaria or Sweden.

Qualitative analysis

The case study research built on the mapping (Task 1) and the targeted consultations carried out under Task 2. National Experts collected and examined both qualitative and quantitative sources, which included the following:

- Information relevant to upskilling pathways, lifelong learning and CVET in the country from reports and literature at EU and international levels (e.g. outputs by DG EMPL, DG EAC, Cedefop, Eurofound, the OECD, the Council of Europe, OECD, the ILO, or peer-reviewed academic literature);
- Specific national qualitative information including reports, evaluations, academic articles or literature which may provide useful information on the national framework for upskilling and life-long learning in that country, and the way in which the scheme/policy/practice fits into the national context;
- In relation to the specific case study scheme/policy/practice, national qualitative sources, including reports, evaluations, beneficiary surveys, participants' or beneficiaries' change stories, academic articles or literature which may provide useful information on the scheme.
- Additional relevant and available quantitative data available at EU and national level, e.g., administrative and programme monitoring/evaluation data, beneficiary data, data from the National Statistical Office or national adult education and VET registers.
- Any relevant quantitative information relating to the specific case study scheme, including data relating to numbers of participants, key outputs, key impacts etc.

In parallel to the desk research, targeted consultations in the form of individual or group interviews were undertaken. An average of five interviews were carried out per case study, including representatives of:

- The responsible Ministries, governmental departments, or intermediaries responsible for implementing the initiatives;

- Regional or local authorities that are engaged with upskilling pathways, adult learning or lifelong learning strategies;
- Relevant implementing organisations of selected initiatives/schemes;
- Responsible NGOs or think tanks working closely with the priority target groups of the Council Recommendation;
- Research centres, academics or other organisations that engage with public policies in the areas of skills and adult learning or are involved in the evaluation of initiatives;
- Social partners (trade unions and employers);
- Private sector organisations, PES, VET centres, Education centres, involved in the practical implementation of upskilling initiatives;

Quantitative analysis

The tender specifications requested that 1) the case studies provide quantitative information when feasible (e.g., success rates, country specific evaluation studies), and 2) a number of case studies be quantitative and include causal impact evaluation where appropriate.

To support the development of a robust causal evaluation design, we reviewed our potential counterfactual-based approach to assessing the impact of some upskilling pathways initiatives during the inception phase, based on the preliminary desk research and the following key considerations:

- the question of what impacts and outcomes of interest we are seeking to evaluate;
- what indicators and data might be used;
- how the counterfactual scenario might be established;
- and how might data and evidence be collated and analysed.

Based on this review, we undertook the following two-task approach to conducting the quantitative analysis for the case studies:

- As a first task, we **formally tested how key outcomes/indicators have changed** since the Recommendation was adopted and, drawing on the mapping exercise (see Task 1), the extent to which any changes are associated with different levels of adoption/implementation of the Recommendation. This analysis was conducted on all Member States (where data is available) and has been included in Annex 10.
- As a second task, we **identified evaluation reports/findings of specific interventions** (aligned to the Recommendation) which were subject to a robust counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE) and included information on these in the individual case studies, where relevant.

For the first task, descriptive statistics were used to assess changes (at a basic level), and, where data allowed, forecasting techniques to develop a counterfactual, which helped build an

understanding of whether the Recommendation has contributed to any change/impact observed. Descriptive statistics focused on visualising the trends before and after the Recommendation at the Member State level to identify signs of change. This included line charts and calculating change between periods. Subgroup analysis was undertaken based on the mapping exercise, in particular the assessment of Member States based on the need for change in 2016 and the actual change (extent to which the Recommendation has been implemented) (see Section 3.2.3). This helped provide an initial insight into whether the Recommendation appears to be associated with changes in outcomes.

Building on the descriptive statistics, forecasting techniques, specifically **interrupted time series analysis** (ITSA), was conducted to construct a counterfactual.²⁷⁸ This analysis focused on key outcomes (e.g. unemployment rates of low-skilled adults, participation rates in adult learning) and sought to identify what may have happened in the absence of the Recommendation. Forecasts, based on the pre-Recommendation trends, were compared to the observed (actual) trends post-Recommendation to estimate impacts. Results were provided for all countries, which has supported the comparative analysis and an understanding of whether there are associations between the degree of change/impact and the extent to which the Recommendation has been implemented. Recognising the Recommendation is at policy level (affecting all the target population), this analysis is intended to build an understanding of the overall potential impact of the Recommendation (rather than that of specific interventions). To strengthen the attribution claim / understand the specific contribution of the Recommendation, the results from this analysis have been synthesised with the findings from the desk research and consultations undertaken as part of the study as a whole.

For the second task, as detailed as part of the qualitative case study research, stakeholders were asked if any counterfactual impact evaluations of specific interventions/activities associated with the Recommendation have been conducted. These were identified in three countries, Bulgaria, Germany and Estonia. The evaluations were reviewed, and relevant findings extracted and synthesised with the wider evidence generated in the case studies.

Reporting

Following the collection of the primary and secondary data, the data was consolidated, analysed and triangulated to draw findings based on the evidence gathered. This exercise also involved the triangulation of the information gathered in both Task 1 and Task 2 and lead to the production of a set of ten case studies (**Annex 4**) based on a reporting template produced in line with the evaluation framework (included in **Appendix 8**). The results of the quantitative analysis undertaken as part of this task is included in **Annex 9** and has fed into the main report findings where relevant.

3.6. Public consultation

The online public consultation was launched by the European Commission on 16 December 2021 and ran until 17 March 2022. The questionnaire used to implement the survey was distributed using the online EU Survey tool. The findings presented in this report are based on a final extraction of public consultation replies dated 18 March 2022. The questionnaire was available in 23 EU official languages and in electronic format only. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed questions, and all answers are collected in a single dataset. The

²⁷⁸ For ITSA, at least 8 data time points are required before and after the “intervention” (in our case, the recommendation).

public consultation was structured differently for three different profiles of respondents, defined as follows:

- All organisations and citizens
- Current or recent adult learners (recent: within the last 4 years a participant in an adult learning measure)
- Adults not currently participating in an adult learning measure but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications

Throughout the questionnaire, respondents are asked to express their views on the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value of upskilling pathways measures. Excluding the profiling and closing questions, the different groups of respondents were asked the following number of questions:

- 17 questions targeted all organisations and citizens
- 6 questions targeted current or recent adult learners
- 5 questions targeted adults not currently participating in an adult learning measure but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications

All respondents were asked to respond to questions that included both a closed and an open component.

A **high degree of caution** should be taken in interpreting and using the results of the consultation particularly due to the low response rates. By nature, a public consultation cannot and should not be considered statistically representative of the target population and thus any extrapolations should be avoided.

3.6.1. Methodology for analysing the results

Respondents' views were examined through a combination of closed questions and open-ended questions. Closed questions provided respondents with either different pre-set categorical answers from which to choose (e.g. the extent to which the features of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways have been implemented in their country or at the EU level, the contribution of adult learning measures to specific benefits at the national and EU level), or asked them to rate the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and relevance of the adult learning measures implemented in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways.

The analysis of results was carried out using both quantitative (to analyse the frequencies of the closed answers) and qualitative methods (for the open questions, in order to analyse complex concepts as well as to substantiate and interpret the quantitative data with relevant insights). In addition, the research team categorised the responses through a range of relevant typologies (type of respondent, types of organisations).

3.6.2. Preparation of the dataset

As a first step for analysis the replies to the public consultation were downloaded from the EU Survey Tool and a new excel database for analysis was created. This consisted of cleaning the dataset, creating classifications for answers received and checking for coherence and completeness. In the first place, multiple responses by the same respondents were checked. No single respondent (identified by their name and email address) submitted more than one response.

Due to the relatively low number of responses received, the recoding of variables in order to disaggregate the analysis and allow differentiation between all response options was not possible. The research team analysed relevant differences between sub-groups of on the basis of disaggregation by type of organisation and groups of respondents where this was possible. However, **when results are disaggregated, inferences should be made with caution** with regards to the results.

3.6.7. Qualitative analysis (closed questions)

The quantitative data analysis included an analysis of frequency distribution for each of the variables related to the closed-ended questions. Depending on the particular variable, all of the data values were represented. Frequency distributions were also depicted as graphs (histograms) as applicable. Cross-tabulations between specific variables and characteristics of respondents (e.g. type of stakeholder categories, type of respondent, type of adult learner) were also conducted, where possible, though the low number of responses has significantly limited the possibilities for this. The responses to the closed questions of the questionnaire were analysed using Excel and R. The statistical significance of the differences observed could not be further tested due to the low number of responses received.

3.6.8. Qualitative analysis (open questions)

As a first step, the answers related to open-ended questions were translated by the research team. With respect to qualitative data analysis, information was classified by related variable (number of question) and analysed to identify additional relevant information and trends. The information was used to enrich the analysis carried out on quantitative data. Such information is reflected in the report through the inclusion of examples which help to illustrate key issues or trends at EU and national level identified in the quantitative analysis.

3.6.9. Interpretation of results

The questionnaire was structured in a way that all the respondents had to fill in the descriptive section covering background information related to themselves, while the questions in the main sections differed according to the stakeholder category to which the respondent belongs.

Each question was analysed separately in order to ensure a consistent analysis of the responses. The report is structured by the evaluation criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value) and includes a short introduction and rationale, the presentation of results (frequency of responses) in terms of figures or tables, and qualitative analysis for open-ended questions including, where possible, a breakdown of responses according to the most relevant dimensions (such as stakeholder category, type of respondent).

3.6.10. Respondents to the public consultation

The public consultation received 60 responses. Respondents were from 19 EU Member States and four non-EU countries. The responses show a somewhat unbalanced geographical distribution, with five out of 23 countries (22%) covering over half of responses (32 out of 60, 53%). These are: Belgium, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany and Italy. Nine position papers were also submitted in response to the public consultation.

In terms of **stakeholder groups**, more than half of respondents represent an organisation (35 out of 60, 58%). Amongst these, the largest group was that of public authorities or bodies which are involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies (12 out of 56, 21%). The second largest group of respondents were organisations representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups such as NGOs, networks or platforms (10 out of 56, 18%). Individuals represent one quarter of all responses (15 respondents out of 60, 25%) including EU and non-EU citizens. Four potential adult learners and one adult learner answered the consultation

The full breakdown of respondents and the results of the public consultation are presented in **Annex 6** of the main report.

3.7. Analysis

In order to produce the **Interim and Final reports**, all the evidence and findings from the different research Tasks (1-4) were gathered together and organised by our Research Team in line with the structure of our evaluation framework for the study. The evaluation framework provided the structure for all the study research tools, which ensured that the findings from all the different Tasks for each evaluation criterion can be easily collated in the interim and final stages of the study for analysis.

The evidence gathered through all the research tasks (mapping, literature review, targeted and public consultations, case studies) was analysed and triangulated to provide answers to all the evaluation questions and sub-questions, with systematic reference to the evidence and/or analysis underpinning the findings presented. The analysis was be presented in the reports in sections corresponding to each of the evaluation criteria. We included boxed examples of illustrative examples where relevant throughout the reports.

The Research Team used the intervention logic as a basis to assess, by contribution analysis, the degree to which the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation is meeting the objectives set, and delivering the expected outputs, results and impacts, with an optimal degree of efficiency and in line with actual needs and problems.

4. Summary of limitations and mitigation measures

There were a number of specific limitations associated with the scope and coverage of the research, the quality of available data and the methodology that was developed, given the constraints of the available resources for the study. These limitations were taken into account in the design and implementation of the study as outlined in the Table below.

Table A1_1330 Key limitations of the research

Limitation	Explanation	Mitigation measures
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<p>Lack of clearly identifiable policies that were implemented in response to the recommendation</p>	<p>Member States' adult learning systems differ greatly in their organisation, scope and infrastructure and the same is true for the overall support provided for upskilling. In many Member States, actions which correspond to the Recommendation existed prior to its adoption in 2016. There is therefore no 'easy access' single repository (at EU or Member State level) of actions implemented by Member States in response to the Recommendation.</p>	<p>To establish a list of relevant measures to assess and analyse for the study, in particular for the mapping task (Task 1), we identified the measures that collectively are considered by national authorities of each Member State to be the most relevant and representative of their country's response to the Recommendation based on key EU policy documents on adult learning and the Recommendation, including the 2019 Staff Working Document 'Taking Stock of implementation measures'²⁷⁹. We then consulted Member State representatives on the completeness of this sample of measures and asked them to validate the sample. Representatives were able to remove or add other measures in order to come to a validated list of measures that best represent a Member States' response to the Recommendation.</p>
<p>Limited data that directly links to the Recommendation and can be used for monitoring its results.</p>	<p>As a result of the limitation explained above in terms of the lack of clearly identifiable policies implemented in response to the Recommendation, there is also a lack of data that is directly linked to the Recommendation. The implementation of the Recommendation is not monitored uniformly or systematically in each Member State meaning that a comprehensive monitoring data is not widely available.</p>	<p>Our study methodology has allowed us to identify existing studies, evaluations of initiatives that Member States deem representative of their UP response (as detailed above). We have used these along with the rich data gathered from consultation activities, the surveys and the case studies to understand and analyse the results of upskilling initiatives linked to the Recommendation, in order to assess its effectiveness in particular.</p>
<p>Limitations of the mapping methodology</p>	<p>The analysis of the situation in 2016 and the evolution since then is based on a sample of initiatives and therefore cannot be seen as a fully comprehensive analysis of all relevant policies in place.</p>	<p>We have ensured that the major initiatives that have been put in place in response to the Recommendation or that are related to the Recommendation are captured in the analysis, and have verified this with national authorities to ensure completeness and further cross-checked with findings from the interviews and views of national experts. Whilst this does not provide the full list of all measures related to upskilling pathways, it has enabled us to assess to understand the expected impact of the Recommendation and the degree of implementation since.</p>
<p>Lack of data on specific target groups, sectors and on specific skills</p>	<p>The low-skilled adults targeted by the Recommendation encompass a wide range of different groups, including for example migrants, older adults, low-skilled workers, unemployed adults and adults at risk of or experiencing poverty. However, granular and comparable data on both the size of and the impact of upskilling measures on specific target groups is not readily available. In particular participation rate data for subgroups such as migrants, those at</p>	<p>We have examined data available for foreign-born populations, the unemployed, long-term unemployed and inactive as well as data disaggregated by gender where relevant.</p> <p>We have also directly targeted beneficiaries of upskilling pathways and organisations representing or working with low-skilled individuals through the surveys conducted which has allowed us to understand how the Recommendation has impacted specific target groups, as far as possible. In addition</p>

²⁷⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf

	<p>risk of poverty is not available. Furthermore, data on specific skills' levels is also limited with the latest comparative data on numeracy and literacy skills being the OECD PIAAC survey from 2017.</p>	<p>to this, all quantitative data has been triangulated with primary data collected through the consultation Tasks.</p>
<p>Lack of causal impact evaluation of policies due to data availability</p>	<p>To perform rigorous causal analysis of Upskilling Pathways initiatives and their effectiveness, it is crucial to have data on the basic units targeted by the policy (i.e., the so-called target group, low-skilled adults) and people belonging to target groups and economic sectors participating in Upskilling Pathways initiatives. Similar data need to be available for the comparison group, meaning access microdata (i.e. data at the level of individuals, households or businesses or communities. As this has not been available, causal impact evaluation has not been fully undertaken.</p>	<p>To address this, we have formally tested how key outcomes/indicators (have changed since the Recommendation was published and, drawing on the mapping exercise, the extent to which any changes are associated with different levels of adoption/implementation of the Recommendation, through an interrupted time series analysis, included in Annex 10. The case studies also include evidence from evaluation reports/findings of specific interventions (aligned to the Recommendation) which were subject to a robust counterfactual impact evaluation (CIE).</p>
<p>Capturing the long-term impacts of participation in upskilling pathways</p>	<p>The full benefits of the participation of individuals (and organisations) in upskilling activities cannot be captured in the short-term, where the focus is on measuring immediate results. Assessing the full outcomes of participation ideally requires longitudinal research involving follow-up after several years to assess the long-term impact of participation e.g. in terms of labour market outcomes, access to further education and training, health and wellbeing, etc. The full range of benefits for individuals and organisations of the 2016 Recommendation will not yet be apparent in some cases.</p>	<p>A number of important impacts from the initial five-year period of implementation, have been captured including through the case studies where existing evaluations of specific measures have been analysed and drawn from to provide sound estimates for the expected long-term effects of completed upskilling pathways in adulthood).</p>
<p>Capturing the views of beneficiaries including adults with low levels of skills, competences and knowledge</p>	<p>There are clear challenges with consulting beneficiaries of upskilling measures, not least in identifying and gaining access due to data privacy (GDPR) and similar issues (national/regional authorities and upskilling providers cannot provide – and sometimes do not hold – contact details for previous participants).</p>	<p>In order to capture the views of adult learners as far as possible, we have worked with representative organisations of relevant target groups such as EU and national level NGOs working closely with the target groups. The surveys targeting adult learners and organisations representing the low-skilled have allowed us gain insights into the views of beneficiaries.</p>
<p>Lack of representativeness of the public consultation results</p>	<p>The public consultation received 60 responses. The recoding of variables in order to disaggregate the analysis and allow differentiation between all response options was therefore not possible</p>	<p>The research team has analysed relevant differences between sub-groups on the basis of disaggregation by type of organisation and groups of respondents where this was possible. However, when results are disaggregated, inferences should be made with caution with regards to the results. Results from the public consultation have been triangulated with all other data sources and have been primarily used to illustrate or</p>

		confirm findings that have emerged from this analysis.
Impact of external shocks	Data and evidence on adult learning (as other domains) from 2020 have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.	In terms of measuring progress over time, data for 2020 has been examined through the lens of the pandemic, considering any major changes in outcomes as outliers in response to a major external shock. We have explicitly addressed the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of upskilling pathways in the evaluation sub questions, and have also examined data from 2019 and 2021 to identify any trends in the indicators that may have been halted due to the onset of the pandemic.

Source: Ecorys, 2022

Appendix 1: Evaluation framework

					Methodological task (T)								
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	T1		T2				T3	T4	
					Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online workshop validation	Case studies	Public consultation
Effectiveness	To what extent have the Member States facilitated access to upskilling pathways for adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and competences?	To what degree did Member States facilitate access for low-skilled adults to upskilling pathways: To acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence? To acquire a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences, relevant for the labour market and active participation in society by making progress towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4?	<p>The number of low-skilled adults accessing different types of upskilling pathways increased since 2016</p> <p>The number of low-skilled adults acquiring a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence increased since 2016</p> <p>The number of low-skilled adults acquiring a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences, relevant for the labour market and active participation in society increased since 2016</p>	<p>Quantitative evidence (period 2016 - 2021) on total number of low-skilled adults accessing upskilling pathways</p> <p>low-skilled adults accessing upskilling pathways as a percentage of low-skilled adults total number of low-skilled adults participating in upskilling pathways' activities acquiring basic skills</p> <p>total number of low-skilled adults participating in upskilling pathways' activities acquiring wider set of skills, knowledge and competences</p> <p>Stakeholder views on extent to which access to upskilling pathways has been facilitated</p> <p>Share of stakeholders interviewed and surveyed that agree that access to upskilling pathways has been facilitated</p>	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
		What approaches were used to facilitate access to different pathways? Why? Which were most/least effective?	<p>Different approaches to facilitate access to different pathways were used to match 1) specific needs of the target group, 2) specific market needs 3) existing policy and measures 4) other reasons</p> <p>Different approaches led to different outputs/outcomes</p>	<p>Quantitative and qualitative evidence on outputs/outcomes/ results of different approaches used (if data available)</p> <p>Qualitative evidence on types of approaches to facilitate access to different pathways</p> <p>Stakeholder views on which specific approaches to facilitate access to upskilling pathways proved to be most/ least effective</p>	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)									
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	T1		T2				T3	T4		
					Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation	
			resulting in different degrees of access to upskilling pathways											
		To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic affected Member States' approaches to facilitate access to different upskilling pathways?	The COVID-19 pandemic affected Member States approaches to upskilling pathways	Stakeholder views on the way and extent to which the pandemic impacted upskilling pathways approaches in Member States			x					x		
	To what extent have Member States identified priority target groups and economic sectors for the delivery of upskilling pathways?	What were the key priority target groups and economic sectors targeted by the Member States?	Member States identified specific target groups and sectors as focus for Upskilling Pathways measures	Qualitative evidence on priority target groups and key sectors targeted by Member States		x	x					x	x	
		Were the most in need and disadvantaged groups effectively targeted (e.g. persons with migrant/minority background, Roma, persons with disabilities, other vulnerable groups, etc.)?	The target groups identified and selected by Member States were those most in need of upskilling opportunities (i.e. those representing the largest share of low-skilled adults, those having less access to upskilling opportunities)	Quantitative evidence on estimated adult population with potential for upskilling by country (%) Stakeholder views on extent to which target groups identified by Member States were the most in need Share of stakeholders interviewed and surveyed that agree that target groups identified by Member States were those most in need	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
		Which methodologies/criteria were used by Member States for identifying the different target groups and relevant economic sectors? Which were most/least effective, and why?	Member States used specific methodologies/ criteria for the identification of target groups, some of these proving to be more effective than others in selecting the target group most in need.	Qualitative evidence from existing studies on methodologies used for identifying different target groups and economic sectors Stakeholder views on the methodologies used for identifying target groups and their effectiveness		x	x	x	x				x	x
		What were the key barriers and success factors in reaching	Key stakeholders are able to identify main barriers and	Number and share of survey respondents reporting specific success factors and barriers			x	x	x					x

					Methodological task (T)								
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	T1		T2				T3	T4	
					Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		different priority target groups and economic sectors?	success factors in reaching different priority target groups and economic sectors	in identifying and reaching priority target groups and sectors Stakeholder views on the effectiveness, barriers and success factors in identifying and reaching priority target groups and sectors									
		What were the outputs and results for specific groups in both qualitative and quantitative terms? What were the profiles of the target groups covered? How many participants were there from different priority groups, both at EU and MS level?	Activities implemented produced specific outputs, outcomes and results in line with the intervention logic, leading, ultimately, to higher employment rates of the specific target groups	Quantitative evidence (period 2016-2021) on: employment rates by target group and economic sector unemployment, NEET and inactivity rates by target group and economic sector Monitoring data (if available) of upskilling pathways measures on outputs, outcomes/results by target group, including data (if available) on length of employment after participation in the measure Number and share of survey respondents reporting that upskilling pathways are identifying and reaching the priority target groups/sectors Share of interviewees agreeing that upskilling pathways are identifying and reaching the priority target groups/sectors	x	x	x	x	x				x
	To what extent have Member States applied the three-step approach in the design of upskilling pathways? How effective was this approach?	What types of skills assessment have Member States put in place? How accessible were these skills assessments to the priority target groups? To what extent have these been used? Which stakeholders were involved in the need assessments? How useful have the skills assessments been?	Member States put in place specific types of skills assessment making them accessible to the priority target group. An increasing number of low-skilled adults in the target group accessed the assessment	Quantitative evidence on outputs/outcomes/ results of skills assessment exercises by target group (if data available) Qualitative evidence on existence, type and effectiveness of skills assessment approaches implemented in Member States Number and share of survey respondents within the priority groups reporting that skills assessment was accessible to them	x	x	x	x	x			x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
				Number and share of survey respondents reporting that skills assessments is accessible to the priority target group Stakeholder views on skills assessment methods implemented, their usage, perceived usefulness and level of accessibility to the target group.									
		To what extent have Member States tailored the learning offer to the needs identified by the skills assessment? To what extent have Member States tailored the learning offer to local, regional and national labour market needs?	Extent to which Member States have tailored the learning offer to the needs identified by the skills assessment taking into account local, regional and national labour market needs Member States introduced elements of customisation in the learning offers	Quantitative evidence on outputs/outcomes/results of measures implemented to tailor the learning offer to the needs identified by skills assessments and/or by target group at local/regional level (if data available) Qualitative evidence on the extent to which the learning offer was tailored to the needs of low-skilled adults (e.g. adapted to their education level, language, specific needs etc.) Number and share of survey respondents reporting that the learning offer was tailored to low-skilled adults needs Stakeholder views the extent to which local, regional and national labour market needs have been taken into account in the learning offer for low-skilled adults Examples of good and bad practices in tailoring the learning offer to target group needs and needs of local, regional and national labour market.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
		To what extent have Member States made learning offers flexible (e.g. units of learning outcomes, modules, learners' plans/records)? What are the		Qualitative evidence on the existence/type/effectiveness of the learning offer for low-skilled adults in Member States									

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National survey authorities	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		examples of good (and bad) practices?		Qualitative evidence on the flexibility of the learning offer to low-skilled adults (e.g. units of learning outcomes/modules etc.) Number and share of survey respondents reporting that the learning offer was flexible (E.g. included units of learning outcomes/modules etc.) Monitoring data (if available) on drop out rates from upskilling pathways initiatives (and any evolution over time).									
		Which different upskilling actions have been implemented for each of the target groups? Which actions were most/least effective for each group? To what extent have Member States included opportunities for language learning and preparation for training for migrants from third countries?	Member States have tailored the approach to upskilling actions depending on the target groups, some of these proving to be more effective than others Member States have implemented specific measures for migrants	Qualitative evidence on types of upskilling actions implemented for each target group Stakeholder views on the effectiveness of different upskilling actions Number and share of survey respondents reporting on the effectiveness of specific approaches targeting priority groups Stakeholder views on extent to which opportunities for language learning and preparation for training was offered to migrants.		X	X	X	X			X	X
		How were acquired skills recognised towards gaining a qualification? To what extent did upskilling pathways draw on validation arrangements already in place?	Member States implemented mechanisms to recognise acquired skills, drawing to some extent on existing validation arrangements	Quantitative evidence on outputs/outcomes/ results of skills recognition by target group (if data available) Qualitative evidence from existing studies on the existence of recognition and validation of learning outcomes Stakeholder views and qualitative evidence from existing studies on extent to which the recognition of acquired skills drew on existing validation arrangements	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
				Share and number of survey respondents and interviewees reporting that skills are effectively recognised and learning outcomes validated Share and number of survey respondents and interviewees reporting that the recognition of acquired skills drew on existing validation arrangements									
		How many initiatives adopted a pathway approach encompassing the three steps?	Member States implemented pathway approaches encompassing the three steps as prescribed in the Recommendation	Quantitative evidence on share of initiatives which adopted a pathway approach encompassing the three steps (if data available) Qualitative evidence and stakeholder views on wider public familiarity with the three steps of the upskilling pathways Qualitative evidence and stakeholder views on share of initiatives which adopted a pathway approach encompassing the three steps Number and share of survey respondents reporting that pathway approaches encompassing the three steps were implemented in their country	x	x	x	x				x	x
	To what extent have Member States delivered upskilling pathways in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, in particular social partners and local, regional and national economic actors?	Were relevant public, private and third sector actors in education and training, employment and other relevant policy areas effectively engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways? In what ways were they involved?	Degree to which Member States engaged relevant public, private and third sector actors in education and training, employment and other relevant policy areas in the delivery of upskilling pathways	Qualitative evidence of involvement of relevant stakeholders (public, private, third sector) in different stages of delivery and design of upskilling pathways Number and share of survey respondents reporting on the type of stakeholders (public, private, third sector) involved in different stages of delivery and design of upskilling pathways Stakeholder views on the type of stakeholders (public, private, third sector) involved in different stages of delivery and design of upskilling pathways		x	x	x		x	x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	T1		T2				T3	T4	
					Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		How did Member States ensure effective coordination of stakeholders at national and regional level to implement the Recommendation?	Member States put in place clear and effective coordination mechanisms at national and regional level to implement the Recommendation	Qualitative evidence of coordination methods of stakeholders at national and regional level to implement the Recommendation Stakeholder views on the coordination and involvement of relevant stakeholders in delivering upskilling pathways		x	x			x		x	
		Which coordination or engagement mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders have been most promising? Were there any examples of bad practice from which lessons can be learnt?	Some coordination mechanisms proved to be more effective than others to involve relevant actors	Stakeholder views on the effectiveness of the coordination and involvement of relevant stakeholder in delivering upskilling pathways Number and share of survey respondents reporting on the effectiveness of the coordination and involvement of relevant stakeholders in delivering upskilling pathways Examples of good and bad practices in coordinating and engaging with relevant stakeholders			x	x	x	x		x	x
	To what extent have Member States provided outreach and guidance services to support the implementation of upskilling pathways?	What type of outreach, guidance and support arrangements have been put in place?	Member States have implemented specific measures for outreach, guidance and support depending on the target group	Qualitative evidence on types of outreach, guidance and support arrangements implemented by target group Stakeholder views on outreach, guidance and support provided to learners, employers and staff engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways		x	x	x	x			x	x
		Which stakeholders have been involved in the design and delivery of outreach, guidance and support services?	Degree to which Member States engaged relevant specific stakeholders in the design and delivery of outreach and guidance services	Qualitative evidence of involvement of relevant stakeholders (public, private, third sector) in different stages of delivery and design of outreach, guidance and support services Number and share of survey respondents reporting on stakeholder involvement in outreach, guidance and support services Stakeholder views on whether all or some relevant stakeholders (public, private, third		x	x	x		x		x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National survey authorities	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
				sector) were involved in different stages of delivery and design of outreach guidance and support services									
		Which services have been most/least effective? Why?	Extent to which some outreach and guidance services proved to be more effective than others in overcoming barriers to participation and supporting low-skilled adults participating in upskilling opportunities	Quantitative evidence on number of learners and/or employers reached/supported by support services (if data available) Stakeholder views on most/least effective types of services and why Number and share of survey respondents reporting on results of implemented outreach and guidance support services Examples of good and bad practice on outreach and guidance support services	x		x	x	x		x	x	x
		To what extent have Member States provided outreach and guidance support to learners or indirect support to employers for upskilling their employees?	Degree to which Member States have implemented outreach and guidance support to learners or indirect support to employers for upskilling their employees	Quantitative evidence on number of learners and/or employers reached/supported by UP initiatives (if data available) Qualitative evidence and stakeholder views on outreach and guidance support provided to learners or indirect support provided to employers for upskilling their employees Number and share of survey respondents within the priority groups reporting they received guidance support or were targeted by outreach measures Number and share of survey respondents reporting that outreach and guidance support are provided	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
		To what extent has the support to learners or to employers for upskilling their employees	Degree to which support measures helped addressing obstacles to participation.	Quantitative evidence (period 2016-2021) on: total number of low-skilled adults participating in upskilling pathways' activities acquiring basic skills	x		x	x	x			x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National survey authorities	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		addressed obstacles to participation?	The number of low-skilled adults accessing upskilling opportunities has increased over time	<p>on number of learners and/or employers reached/supported by support services (if data available)</p> <p>Stakeholder views on the effectiveness of outreach and guidance services to address existing obstacles to participation</p> <p>Number and share of survey respondents within the priority groups agreeing that guidance support or outreach measures helped them participate in upskilling opportunities,</p> <p>Number and share of survey respondents reporting on implemented outreach and guidance support services</p>									
		To what extent have Member States provided initial training and continuous professional development to staff engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways (in particular teaching professionals)?	Degree to which Member States have provided initial training and continuous professional development to staff engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways	<p>Quantitative evidence on number of staff engaged in the delivery upskilling pathways that received training/professional development (if data available)</p> <p>Qualitative evidence of initial training and continuous professional development provided to staff engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways</p> <p>Share of stakeholders reporting on whether initial training and continuous professional development is provided to staff engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways and their effectiveness</p>	x	x	x	x			x		x
	To what extent has the Recommendation contributed to the observed changes in Member States?	To what extent has the Recommendation contributed to observed changes with regards to levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills among the target population?	Observed changes with regards to levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills among the target population can be at least partially attributed to the Recommendation. Without	<p>Quantitative evidence on share of adult population (25 to 64) with low skills by target groups (and non-target) in 2016 and 2020 (if data available).</p> <p>Number and share of survey respondents that reported the Recommendation contributed to</p>	x		x	x			x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	T1		T2				T3	T4	
					Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		In which principal ways has it contributed to the changes?	the Recommendation the changes would have been different in terms of scope, target group, stakeholders involved, etc	improving specific aspects of upskilling pathways in their country Stakeholder views on the Recommendation's contribution to the development of a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled adults Development of a 'performance story', validated through evidence from the range of data sources accessed, as part of the contribution analysis approach									
	To what extent has the implementation of the Recommendation been facilitated by support at EU level?	To what extent has the Commission, with the support of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training, been successful in following up on the implementation of the Recommendation, e.g. through exchanges such as mutual learning or coordination with other relevant EU level processes or policies dealing with employment, education or training?	The Commission has conducted follow up activities on the implementation of the Recommendation. These activities were appreciated and considered useful by national and EU level participants	Qualitative and quantitative evidence from monitoring and evaluation exercises on follow-up activities conducted by the Commission Stakeholder views on follow-up activities conducted by the Commission and their usefulness Number and share of survey respondents reporting to have taken part in follow-up activities conducted by the Commission	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
	To what extent have Member States evaluated and monitored measures related to upskilling pathways?	How, and to what degree, have Member States evaluated and monitored measures relating to the implementation of the Recommendation?	Member States have monitored and evaluated implemented measures in line with the Recommendation's requirements	Evidence from evaluation reports and monitoring data at national level Stakeholder views on approaches to and degree of evaluation and monitoring of upskilling pathways measures		x	x	x				x	
		To what degree have relevant stakeholders been involved in evaluating and monitoring the measures?	Extent to which all relevant stakeholders have been involved in monitoring and	Qualitative evidence of involvement of different stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation Stakeholder views on whether relevant stakeholders (public, private, third sector) were		x	x	x	x	x		x	

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
			evaluating the measures implemented	involved in evaluating and monitoring the measures Number and share of survey respondents that reported to have been involved in monitoring and evaluating measures implemented									
		What are the examples of good and bad practices of monitoring and evaluation upskilling pathways?	Some monitoring and evaluating practices proved to be more effective than others in involving all relevant stakeholders and providing a complete overview of results	Examples of good and bad practice of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms from qualitative evidence			x				x	x	
		To what degree have the results of the evaluations been used in informing the design and delivery of upskilling pathways?	Results of the evaluations have been used to inform the design and delivery of upskilling pathways improving the approach over time	Qualitative evidence on existing evaluations and the use of their results to inform the design/delivery of upskilling pathways Stakeholder views on the use of evaluation results to inform the design/delivery of upskilling pathways Number and share of survey respondents reporting monitoring and evaluation results have been used to inform design and delivery of upskilling pathways		x	x	x				x	
Efficiency	What were the costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation for the different stakeholders?	What were the costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation for the different stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, social partners, training/support service providers, employers, etc.) and for adult learners themselves?	Costs of implementation of the Recommendation for policymakers, social partners, training providers, employers and other stakeholders, and for adult learners themselves need to be described	Qualitative and quantitative evidence on costs of the implementation of the Recommendation from existing studies and mapping data sources Spending and composition of expenditure on ALMP by Member States Stakeholder views on the costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation	x	x	x					x	
		What were the costs associated with the	Costs of implementation of the Recommendation for	Qualitative and quantitative evidence on costs of the implementation of the Recommendation	x	x	x					x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		implementation of the Recommendation for stakeholders at various levels (national, regional, local)?	stakeholders at national, regional and local level need to be described	Stakeholder views on the costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation									
		To what extent have Member States encouraged participation in upskilling pathways through financial incentives?	Financial incentives were provided by Member States to encourage participation in upskilling pathways	Qualitative evidence on existence of financial incentives for participation in upskilling pathways		x	x	x				x	x
	What are the benefits associated with the implementation of the Recommendation for the different stakeholders?	What were the benefits associated with the implementation of the Recommendation for the different stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, social partners, training/support service providers, employers, etc.) and for adult learners themselves?	Degree of quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits of implementation of the Recommendation reported by different stakeholders and for adult learners need to be described	Qualitative and quantitative evidence on benefits of the implementation of the Recommendation from existing studies Stakeholder views on the benefits associated with the implementation of the Recommendation from the interviews and case studies Number of people reached and supported by measures adopted by Member States to implement the Recommendation (by target group and economic sector) from the mapping data sources	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
		What were the benefits associated with the implementation of the Recommendation for stakeholders at various levels (national, regional, local)?	Degree of quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits of implementation of the Recommendation reported by stakeholders at national, regional and local level need to be described	Level of achievement of immediate and longer-term results of the interventions at national level Qualitative and quantitative evidence on benefits of implementation of the Recommendation from existing studies Stakeholder views on the benefits associated with implementation of the Recommendation	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
	Which factors influenced efficiency and how?	What were the key factors which affected the efficiency of the implementation of the Recommendation? In what	Specific factors which affected the efficiency of implementation of the Recommendation.	Stakeholder views on the key factors affecting efficiency of implementation of the Recommendation, and the nature of their impact			x	x			x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		ways and to what degree did they have an influence on efficiency? To what extent were synergies identified between other initiatives on skills/adult learning?	Degree to which these factors influenced efficiency Degree to which synergies were identified between other initiatives on skills/adult learning?										
		Could benefits have been achieved at a lower cost?	Stakeholder perceptions of where efficiency can be improved	Stakeholder views and expert opinion on whether benefits could have been achieved more efficiently			x	x			x	x	
	To what extent are the costs of the actions proportionate to the benefits?	To what extent are the costs of the actions suggested by the Recommendation proportionate to the benefits brought to individuals, economy and society?	Extent to which the benefits of implementing upskilling pathways interventions on individuals, economy and society justify the costs they generate	Quantitative and qualitative evidence of significant differences between Member States in costs and benefits Stakeholder views, wider public perception and expert opinion on the proportionality of costs and benefits of the actions associated with the implementation of the Recommendation	x	x	x				x	x	x
	Are there significant differences in costs/benefits between the Member States?	Are there significant differences in costs and benefits for different Member States? If yes, what factors may have caused these differences?	Evaluative judgment of differences between Member States in costs and benefits of implementing the Recommendation Evaluative judgement of the factors causing differences between Member States in costs and benefits of implementing the Recommendation	Stakeholder views on the differences in costs and benefits for different Member States and factors which may explain them Expert opinion based on analysis of costs and benefits of different Member States			x				x	x	
	Which EU programmes have contributed to achieving the	Which EU programmes and funding sources (e.g. Erasmus+, ESF, EaSI, etc.) have contributed to achieving	Degree to which EU programmes and funding sources have been used to	Qualitative and quantitative evidence of EU funding sources and programmes which have contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation	x	x	x				x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
	objectives of the Recommendation?	the objectives of the Recommendation?	achieve the objectives of the Recommendation	Stakeholder views on the nature and extent of the contribution of different EU funds and programmes to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation									
		Was the use of funding from different EU programmes cost-effective? Which programmes provide the most/least cost-effective funding?	Evaluative judgement of relative cost-effectiveness of different EU programmes to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation	Stakeholder views on the cost-effectiveness of different EU funds and programmes to achieving the objectives (e.g. application costs vs funding received)			x				x	x	x
Relevance	To what extent are the objectives defined in the Recommendation still relevant?	To what extent are the objectives defined in the Recommendation still relevant to the current socio-economic context? Why?	Extent to which objectives defined in the Recommendation are still relevant to the current socio-economic contest	Share of adult population (25 to 64) with low skills in 2016 and 2020 by target group (and non-target) (if data available) Qualitative evidence from EU level studies on current and future market needs (e.g. Cedefop skills need forecast) Stakeholder and wider public views on the ongoing relevance of the objectives of the Recommendation	x	x	x				x	x	x
		To what extent are the objectives defined in the Recommendation still relevant to the current EU policy context? Why?	Extent to which objectives defined in the Recommendation are still relevant to the current EU policy context	Qualitative evidence from EU-level strategic documents (EU strategic agenda 2019-2024, European Pillar of Social Rights etc.) of current EU policy priorities Stakeholder views on the ongoing relevance of the objectives of the Recommendation to the EU policy context		x	x				x		
	To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to achieve the objectives?	Which measures are most relevant for achieving the objectives? Why?	Degree to which Skills assessments, Provision of tailored and flexible learning offers and Validation and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences are each relevant in achieving	Stakeholder views on the relevance of each measure to meet the objectives of the Recommendation Expert opinion based on analysis			x	x			x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	T1		T2				T3	T4	
					Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National survey authorities	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
			the objectives of the Recommendation										
		Do any measures become less relevant over time? Why?	Evaluative judgement of continued relevance of each measure to the socio-economic and policy context	Stakeholder views on the ongoing relevance of each measure defined in the Recommendation to meet its objectives Expert opinion of changes in relevance of measures, based on analysis			x	x			x	x	x
	To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to needs?	To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to the needs of the priority target groups? Why?	The needs of adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences can still be met by the measures defined in the Recommendation	Qualitative evidence on the current needs of adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences, and what measures work best in supporting them Stakeholder and wider public views on the ongoing relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the needs of adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences		x	x				x	x	x
		Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the needs of the target group? In what ways?	Evaluative judgement of the degree to which the pandemic impacted the relevance of measures to target groups	Stakeholder and wider public views on the ongoing relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to needs of adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences			x				x	x	x
		To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to the needs of economic sectors (e.g. tourism; textile, construction, mining etc.)? Why?	The needs of economic sectors in relation to the workforce can still be met by the measures defined in the Recommendation	Qualitative and quantitative evidence on the current needs of economic sectors in relation to the workforce Stakeholder and wider public views on the ongoing relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the current needs of economic sectors in relation to the workforce	x	x	x				x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
	To what extent are the target groups still relevant?	To what extent are the target groups addressed by the Recommendation still relevant?	Extent to which EU Member States continue to have high shares of adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences	Share of adult population (25 to 64) with low skills in 2020 by target group (and non-target) (if data available) Participation of low-skilled individuals in formal and non-formal education (if data available) Stakeholder and wider public views on the ongoing relevance of the target groups defined in the Recommendation and by Member States	x		x				x	x	x
		To what extent are the target groups defined by the Member States still relevant?	Extent to which target groups defined by Member States continue to need support to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence; and a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences Extent to which Member States adapted their defined target groups to ensure they were the most relevant	Share of adult population (25 to 64) with low skills by target group (and non-target) in 2020 (if data available) Stakeholder views on continued relevance of defined target groups Share of survey respondents that report that the target groups defined by Member States are still relevant Evidence of adaptation within Member State's planned Upskilling Pathways measures to respond to changed target group needs	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Coherence	To what extent has the Council Recommendation been coherent with relevant policies at national and regional level?	To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways, as defined in this Council Recommendation, been coherent with education and training, employment and social policies at national and regional level?	Extent to which objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways have been coherent with education and training, employment and social policies at national and regional level	Qualitative evidence and stakeholder views on complementarities with relevant national and regional policies Number and share of survey respondents reporting that the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways, as defined in this Council Recommendation, were coherent with policies at national and regional level		x	x	x			x	x	x
	To what extent has the Council	To what extent have the objectives, target groups and	Extent to which objectives, target groups and measures	Existence/non-existence of evidence of coherence from a coherence analysis of legal		x	x	x	x		x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
	Recommendation been coherent with other related EU level policies?	measures to implement upskilling pathways as defined in this Council Recommendation been coherent with other related EU level policies, in particular: Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning? Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning? Long-term Unemployment recommendation Youth Guarantee? New Skills Agenda for Europe? Other relevant EU policies? To what extent have Member States identified and used synergies between other related EU policies in implementation of the Recommendation	to implement upskilling pathways have been coherent with other related EU level policies Extent to which Member States identified and used synergies between other related EU policies in implementation of the Recommendation	texts underpinning the Recommendation and related EU policies Qualitative evidence of references to upskilling pathways in related EU policy documents/ evaluations/ reports Share of interviewees reporting that the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways, as defined in this Council Recommendation, were coherent with related EU policies Stakeholder views on the coherence of Recommendation in terms of objectives, target groups and measures with related EU policies National stakeholder views on the extent to which synergies with other related EU policies were identified and used in implementation of the Recommendation									
	To what extent has the Council Recommendation been coherent with other relevant EU funding mechanisms?	To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways as defined in this Council Recommendation been coherent with relevant EU funding mechanisms, in particular:	Extent to which objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways as defined in this Council Recommendation have been coherent with relevant EU funding mechanisms	Existence/non-existence of evidence of coherence from a coherence analysis of legal texts underpinning the Recommendation and relevant EU funds Qualitative and quantitative evidence of funding for upskilling pathways actions in monitoring or evaluation of other EU funds (ESF, E+, etc.) (e.g. type of funding mechanisms used, total amount granted to implement relevant measures)	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		The European Social Fund (ESF)? Erasmus+? The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)? The Technical Support Instrument? Other relevant EU funding mechanisms?		Stakeholder views on the coherence of Recommendation in terms of objectives, target groups and measures with relevant EU funding mechanisms Share of interviewees and survey respondents reporting that the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways, as defined in this Council Recommendation, were coherent with relevant EU funding mechanisms									
	To what extent has the Recommendation been internally coherent?	To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures of the Recommendation been internally coherent?	Extent to which objectives, target groups and measures of the Recommendation have been internally coherent	Stakeholder views on the internal coherence of Recommendation in terms of objectives, target groups and measures Expert opinion based on analysis of coherence within the Recommendation			X				X	X	
EU added value	What has been the added value of the Recommendation in promoting, informing and supporting a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled/qualified adults?	What has been the added value of the Council Recommendation in promoting, informing and supporting a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled/qualified adults, in terms of their objectives, design, target group and coordination and support measures?	The Recommendation contributed to the development of a common approach across EU MS and in some cases kick-started the development of upskilling pathways. Key stakeholders recognise that the Recommendation contributed to improve the quality and implementation of upskilling pathways (e.g. by encouraging the involvement of relevant stakeholders; by requiring monitoring and evaluation, etc).	Qualitative evidence on implemented strategies and measures following up on the Recommendation Stakeholder views on whether and how the Recommendation contributed to the development of a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled adults Share of stakeholders surveyed and interviewed that reported the Recommendation contributed to improve specific aspects of upskilling pathways in their country		X	X	X	X		X	X	X

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National survey authorities	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
		To what extent were upskilling pathways arrangements in Member States converging? Which key factors can explain any trends observed?	Before the Recommendation, Member States were adopting different upskilling measures for low-skilled adults and the Recommendation helped them to adopt more converging approaches	Qualitative evidence on potential convergence from policy mapping in 2016 Stakeholder views on the impact of the Recommendation on upskilling pathways in MS and whether it helped them converge Development of a 'performance story', validated through evidence from the range of data sources accessed, as part of the contribution analysis approach		x	x	x	x		x	x	x
	Could the objectives of the Recommendation have been achieved sufficiently by the Member States acting alone?	Could the objectives of the Recommendation have been achieved without the EU level intervention? If so, how? If not, why not?	Without the Recommendation, some Member States would have adopted different initiatives on upskilling for low-skilled people while others would have not focus on this area, leading overall to weaker impact in terms of access to upskilling opportunities, reduction of the number low-skilled adults, reduction of unemployment among the target population	Qualitative evidence of existing relevant policy in 2016 Share of interviewees and survey respondents reporting that the same objectives would not have been reached without the Recommendation Development of a 'performance story', validated through evidence from the range of data sources accessed, as part of the contribution analysis approach		x	x	x	x		x	x	x
		What were the benefits of EU level action in this area?	Without the Recommendation, Member States' initiatives on upskilling for low-skilled people would have been less convergent and different in terms of scope, target group, access to funding, visibility, stakeholders involvement, etc	Stakeholder views on impact of the Recommendation on national and regional upskilling initiatives Expert opinion based on analysis of evidence			x	x	x		x	x	x

					Methodological task (T)								
					T1		T2				T3	T4	
Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Potential judgement criteria	Indicators and sources of data	Quantitative mapping	Qualitative mapping	Interviews	National authorities survey	Beneficiaries survey	Online expert meeting	Online validation workshop	Case studies	Public consultation
	To what extent do the objectives and measures addressed by the Recommendation continue to require action/support at EU level?	To what degree do the objectives addressed by the Recommendation still require action and support at EU level? Why, and in what ways?	Without EU support it would not be possible to address the objectives set by the Recommendation	Stakeholder and wider public views on whether the objectives and measures suggested by the Recommendation still require action/support at EU level			x	x	x		x	x	x
		To what degree do the measures suggested by the Recommendation still require action and support at EU level? Why, and in what ways?	National stakeholders consider needed action and support at EU level for the correct implementation of measures suggested by the Recommendation	Stakeholder and wider public views on whether the objectives and measures suggested by the Recommendation still require action/support at EU level			x	x	x		x	x	x

Appendix 2: Stakeholder consultation strategy for the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults

Background information

The consultation strategy is part of the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults²⁸⁰. The Recommendation invites Member States to ensure that adults with low levels of skills and qualifications have access to ‘upskilling pathways’ which allow them to develop their skills (including basic skills i.e. numeracy literacy and digital skills), knowledge, and competences and potentially to progress towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4. These pathways should offer comprehensive range of support through three steps: (1) A skills assessment to identify existing skills and upskilling needs, (2) A tailor-made offer of learning and mentoring, and (3) The opportunity to have their acquired knowledge and skills validated and recognised towards gaining a qualification or getting a job.

The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the actions taken in response to the Recommendation by Member States and the European Commission, the Recommendation’s efficiency, coherence and EU added value, and whether the Recommendation is still relevant, taking into account the changing policy context. It will also look into the progress made towards raising the levels of literacy, numeracy and digital competence amongst low-qualified adults, experience gained and implications for the future. The evaluation will cover all 27 Member States.

The evaluation comes at a crucial time for the development of lifelong learning systems in EU Member States. The Covid-19 transition has accelerated changes already underway in the labour market and society as a result of the digital and green transitions and made it even more important for people to have access to effective up- and re-skilling opportunities throughout their life. The EU continues to be committed to this policy area, as seen in its European Skills Agenda of 2020²⁸¹, the European Pillar of Social Rights²⁸² as well as the European Pillar of Social Rights Actions Plan²⁸³. The evaluation conclusions and key learning points will play an important role in guiding the crucial development of EU and national policies related to the area covered by upskilling pathways in the future.

An Inter-Service Steering Group, comprising of representatives from various Directorates-Generals of the European Commission, has been established to oversee and provide expertise throughout the different stages of the evaluation.

The scope and content of the evaluation is described in its roadmap, which is available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12637-Improving-adults-basic-skills-Upskilling-pathways-recommendation%E2%80%9D-evaluation_en

Consultation scope and objectives

This stakeholder consultation strategy is an overarching document setting the plan for the consultation process to support the evaluation. In line with the Better Regulation Guidelines, the consultation strategy aims to reach out to the wide variety of stakeholders involved in policy making and in the implementation of the types of measures outlined in the Recommendation, in order to gather their views and opinions on the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value of the Recommendation and the progress made towards raising the levels of literacy, numeracy and digital

²⁸⁰ EUR-Lex - 32016H1224(01) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

²⁸¹ European Skills Agenda - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

²⁸² The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles | European Commission (europa.eu)

²⁸³ The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan | European Commission (europa.eu)

competence amongst low-qualified adults. The consultation strategy covers stakeholders in all EU27 Member States and aims to ensure that opinions of the general public, the participants in the upskilling pathways measures as well as the relevant stakeholders groups are well reflected. The consultation process will include a public consultation as well as targeted consultations. The results of the consultations will be reflected in further Commission reporting and planning. Mapping of stakeholders

In this part, the stakeholder groups who have a link to the upskilling pathways design, implementation or who were the target group of such scheme were determined.

The following stakeholder groups have been identified:

- 1. National and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies.** Examples include Ministries of Education and other public institutions/organisations active in this area. The aim of consulting them is to obtain direct insights into the oversight, implementation and funding of upskilling pathways initiatives to feed into all dimensions of the evaluation.
- 2. National and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for employment policies.** Examples include Ministries of Employment/Labour and Social Affairs and Public Employment Services (PES) to obtain direct insights into the oversight, implementation and funding of upskilling pathways initiatives to feed into all dimensions of the evaluation.
- 3. Other national and regional public authority or body responsible for adult learning/training,** vocational education and training, lifelong learning skills or employment policies, such as public agencies responsible for education and training that are not direct Ministries, ESF Managing Authorities (through e.g. the ESF Committee). The purpose of consulting them is to obtain direct insight into the implementation and funding of upskilling pathways initiatives to feed into all dimensions of the evaluation.
- 4. Social and economic partners at national and EU level,** including EU business organizations and trade unions the national/regional social partners and chambers of commerce and the EU level social partners. The aim of consulting these organisations is to understand the perspective of trade unions and employer representatives on all dimensions of the evaluation.
- 5. Education and training providers and representatives,** including training/education organisations implementing adult learning, teachers and trainers, and other staff involved in providing adult learning, such as adult careers development staff, support staff working with disadvantaged adults etc. The aim of consulting these organisations is to gather insight on the operational aspects of upskilling pathways initiatives as well as evidence of success and failure factors.
- 6. EU level institutions/ policymakers and other international organisations** responsible for education, training, and adult learning policies such as Cedefop, Eurofound, the European Training Foundation and OECD.
- 7. Organisations representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups** such as NGOs and networks at the EU and national level representing (among others) the low-skilled and other specific target groups of the upskilling pathways initiatives (migrants, people with disabilities, etc.). This group can also include e.g. libraries and local learning centres. The aim of consulting these bodies is to understand the perspective of organisations who are involved or linked to the upskilling pathways initiative to feed into all aspects of the evaluation.
- 8. Beneficiaries of upskilling pathways interventions:** low-skilled adults receiving support for acquiring a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence through measures implementing Upskilling Pathways. The aim of consulting them is to obtain direct insight on the

extent to which their own objectives for participation have been achieved. Evidence of success and failure factors that have played a role in this, and cannot be directly identified through the monitoring mechanisms, may also be obtained through this consultation.

9. **Potential beneficiaries of upskilling pathways interventions:** low-skilled adults not receiving/having not received support for acquiring a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence through measures implementing Upskilling Pathways. The aim of consulting them is to obtain their views on factors which may hinder or support their participation in upskilling pathways initiatives, to feed into all aspects of the evaluation.
10. **Research /academia focusing on low skilled adults, adult learning and skills policies,** such as think-tanks working on education, training and work force development, adult learning, employment, university departments focusing on labour market and consultancies, The aim of consulting them is obtaining further insights from the research perspective into all dimensions of the evaluation.
11. **Citizens** responding on their own behalf to enable interested individuals to provide their perspectives on the Recommendation.

Selection of consultation activities & their accessibility

The consultation format and questions of each consultation activity will be tailored to the various stakeholder groups identified in Section 3. In particular, consultation activities will aim to reach the wider population and organisations involved beyond the beneficiaries and the organisations representing the low-skilled adults and specific target groups. The questions will address the evaluation criteria set out in the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value). The consultation will be undertaken through the following activities:

- ▶ A 12-week, internet-based **public consultation** will be carried out in conformity with the Better Regulation Guidelines, as part of the evaluation process. The public consultation will be conducted using the EU Survey tool and will be available on the public consultation pages of the Commission. The questionnaire will be available in 23 official EU languages²⁸⁴ and responses will be accepted in 23 official EU languages. The consultation will give the opportunity to all interested stakeholders to provide their inputs into the topics covered by the evaluation. It will address aspects of the key evaluation criteria (i.e. effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added-value) and will provide an open channel through which any interested party or individual citizen can contribute their perspective. In particular, the public consultation will provide an important opportunity to gauge the views of a wider group of stakeholders beyond those that will be targeted in the remaining consultation activities. The public consultation will include a possibility to submit a position paper.
 - ▶ **Targeted interviews with EU and national level stakeholders** will be carried out during the implementation of the evaluation. The interviews will focus on two types of stakeholders:
12. **EU level stakeholders** directly and indirectly linked to the education, training, and adult learning policy with a particular focus on EU level representative organisations, including relevant EU level social and economic partners. These will include, among others, policy makers from the European Commission, CEDEFOP, the EU level social partner organisations including Business Europe, SME United and the European Trade Union Confederation/European Trade Union Committee for Education, and relevant EU civil society organisations, such as the Lifelong Learning Platform, the European Association for the Education of Adults and the European Basic Skills Network.

²⁸⁴ All with the exception of Irish.

13. **National (and/or sub-national) level stakeholders** responsible for adult learning/training/VET/skills policies, primarily Ministries of employment/social affairs and Ministries of education, as well as other stakeholders such as national agencies responsible for education and training, adult learning or VET that are not direct Ministries.
- ▶ Stakeholder interviews will be also carried out in the context of individual **case studies**, which will provide a comprehensive assessment that considers the contexts in which Member States operationalised the implementation of the Council Recommendation. These interviews will focus principally on consulting representatives involved in the practical implementation, operations, and monitoring of national approaches to the implementation of the Council Recommendation.
 - ▶ **Two internet-based surveys.** The first survey will target national and regional authorities in charge at operational level of upskilling initiatives, the second survey will reach out to beneficiaries, including organisations and stakeholders involved in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways (initial beneficiaries), and adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and competences and organisations representing them (end-beneficiaries).
 - ▶ **Online expert meeting** with selected representatives of national authorities with overall responsibility for the implementation of upskilling pathways, and those in charge of implementing upskilling pathways on the ground. The expert meeting will enable these stakeholders to share their views on key topics related to all aspects of the evaluation, provide examples of approaches, practices and lessons learnt on the implementation of upskilling pathways and give their views on enablers, challenges and priorities for the future in relation to upskilling pathways at national and EU level.
 - ▶ **Online validation workshop** with representatives of national authorities, in charge of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, including representatives from businesses/employers, social partners, EU level organisations and experts. The workshop participants will be encouraged to provide their feedback on the draft conclusions and recommendations of the study, validate the analysis undertaken in the study, and share their views on the policy learnings of the evaluation.
 - ▶ **Other targeted consultations**, including e.g. exchange of views with the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT) and the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT), exchange of views with the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network), consultation of the National coordinators for adult learning and the EQF advisory group²⁸⁵.

A synopsis consultation report, which summarises the activities, methods and findings of the entire consultation task, will be produced, in line with the requirements of the Better Regulation and guidelines and toolbox. The document will be an annex to the Staff Working Document evaluation report. The headline findings will be provided for each consultation activity, and the main overall findings will be set out in line with the key evaluation criteria. A factual report presenting the main features and results from the public consultation will be produced.

²⁸⁵ The EQF advisory group as responsible also for the 2012 Council Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Table A1_14 Overview of consultation activities by stakeholder groups and indicative timing

Stakeholder	Public consultation	Interviews	Surveys	Expert meeting	Validation workshop	Other consultations targeted e.g. ACVT/DGVT, Network, National Coordinators for AL, EQF advisory group
	Q4 2021 - Q1 2022	Q4 2021 - Q3 2022	Q4 2021 - Q1 2022	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q1 2022 - Q2 2022
1. Ministries and institutions responsible for education and training policy	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Ministries and institutions responsible for employment policies	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Other relevant public institutions responsible for adult learning, training, VET and skills policies	X	X	X		X	X
4. Social and economic partners at national and EU level	X	X	X		X	X
5. Education and training providers	X	X				X
6. EU level institutions/ policymakers	X	X	X			X
7. Organisations representing low-skilled adults and target groups	X	X	X			
8. Beneficiaries	X	X	X			
9. Research /academia and other international organisations	X	X			X	
10. Citizens	X					

Consultation webpage & communication activities

The public consultation will be accessible in November 2021 at the “Have your say” consultations webpage. The public consultation will run in parallel to other targeted stakeholder consultations. The consultations will be actively promoted by the Commission through the Europa website and social media. The synopsis consultation report and the public consultation factual report will be made publicly available.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for the public consultation

Introduction

The European Commission invites you to take part in a public consultation aimed at gathering views on the 2016 **Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New opportunities for Adults**, an EU initiative to help low-skilled adults develop new skills through learning opportunities.

The Recommendation invites Member States to ensure that adults with low levels of skills and qualifications have access to ‘upskilling pathways’ which allow them to develop their skills (including basic skills i.e. numeracy, literacy and digital skills), knowledge, and competences and potentially to progress towards a qualification. These pathways should offer comprehensive range of support through three steps: (1) A skills assessment to identify existing skills and upskilling needs, (2) A tailor-made offer of learning and mentoring, and (3) The opportunity to have their acquired knowledge and skills validated and recognised towards gaining a qualification or getting a job.

For the purposes of this consultation, ‘**adult learning measures**’ refer to formal, non-formal and informal learning activities for adults with a low level of skills undertaken by adults (above the age of 25) after leaving initial education and training.

This public consultation will feed into the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways. The evaluation will assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value of the implementation of the Recommendation. It will assess the progress made towards raising the levels of literacy, numeracy and digital competence amongst low-qualified adults, experience gained and implications for the future. The responses will be published by the European Commission on the consultation website after the end of the consultation period.

All citizens, organisations and public authorities are encouraged to respond to this consultation. In particular, the consultation seeks to gather views from civil society organisations working on education and training; social partners, employment and social services providers; public authorities at national, regional and local levels, research, academia and individual citizens, in their personal or professional capacity.

Please submit your responses via this online questionnaire. You may also add position papers. Thank you in advance for your support in this consultation process.

General information about respondents

About you section (standard text)

- A. *Language of my contribution: [DROP DOWN LIST OF EU LANGUAGES]
B. *I’m giving my contribution as: [DROP DOWN LIST OF:]

- Academic/ research institution
- Business association
- Company/business organisation
- Consumer organisation
- EU citizen

- Environmental organisations
 - Non-EU citizen
 - Non-governmental organisations (NGO)
 - Public authority
 - Trade Union
 - Other
- C. *First Name *[Free text – maximum 100 characters]*
- D. *Surname *[Free text – maximum 100 characters]*
- E. *Email *[Free text – maximum 100 characters]*
- F. **[FOR ALL RESPONDENTS EXCEPT FOR EU AND NON-EU CITIZEN]** Organisation name *[Free text – maximum 255 characters]*
- G. **[FOR ALL RESPONDENTS EXCEPT FOR EU AND NON-EU CITIZEN]** Organisation size [DROP DOWN MENU OF]:
- Micro (1-9 employees)
 - Small (10-49 employees)
 - Medium (50 -249 employees)
 - Large (250 or more)
- H. **[FOR ALL RESPONDENTS EXCEPT FOR EU AND NON-EU CITIZEN]** Transparency register number. *[Free text – maximum 255 characters]*. Check if your organisation is on the transparency register. It's a voluntary database for organisations seeking to influence EU decision-making.
- I. *Country of origin: Please add your country of origin or that of your organisation **[DROP DOWN LIST OF COUNTRIES]**
- J. *The Commission will publish all contributions to this public consultation. You can choose whether you would prefer to have your details published or to remain anonymous when your contribution is published. For the purpose of transparency, the type of respondent (for example, “individual, ‘private enterprise’) country of origin, organisation name and size, and its transparency register number, are always published. Your e-mail address will never be published. Opt in to select the privacy option that best suits you. Privacy options default based on the type of respondent selected.

[DISPLAY IF RESPONDENT IS EU CITIZEN OR NON-EU CITIZEN]

- Anonymous: The type of respondent that you responded to this consultation as, your country of origin and your contribution will be published as received. Your name will not be published. Please do not include any personal data in the contribution itself.
- Public: Your name, the type of respondent that you responded to this consultation as, your country of origin and your contribution will be published.

[DISPLAY IF RESPONDENT IS ORGANISATION]

- Anonymous: Only organisation details are published: The type of respondent that you responded to this consultation as, the name of the organisation on whose behalf you reply as well as its transparency number, its size, its country of origin and your contribution will be published as received. Your name will not be published. Please do not include any personal data in the contribution itself if you want to remain anonymous.
- Public: Organisation details and respondent details are published: The type of respondent that you responded to this consultation as, the name of the organisation on whose behalf you reply as well as its transparency number, its size, its country of origin and your contribution will be published. Your name will also be published.
- *I agree with the [personal data protection provisions](#)

QUESTIONS FOR ROUTING THE RESPONDENTS

K. [FOR RESPONDENTS FROM AN ORGANISATION] I am responding to this questionnaire in reference to:

- My country of origin
- The EU as a whole
- Other. Please specify [Free text – maximum 30 characters]

L. Can you specify further the capacity in which you are replying to this questionnaire:

1. Adult learner (current or recent) (within the last 4 years participant in an adult learning measure related to this evaluation) [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND II]
 - [IF SELECTED, DROPDOWN MENU]
 - Employed
 - Unemployed
 - In full-time training or education
 - Other [Free text – maximum 100 characters]
2. Adult not currently participating in an adult learning measure related to this evaluation but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND II]
 - [IF SELECTED, DROPDOWN MENU]
 - Employed
 - Unemployed
 - Other [Free text – maximum 100 characters]
 - Citizen [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
3. Ministry or other Government body responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
 - [IF SELECTED, DROPDOWN MENU]
 - national level
 - regional level
4. Other public authority or body involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
 - [IF SELECTED, DROPDOWN MENU]

- national level
- regional level
- 5. EU level institution or policymaker [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
- 6. Social partner [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
 - [IF SELECTED, DROPDOWN MENU]
 - trade union
 - employer organisation
 - other
- 7. Organisation representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups (NGOs, networks or platforms) [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
- 8. Education and training provider [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
- 9. Research or academic organisation [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
- 10. International organisation [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
- 11. Private enterprise [IF CHECKED, GO TO STRAND I]
 - [IF SELECTED, DROPDOWN MENU]
 - Aerospace and Defence
 - Agri-Food
 - Construction
 - Creative and Cultural industries
 - Digital
 - Electronics
 - Energy-intensive industries
 - Financial services
 - Health
 - Mobility-Transport-Automotive
 - Proximity, Social Economy and Civil Security
 - Renewable Energy
 - Retail
 - Textiles
 - Tourism
 - Other [Free text – maximum 30 characters]
 - Other [Free text – maximum 100 characters]

STRAND I

IF L=3-13 [i.e. all organisations + citizen]

Q1. To what extent have the following features of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways been implemented in your country/the EU?

Features	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all	To a small extent	To a fairly large extent	To a very large extent	Do not know/ Not applicable
Skills assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Provision of a tailored offer	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Provision of a flexible offer	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Validation and recognition of skills acquired	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q2. **[DISPLAY IF TO A SMALL EXTENT, TO A FAIRLY LARGE EXTENT, OR TO A VERY LARGE EXTENT SELECTED IN Q1 FOR ANY FEATURE]**. How effective have these features been in helping low-skilled adults take part in adult learning measures?

Features	1	2	3	4	5
	Not effective at all	Mostly ineffective	Mostly effective	Very effective	Do not know/Not applicable
Skills assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Provision of a tailored offer	<input type="checkbox"/>				

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Provision of a flexible offer	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Validation and recognition of skills acquired	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning	<input type="checkbox"/>				

- Please feel free to explain your response, and, to the extent possible, provide an example [Free text - maximum 500 characters]

Q3. To what extent have the following target groups in your country/the EU been able to better access adult learning measures (as specified in the previous question) over the past five years?

Target groups	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all	To a small extent	To a fairly large extent	To a very large extent	Do not know/ Not applicable
Adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Long-term unemployed adults	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Older workers (above 55-years)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Economically inactive people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Nationals with a migrant background	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Third country nationals	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Persons with disabilities					
Other target group specified by your Member State. Please specify [free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q4. Have the skills needs in specific economic sectors (e.g. agriculture, construction, etc.) been targeted in the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways in your Member State/the EU?

- Yes
- No

[IF YES]. Could you state which sectors, and, if possible, provide an example of how they were targeted?

Q5. To what extent have the following features of adult learning measures in the past five years been delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders?

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a very large extent	5 Do not know
Skills assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision of a tailored offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision of a flexible offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Validation and recognition of skills acquired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[IF ANY OF 2-4 SELECTED IN Q5] Could you please specify which stakeholders were consulted and, to the extent possible, provide an example *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q6. To what extent have outreach and guidance services been provided to help implement adult learning measures in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all provided	Provided to a small extent	Provided to a fairly large extent	Provided to a very large extent	Do not know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please feel free to explain your answer and, to the extent possible, provide an example
[Free text - maximum 500 characters]

Q7. In your opinion, to what extent have adult learning measures in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways contributed to the following benefits in your country/the EU?

Benefits		1	2	3	4	5
		They have not contributed at all	They have contributed to a small extent	They have contributed to a fairly large extent	They have contributed to a very large extent	Do not know
For the individual	Gaining a qualification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gaining access to further education or training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gaining access to employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gaining a promotion in current workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gaining more confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gaining improved wellbeing and health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gaining improved participation in society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For employers	Fewer skills shortages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Additional funding for training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	More motivated staff	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Higher levels of productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>				
For society as a whole	(Increased) income tax and VAT from (increased) wages and consumer spending	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Lowered costs for welfare payments	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Supporting the skills needed for green and digital transition					
	Improving cohesion of society and equal opportunities					
	Reducing skills mismatches in the labour market					
Other benefits. Please specify	<i>[free text = 30 characters]</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q8. In your opinion, to what extent has implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways incurred the following costs?

	1	2	3	4	5
	It has not incurred these costs at all	It has incurred these costs to a small extent	It has incurred these costs to a fairly large extent	It has incurred these costs to a very large extent	Do not know
Costs of designing, delivering, and monitoring measures (including staff and administrative costs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Infrastructure costs to deliver measures (e.g. computers, network infrastructure, renting of classrooms)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Costs to raise awareness measures (advertising, special events etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Financial incentives paid to learners to encourage take-up of measures	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Financial incentives paid to employers to upskill employees	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Financial incentives paid to education providers					
Other [please specify]	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q9. Are you familiar with any of the following EU funding programmes?

EU funding programme	Y/N
European Social Fund	Y/N
Employment and Social Innovation Programme	Y/N
Erasmus +	Y/N
Technical Support Instrument	Y/N
Horizon Europe	Y/N
Digital Europe	Y/N
European Regional Development Fund	Y/N
Just Transition Fund	Y/N
European Globalisation Fund	Y/N
Invest EU	Y/N
The Recovery and Resilience Facility	Y/N
Other. Please specify <i>[free text = 30 characters]</i>	Y/N

Q10. **[DISPLAY IF YES TO ANY OF THE OPTIONS IN Q9]** To what extent have the following EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objective of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills?

EU funding programme	1 They have not contributed at all	2 They have contributed to a small extent	3 They have contributed to a fairly large extent	4 They have contributed to a very large extent	5 Do not know
European Social Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Employment and Social Innovation Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Erasmus +	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Technical Support Instrument	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Horizon Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Digital Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>				
European Regional Development Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Just Transition Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>				
European Globalization Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Invest EU	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Recovery and Resilience Facility	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other. Please specify [free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q11. To what extent is it still relevant today to provide learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults in the EU?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all relevant	Somewhat irrelevant	Somewhat relevant	Very relevant	Do not know
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please feel free to explain your response *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q12. To what extent are the target groups addressed in the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways still relevant today?

Target groups	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all relevant	Somewhat irrelevant	Somewhat relevant	Very relevant	Do not know
Adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Long-term unemployed adults	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Older workers (above 55 years)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Economically inactive people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Third country nationals	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Nationals with a migrant background	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Persons with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other target group specified by your Member State. Please specify [free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please feel free to explain your response *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q13. To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways complemented and created synergies with the following EU policies on skills?

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a very large extent	5 Do not know
European Pillar of Social Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2020 European Skills Agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
European Agenda for Adult Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on the long-term unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please feel free to explain your response and provide any examples *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q14. To what extent have there been overlaps between the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and the following EU policies on skills?

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a very large extent	5 Do not know
European Pillar of Social Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2020 European Skills Agenda	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
European Agenda for Adult Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on the long-term unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Please feel free to explain your response and provide any examples *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q15. To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways been in line with education and training, and employment and social policies in your country/the EU?

1 Not at all in line	2 In line to a small extent	3 In line to a fairly large extent	4 In line to a very large extent	5 Do not know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Please feel free to explain your response and provide any examples *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q16. To what extent has the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and EU action/support led to improved use and quality of the following features of adult learning measures as defined by the Recommendation, which would not have happened if Member States had acted alone?

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	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a very large extent	5 Do not know
Skills assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision of a tailored offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision of a flexible offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Validation and recognition of skills acquired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Please feel free to explain your response and provide any examples *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q17. To what extent is EU policy guidance still required to provide opportunities for low-skilled adults to develop their skills?

1 Not at all required	2 Required to a small extent	3 Required to a fairly large extent	4 Required to a very large extent	5 Do not know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Please feel free to explain your response *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

- Would you like to add a position paper or further evidence to support your response? [Option to Upload document]

STRAND II

If L=1 i.e. Adult learner (current or recent (within the last 4 years participant in an adult learning measure)'

If L=2 i.e. 'Adult not currently participating in an adult learning measure but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications'

Q18. Do you think that you have better access to adult learning measures, which allow you to develop your skills, knowledge, and competences, today than in the past?

1	2	3	4	5
No, not at all	Yes, a little	Yes, quite a lot	Yes, a lot more	Do not know
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please feel free to explain your response *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q19. To what extent do you think that it is important today to support low-skilled adults to gain access to skills in your country?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all important	Somewhat important	Quite important	Very important	Do not know
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please explain your response *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q20. **[DISPLAY IF L=1]** In the adult learning measure in which you participated, were you offered the following services? If so, how useful did you find them?

	1 Not at all useful	2 Slightly useful	3 Quite useful	4 Very useful	5 I was not offered this	6 I do not know if I was offered this
An assessment of your existing skills and skills needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Validation and recognition of the skills you gained (e.g. with a certificate or other form of validation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A learning offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance, support or mentoring during your participation in the adult learning measure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other measures to overcome potential obstacles to participation in the programme (e.g. childcare, financial support, paid educational leave, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q21. **[DISPLAY IF ANSWER TO L=1]** How useful overall did you find the adult learning measure in which you participated?

1 Not at all useful	2 Slightly useful	3 Quite useful	4 Very useful	5 Do not know
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please explain your response *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*

Q.21 **[DISPLAY IF L=1]** Were there any financial costs for you of participating in the adult learning measure?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- [IF YES] What sort of costs did you incur? Please tick all that apply:
 - Travel expenses
 - Course supplies (e.g. textbooks)
 - Loss of income from work
 - Childcare costs
 - Other: please specify *[free text = 30 characters]*

Q.22 **[DISPLAY IF L=1]** What are the main benefits you have got from participating in an adult learning measure? Please tick the most important benefits (up to five)

- Gaining a recognised qualification
- Gaining access to further education or training
- Gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- Gaining a job
- Changing career
- Gaining a promotion in my current workplace
- Gaining a higher paid job
- Developing my personal portfolio of skills and competences
- Gaining more confidence
- Being able to better support my children / family / community in their learning
- Other: please specify *[free text = 100 characters]*

Q24. **[DISPLAY IF ANSWER TO L=2]** How useful do you think the services below would be for you in improving your skills?

Services	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all useful	Somewhat useful	Quite useful	Very useful	Do not know
Support to assess your skills needs	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Support in getting a learning offer tailored to your needs	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Support to validate and formally recognise the skills you already have / you will acquire	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Awareness-raising on the employment, further learning opportunities following the training	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Guidance and/or mentoring support during the training	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Support to address potential obstacles to your participation in training (e.g. childcare, financial support)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Q25. [DISPLAY IF L=2] What are the main benefits you hope you would get from participating in an adult learning measure? Please tick the most important benefits (up to five)

- Gaining a recognised qualification
- Gaining access to further education or training
- Gaining a job
- Changing career
- Gaining a promotion in my current workplace
- Gaining a higher paid job
- Developing my personal portfolio of skills and competences
- Gaining more confidence
- Being able to better support my children / family / community in their learning
- Other: please specify *[free text = 100 characters]*

Q26. [DISPLAY IF L=2] In your opinion, to what extent are the target groups addressed in the Upskilling Pathways recommendation of 2016 still relevant today?

Target groups	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all relevant	Somewhat irrelevant	Somewhat relevant	Very relevant	Do not know
Adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Long-term unemployed adults	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Older workers (above 55 years)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Economically inactive people	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Third country nationals	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Nationals with a migrant background	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Persons with disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other target group specified by your Member State. Please specify [free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				

- Please feel free to explain your response *[Free text - maximum 500 characters]*
- Would you like to add a position paper or further evidence to support your response? [Option to Upload document]

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations

Introduction

This online survey aims to gather the views of national and regional authorities in charge of implementing the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways²⁸⁶ and of those organisations and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Recommendation. The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways is an EU initiative to help low-skilled adults develop new skills through learning opportunities.

'Upskilling Pathways' are a set of adult learning measures to help adult learners 1) assess their learning needs, 2) access tailored learning opportunities, 3) have their experience and competences validated so that they can obtain a qualification. This should be accompanied by guidance, outreach and relevant education staff training. For the purposes of this consultation 'adult learning measures' refer to formal, non-formal and informal learning activities for adults with a low level of skills undertaken by adults (above the age of 25) after leaving initial education and training.

Your feedback will help us evaluate the measures, and design more effective EU and national learning opportunities for adults.

The survey combines multiple choice questions (with drop-down menus) and open questions, where you can write longer answers, if you wish. The survey should take around 45 minutes to complete. All your responses will be anonymous and all data collected will be stored and used in line with EU data protection regulations. All information collected in the survey will be stored on a computer of the external contractor, Ecorys, acting as data processor, who guarantees the data protection and confidentiality required by the Regulation (EC) 45/2001.

Screening questions

1. Please indicate in which country/region your organisation is active: [open text]
2. Please indicate whether your organisation is:
 - A. Responsible for coordinating the work of other organisations and directing the overall implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways.
 - B. Involved in the direct implementation of Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, by providing skills assessment, tailored learning, validation or recognition of skills, outreach or support measures, etc.
3. [if a to Q2] Please indicate the type of organisation you represent.
 - A. Ministry or other Government body responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies at national level
 - B. Regional authority responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies

²⁸⁶ EUR-Lex - 32016H1224(01) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

- C. Local authority responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies
- D. Other public authority or body involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning or skills policies. Please specify

4. [if b to Q2] Please indicate the type of organisation you represent:

- A. Regional authorities
- B. Local authorities
- C. Public employment services
- D. Employers' organisations
- E. Trade unions/ Employees' organisations
- F. Sectorial skills operators
- G. Education and training providers and representatives, public and private schools
- H. Stakeholders from civil society in the fields of education and training
- I. Community centres
- J. Social enterprises
- K. Private bodies
- L. Other, please specify:

5. [if b to Q2] Please indicate which feature(s) of adult learning measures you are involved in: [multiple options]

- A. Skills assessment
- B. Provision of a tailored offer
- C. Provision of a flexible offer
- D. Validation and recognition of skills acquired
- E. Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits
- F. Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression
- G. Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)
- H. Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning
- I. Monitoring and evaluation
- J. Overview of approaches

6. To what extent do you think that:

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
adults with low levels of skills have had greater access to adult learning measures over the past five years than before?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[if a to Q2] measures established to facilitate access were	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

implemented due to the 2016 Recommendation?					
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7. Please explain your answer and provide examples

Key priority groups & economic sectors in the country

8. What were the key priority groups targeted by your country/region when setting up adult learning measures?

- ▷ Adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital)
- ▷ Adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork)
- ▷ Long-term unemployed adults
- ▷ Older workers (above 55)
- ▷ Economically inactive people
- ▷ Third country nationals
- ▷ Persons with disabilities
- ▷ Nationals with a migrant background
- ▷ Other target group specified by your Member State. Please specify [free text = 30 characters]
- ▷ No priority target group has been defined

9. [if not No priority target group has been defined] To what extent were these priority groups the most in need/ disadvantaged?

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork)					
Long-term unemployed adults					
Older workers (above 55)					
Economically inactive people					
Third country nationals					
Persons with disabilities					

Nationals with a migrant background					
Other target group specified by your Member State. Please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>				

10. In your opinion, are there (other) specific priority groups that should have been targeted?

11. To what extent are individuals within the target groups in your country/region aware of adult learning measures? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]

12. To what extent do the following obstacles and success factors have an impact on reaching out to these specific priority target groups?

		1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Obstacles	Communication/language issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lack of trust toward the system					
	Lack of awareness of upskilling opportunities					
	Other obstacles[please specify]					
Success factors	Effective communication of the benefits of upskilling pathways					
	Effective communication of procedures involved in participation					
	Targeted communication campaigns					
	Sufficient financial resources					
	Sufficient human resources					
	Cooperation with relevant stakeholders					
	Other [please specify]					

13. [if a to Q2] Are there statistics or evaluations on the results achieved for specific groups that participated in adult learning measures? [Y/N]

14. [If yes] Please provide link/upload relevant documents or send them to email

15. What were the key economic sectors targeted by your country/region when setting up adult learning measures?

- ▷ Aerospace and Defence
- ▷ Agri-Food
- ▷ Construction
- ▷ Creative and Cultural industries
- ▷ Digital
- ▷ Electronics
- ▷ Energy-intensive industries
- ▷ Financial services
- ▷ Health
- ▷ Mobility-Transport-Automotive
- ▷ Proximity, Social Economy and Civil Security
- ▷ Renewable Energy
- ▷ Retail
- ▷ Textiles
- ▷ Tourism
- ▷ Other [Free text – maximum 30 characters]
- ▷ No specific sectors were targeted

16. [if not No specific sectors were targeted]To what extent were these economic sectors the most in need?

[display only selected options]

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Aerospace and Defence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Food					
Construction					
Creative and Cultural industries					
Digital					
Electronics					

Energy-intensive industries					
Financial services					
Health					
Mobility-Transport-Automotive					
Proximity, Social Economy and Civil Security					
Renewable Energy					
Retail					
Textiles					
Tourism					
Other [Free text – maximum 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				

17. Are there (other) specific economic sectors that should have been targeted?

[if a to Q2] Design of adult learning measures

18. [if a to Q2] Please indicate the implementation status in your region/country for each feature of adult learning measures:

	Implemented in 2016 or before	Reformed after 2016	Implemented after 2016	Not implemented
Skills assessment				
Provision of a tailored offer				
Provision of a flexible offer				
Validation and recognition of skills acquired				
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits				
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression				
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)				
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning				
Monitoring and evaluation				

19. [If any reformed/implemented after 2016] Were these measures implemented/reformed in response to the 2016 Recommendation?

A. List of selected options from above (yes/no/I don't know)

[if b to Q2 and a to Q5] or [if a to Q2 and a to Q18 is not 'Not implemented']

Skills assessment

20.

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
To what extent are skills assessment measures accessible to the priority target groups in your country/region?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent are skills assessment measures used by the priority target groups in your country/region?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. [if b to Q2] Would you be able to provide an example of skills assessment approaches that have proven most/ least effective and why?

Learning offer

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
[if b to Q2 and b or c to Q5] or [if a to Q2 and b or c to Q18 is not 'Not implemented'] To what extent are learning offers tailored to the needs of the priority target groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
[if b to Q2 and b or c to Q5] or [if a to Q2 and b or c to Q18 is not 'Not implemented'] To what extent are local, regional and national labour market needs taken into account to tailor the learning offer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<p>[if b to Q2 and b or c to Q5] or [if a to Q2 and b or c to Q18 is not 'Not implemented']</p> <p>To what extent are learning offers flexible?</p>	□	□	□	□	□
<p>To what extent have opportunities for language learning and preparation for training for migrants from third countries been introduced in your country/region as part of adult learning measures?</p>	□	□	□	□	□

22. [if b to Q2] Would you be able to provide an example of an approach to tailoring the learning offer to the needs of the labour market or the specific target group that has proven most/ least effective and why?

23. [if b to Q2] Would you be able to provide an example of approaches to flexible learning offer that has proven most/ least effective and why?

[if b to Q2 and d to Q5] or [if a to Q2 and d to Q18 is not 'Not implemented']

Prior learning and recognition

24. To what extent are acquired skills recognised towards gaining a qualification at national level? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]

25. [if b to Q2] Would you be able to provide an example of an approach to prior learning recognition that has proven most/ least effective and why?

[if b to Q2 and g to Q5] or [if a to Q2 and g to Q18 is not 'Not implemented']

Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning

26. [if b to Q2] To what extent have measures been implemented to address obstacles to participation in learning? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]

[If to a fairly large extent or to a great extent] Or [if a to Q2 and g to Q18 is not 'Not implemented']

27. To what extent have these measures been tailored to specific priority groups?

28. To what extent were these measures effective?

29. [if b to Q2] Can you please provide examples of most and/or least effective support measures?

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders

30. [if a to Q2] Please select all stakeholders that have been involved in the different features of adult learning measures in your country/region:

	Target group identification	Skills assessment	Provision of a tailored offer	Provision of a flexible offer	Validation and recognition of skills acquired	Motivation and outreach measures to raise	Guidance and/or mentoring to support	Support measures to address obstacles to	Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning	Monitoring and evaluation
VET providers										
Public Employment Services										
Employers' organisations										
Trade union										
Sector organisations										
Large companies										
SMEs										
Civil society organisations										
Other										

31. To what extent was training and continuous professional development provided to staff involved in delivering adult learning measures (e.g. teaching professionals)? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]
32. [If to a fairly large extent or to a great extent and if b to Q2]. To what extent were these opportunities effective?

Effectiveness of the 2016 Recommendation

33. [if a to Q2] To what extent has the 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways contributed to changes in levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills among the target population in your country? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]
34. What contextual factors (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, refugee crisis etc.) have influenced the effectiveness of the implementation of the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways in your country/region? Please provide examples of such factors.
35. In your opinion, to what extent have adult learning measures in your country introduced in the last 5 years contributed to the following benefits?

Benefits	1	2	3	4	5
	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Mostly achieved	Totally achieved	Do not know

STUDY SUPPORTING THE EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON UPSKILLING PATHWAYS:
NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

For the individual	Gaining a qualification	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Gaining access to further education or training	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Gaining access to employment	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Gaining a promotion in current workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Gaining more confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Gaining improved wellbeing and health	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Gaining improved participation in society	<input type="checkbox"/>				
For employers	Fewer skills shortages	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Additional funding for training	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	More motivated staff	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Higher levels of productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>				
For society as a whole	(Increased) income tax and VAT from (increased) wages and consumer spending	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Lowered costs for welfare payments	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Supporting the skills needed for green and digital transition	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Improving cohesion of society and equal opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	Reducing skills mismatches in the labour market	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Other benefits. Please specify	[free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other benefits. Please specify	[free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other benefits. Please specify	[free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>				

36. [if b to Q2] How would you describe your overall experience with working with low skilled individuals (and the specific priority groups if any)? Could you please describe the potential obstacles and lesson learnt?

[if a to Q2]

Support at EU level

37. To what extent have follow-up activities conducted by the European Commission, such as mutual learning workshops, been useful to support you in implementation of the Recommendation in your country/region? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]

38. Please explain your answer and provide examples

Support measures and costs

39. To what extent has participation in adult learning measures been encouraged through financial incentives at national/regional level after 2016?

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Financial incentives to the individual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial incentives to the employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial incentives to the education provider.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

40. [if b to Q2] To what extent have additional funds been made available to support adult learning measures in your country/region since 2016? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]

41. Please explain your answer and provide examples

42. [if a to Q2] To what extent have the following EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills?

STUDY SUPPORTING THE EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON UPSKILLING PATHWAYS:
NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

EU funding programme	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
European Social Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment and Social Innovation Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Erasmus +	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technical Support Instrument	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horizon Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Digital Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
European Regional Development Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Just Transition Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
European Globalization Fund	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invest EU	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Recovery and Resilience Facility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other. Please specify [free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

43. Please detail your answer and provide examples of funds used

44. [if a to Q2] To what extent have the other non-EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objective of the Recommendation to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills?

Funding programmes at	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
National level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sectoral level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other. Please specify [free text = 30 characters]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

45. Please detail your answer and provide examples of funds used

46. [if a to Q2] To what extent have the funds to support adult learning measures in your country/region increased since 2016? [Display only options with “To a fairly large extent” or “To a great extent” from previous two questions]

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
EU funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sectoral funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other(s), please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

47. Please explain your answer and provide examples of funds that have increased since 2016

48. [if ‘to a fairly large extent or to a great extent’ and if a to Q2] To what extent do you think this increase in funding was due to the 2016 Recommendation? [display only options selected in previous question]

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
EU funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sectoral funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other(s), please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

49. [if a to Q2] Please provide a breakdown of resources allocated to the different features of adult learning measures, if possible.

	EUR	% of total amount allocated to Upskilling pathways	Full time equivalent staff
Identifying the target group			
Skills assessment			
Provision of a tailored offer			

Provision of a flexible offer			
Validation and recognition of skills acquired			
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits			
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression			
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)			
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning			
Monitoring and evaluation			

50. [if b to Q2] To what extent has your organisation incurred the following types of costs to implement adult learning measures?

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Costs of designing, delivering, and monitoring the programme (including staff salaries, any staff training required)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Infrastructure costs to deliver measures (e.g. computers, network infrastructure, renting of classrooms)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Costs to raise awareness of the in-country opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial incentives paid to learners to encourage participation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial incentives paid to employers to upskill employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial incentives paid to education providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other [please specify]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

51. To what extent are the costs of the adult learning measures proportionate to the benefits brought to individuals, economy and society? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]

52. [if a to Q2] What were the key factors which affected the efficiency of the implementation of the Recommendation?

Objectives, target groups and sectors

53. [if a to Q2] Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
The objective of the Recommendation - to provide adults with a low level of skills, opportunities to improve their skills – is still relevant to the current socio-economic and policy context in my country/region	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The measures defined in the Recommendation are still relevant for achieving its objectives					
The measures defined in the Recommendation are still relevant to the needs of the target groups in my country/region	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The measures defined in the Recommendation are still relevant to the needs of the economic sectors in my country/region	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The target groups specified in the Recommendation are still relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

54. Please explain your answer and provide examples

55. [if b to Q2] Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Adult learning measures are still relevant to the needs of	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

the target groups in my country/region					
Adult learning measures are still relevant to the needs of economic sectors in my country/region					
Low-skilled adults are still in need of targeted measures to help them gain skills	<input type="checkbox"/>				

56. Please explain your answer and provide examples

57. [if a to Q2] To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic reduced or increased the relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the needs of the target group? [Reduced to a large extent; reduced to a small extent; no change; Increased to a small; Increased to a large extent; Do not know]

58. Please explain your response and provide any examples?

[if a to Q2]

Coherence of adult learning measures

59.

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement adult learning measures (as defined in the 2016 Recommendation) been coherent with education and training, employment and social policies at national /regional level?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways created synergies with and complemented other EU policies on skills?					

60. Please explain your response and provide any examples

[if a to Q2]

Added value of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

61. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know

The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways helped adult learning measures in my country/region converge with other EU Member States	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Without the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, adult learning measures in my country/region in the past five years would have been implemented in the same way	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The objectives of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways could have been achieved without EU level intervention	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The objectives of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways still require action and support at EU level	<input type="checkbox"/>				

62. In your opinion, to what extent has the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways led to improved use and quality of the following features of adult learning measures, which would not have happened if Member States had acted alone?

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Skills assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision of a tailored offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision of a flexible offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Validation and recognition of skills acquired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

63. Please explain your response and provide any examples

Closing

64. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Many thanks for taking our survey. The information you provided will greatly contribute to the development of adult learning in the EU.

Appendix 5: Questionnaire for the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults

Introduction

This online survey aims to capture the views of organisations that represent low-skilled adults and other target groups of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways²⁸⁷, an EU initiative to help low-skilled adults develop new skills through learning opportunities.

'Upskilling Pathways' are a set of adult learning measures to help adult learners 1) assess their learning needs, 2) access tailored learning opportunities, 3) have their experience and competences validated, so that they can obtain a qualification. This should be accompanied by guidance, outreach and relevant education staff training. For the purposes of this consultation 'adult learning measures' refer to formal, non-formal and informal learning activities for adults with a low level of skills undertaken by adults (above the age of 25) after leaving initial education and training.

Your feedback will help us evaluate the measures, and design more effective EU and national learning opportunities for adults.

The survey combines multiple choice questions (with drop-down menus) and open questions, where you are able to write longer answers, if you wish. The survey should not take more than about 15 minutes to complete. All your responses will be anonymous and all data collected will be stored and used in line with EU data protection regulations. All information collected in the survey will be stored on a computer of the external contractor, Ecorys, acting as data processor, who guarantees the data protection and confidentiality required by the Regulation (EC) 45/2001.

Screening question

1. Please indicate in which country/region your organisation is active:
2. Please indicate which group your organisation represents:
 - A. Adults with low levels of basic skills (reading, mathematics, digital)
 - B. Adults lacking core / generic skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, teamwork)
 - C. Long-term unemployed adults
 - D. Older workers (above 55)
 - E. Economically inactive people
 - F. Nationals with a migrant background
 - G. Persons with disabilities
 - A. Third country nationals
 - B. Other target group. Please specify:

Assessment of effectiveness

3. The Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways calls for the following adult learning measures targeting low-skilled individuals. Are any of the following features of adult

²⁸⁷ EUR-Lex - 32016H1224(01) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

learning programmes in your country/region specifically designed to target individuals within the groups you represent?

	Yes	No
Skills assessment		
Provision of a tailored offer		
Provision of a flexible offer		
Validation and recognition of skills acquired		
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits		
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression		
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (e.g. childcare, financial support, etc.)		
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning		
Monitoring and evaluation		

Outreach and guidance activities

4. To what extent are individuals within the target groups you represent aware of adult learning opportunities? [Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]

Skills assessment

5.

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
To what extent are skills assessment measures accessible to the target groups you represent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To what extent are these skills assessment measures used by the priority target groups you represent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. What are the key challenges in relation to accessing skills assessment faced by the target groups you represent?

Provision of learning offer

7.

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know

To what extent are learning offers tailored to match the needs of the target groups you represent?	<input type="checkbox"/>				
To what extent are the learning offers flexible?	<input type="checkbox"/>				

8. What are the key challenges in relation to accessing tailored learning opportunities faced by the target groups you represent?

Recognition of prior learning

9. What are the key challenges faced by the target groups you represent in relation to the recognition of acquired skills towards gaining a qualification at national level?

Results and impact

10. In your opinion, have adult learning measures in your country/EU introduced in the last 5 years contributed to the following benefits for individuals in the target group you represent?

Benefits	
Gaining a qualification	
Gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills	
Gaining access to further education or training	
Gaining access to employment	
Gaining a promotion in current workplace	
Gaining more confidence	
Gaining improved wellbeing and health	
Gaining improved participation in society	
Other benefits. Please specify	<i>[free text = 30 characters]</i>
Other benefits. Please specify	<i>[free text = 30 characters]</i>
Other benefits. Please specify	<i>[free text = 30 characters]</i>

11. To what extent do you think the scope of the measures implemented is sufficient in terms of:

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Number of people reached	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Types of skills tackled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Type of support measures implemented					
--------------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--

Assessment of relevance

12. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	1 Not at all	2 To a small extent	3 To a fairly large extent	4 To a great extent	5 Do not know
Adult learning measures are still relevant to the needs of the target groups my organisation represents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low-skilled adults are still in need of targeted measures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The target groups defined by my country/region are still relevant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 6: Questionnaire for the survey of adult learners

Introduction

This online survey aims to capture your experience and views of the support you received to access learning opportunities in your country. The results will help us evaluate the support and design more effective EU and national learning opportunities for adults.

'Upskilling Pathways' are a set of measures established by each European country to help adult learners 1) assess their learning needs, 2) access tailored learning opportunities, 3) have their experience and competences recognised, so that they can obtain a national qualification. **For the purposes of this consultation 'adult learning measures' refers to a programme, initiative or scheme for adults with a low level of skills undertaken by adults (above the age of 25) after leaving initial education and training.**

The survey combines multiple choice questions (with drop-down menus) and open questions, where you are able to write longer answers, if you wish. The survey should not take more than about 15 minutes to complete. All your responses will be anonymous and all data collected will be stored and used in line with EU data protection regulations. All information collected in the survey will be stored on a computer of the external contractor, Ecorys, acting as data processor, who guarantees the data protection and confidentiality required by the Regulation (EC) 45/2001.

Thank you very much for your valuable support.

Your background

1. Please complete the following information on your background:
 - a. Your gender [M/F]
 - b. Your age [drop-down menu – age ranges]
 - c. Your country of origin: [drop-down menu including all worldwide countries]
 - d. Your country of residence at the time of taking part in the adult learning programme [drop-down menu including all EU27 Member States]
 - e. Your highest level of qualification obtained [drop-down menu: lower secondary or below; upper secondary; tertiary or above; vocational (secondary level); vocational (tertiary level)]
 - f. Your status prior to taking part in an adult learning programme [drop-down menu: in education/in training/ employed/looking for work/not looking for work]
 - g. Before attending/using an adult learning programme, how many years of work experience did you have? [0, 1-3, 4-10, 10 and more]
 - h. Do you care for children aged 15 or younger? [Y/N]

Support measures

2. What kind of support did you request/receive during your participation in the adult learning programme? [multiple choice including the following options]

<u>Support measures</u>
An assessment of my existing skills and competences
A tailored learning offer

Validation and recognition of my skills and competences
Acquisition of a national qualification
Guidance, support or mentoring during your participation in the adult learning measure
Other measures to overcome potential obstacles to participation in the programme (e.g. childcare, financial support, paid educational leave, etc.)

3. Please indicate to what extent the support measures selected have been completed.

Support measures (only show options selected by respondent in Q.2)	Completed/Abandoned (please state)
An assessment of my existing skills and competences	
A definition of a tailored learning plan for me	
A tailored learning offer	
Validation and recognition of my skills and competences	
Acquisition of a national qualification	
Mentoring/guidance	
Other [please specify:...]	

4. How useful did you find the following services individually and overall?

- a. Not at all useful
- b. Slightly useful
- c. Quite useful
- d. Very useful
- e. I don't know

Costs and challenges

5. Were there any financial costs for you of participating in the adult learning programme? [Y/N]

6. [If yes] What sort of costs did you incur? Please tick all that apply

- Travel expenses
- Course supplies (e.g. textbooks)
- Loss of income from work
- Childcare costs
- Other: please specify *[free text = 30 characters]*

7. Were there any challenges in accessing the adult learning programme? What were they?

8. [If abandoned is selected to measures in Q3] Why did you not complete the adult learning programme? [multiple choice]
- a. Left to start a new job
 - b. Family/personal reasons
 - c. Course did not meet expectations
 - d. Lack of time/too busy
 - e. Started another course
 - f. Didn't like it
 - g. Lack of support/help
 - h. Problems getting to course
 - i. Lost interest
 - j. Dropped from the course
 - k. Other please specify

Short-term outcome/results/ impacts

9. How useful overall did you find the adult learning measure in which you participated?
[Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a great extent; Do not know]
10. Are there other benefits you got from participating in an adult learning measure?
[multiple choice]
- Gaining a recognised qualification
 - Gaining access to further education or training
 - Gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills
 - Gaining a job
 - Changing career
 - Gaining a promotion in my current workplace
 - Gaining a higher paid job
 - Developing my personal portfolio of skills and competences
 - Gaining more confidence
 - Being able to better support my children / family / community in their learning
 - Other: please specify [free text = 100 characters]

Appendix 7: Topic guides for the targeted interviews

This annex includes the topic guides for the targeted interviews for national and EU level stakeholders (Task 2.1) in line with the evaluation framework and refined following the inception phase. During each interview, the topic guides will be specifically tailored to each interviewee, by selecting the questions appropriate to their expertise.

Topic guide for national level stakeholder interviews

Context, role & expertise

1. Please give an overview of your position, and areas of responsibility
2. What type of involvement have you had in designing upskilling pathways for low-skilled/ qualified adults (in particular in relation to the 2016 Council Upskilling Pathways Recommendation) and other similar opportunities for adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences?

Assessment of effectiveness

Overview of approaches

3. Were any upskilling pathways in place in your Member State before the 2016 Recommendation?
4. What actions were taken in your Member State in response to the 2016 Recommendation (e.g. legislative, financial)?
5. What types of approaches have been used to facilitate access for low-skilled adults to different upskilling pathways in your Member State since 2016? Why were these approaches selected?
6. To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic or other external events such as the refugee crisis affect your country's approach to facilitate access to different upskilling pathways?

Key priority groups & economic sectors in the Member States

7. What were the key priority groups and economic sectors targeted by your Member State when setting up upskilling pathways?
 - ▶ Were all low-skilled adults or specific groups targeted? Were different priority groups targeted in different economic sectors, regions or in relation to specific skills sets (e.g. digital skills)? How?
 - ▶ Was an intersectional approach taken to determine priority groups for upskilling pathways interventions (e.g. addressing the interaction of characteristics such as gender, migration background and age)?
 - ▶ Were the most in need/ disadvantaged effectively targeted (e.g. migrants, Roma, other vulnerable groups)?
8. Which methodologies/criteria were used by your Member State for identifying the different target groups and relevant economic sectors? Which were most/least effective? Why?

9. What were the key barriers and success factors in reaching different priority target groups and economic sectors?
10. What were the results for the target groups that participated in the upskilling pathways?

Design of upskilling pathways

11. To what extent was the three-step approach implemented in upskilling pathways in your country? [Probe: explain the three-step approach: skills assessment, a tailored and flexible offer, validation and recognition of skills]
12. What types of skills assessment were put in place in your Member State?
13. How accessible were these skills assessments to the priority target groups in your Member State? To what extent have these been used?
14. To what extent has the learning offer been tailored to the needs identified by the skills assessment in your Member State?
 - ▶ Were local, regional and national labour market needs taken into account?
15. Have upskilling approaches been tailored to different target groups? E.g.
 - ▶ To what extent have opportunities for language learning and preparation for training for migrants from third countries been included at Member State level?
16. Have learning offers been flexible? How so? [Probe: provide example of how e.g. units of learning outcomes, modules, learners' plans/records]
17. Which actions were most/least effective for different target groups?
18. How were acquired skills recognised towards gaining a qualification at Member State level? To what extent did upskilling pathways draw on validation arrangements already in place? What were the key challenges?

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders

19. Which stakeholders (e.g. public, private and third sector actors in education and training, employment and other relevant policy areas) have been involved at different stages in upskilling pathways in your Member State (e.g. needs assessment, design, delivery)? In what ways were they involved?
20. How was coordination of stakeholders ensured at national and regional level to implement the 2016 Recommendation? How effective was it? Which coordination or engagement mechanisms have been most/ least promising?
21. To what extent did you provide outreach and guidance services to employers to help them address obstacles to upskilling their employees? How well did these address obstacles?
22. To what extent were social partners involved in the design and delivery of upskilling pathways measures?
23. To what extent did you provide outreach and guidance services to learners to address obstacles to participation? How well did these address obstacles?

24. Did you provide initial training and continuous professional development to staff engaged in delivering upskilling pathways (e.g. teaching professionals)? To what extent were these opportunities used and effective?

Effectiveness of the 2016 Recommendation overall

25. To what extent has the 2016 Upskilling Pathways Recommendation contributed to observed changes with regards to levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills among the target population in your Member State and developments in lifelong learning opportunities?
26. To what extent has the implementation of the Recommendation in your Member State been facilitated by support at EU level? [Probe: give example of support, e.g. mutual learning opportunities, coordination with other relevant EU level processes, EU funding (ESF, EaSI) etc.]
27. Have measures relating to the implementation of the Recommendation been monitored and evaluated? How so and have relevant stakeholders been involved? Please provide examples of good and bad practices.
- To what degree have the results been used in informing the design/ improving the delivery of upskilling pathways? [Note to interviewer: please request all relevant evaluations conducted to be sent to you after the interview]

Assessment of efficiency

28. What types of costs were associated with the implementation of the Recommendation at national level and for your institution/ organisation in particular?
29. To what extent did your Member State encourage participation in upskilling pathways through financial incentives at national level? How so?
30. What were the benefits associated with the implementation of the Recommendation at national level and for your institution/ organisation? Could benefits have been achieved at a lower cost?
31. To what extent are the costs of the actions suggested by the Recommendation proportionate to the benefits brought to individuals, economy and society?
32. What were the key factors which affected the efficiency of the implementation of the Recommendation? In what ways?
33. To what extent were synergies identified between other initiatives on skills/adult learning to increase efficiency?
34. Have EU programmes and funding sources (e.g. Erasmus+ and what key actions – mobility activities or strategic partnerships), ESF, EaSI, etc.) contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation? How so? Which programmes provided the most/least cost-effective funding?
35. Which national funding sources/ streams been used to fund upskilling pathways interventions at MS level? Have they contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendations? How so and which funding sources/ streams provided the most/ least cost-effective funding?

Assessment of relevance

36. To what extent are the objectives defined in the 2016 Recommendation still relevant to the current socio-economic and policy context in your Member State?
37. To what extent are the target groups specified in the Recommendation and those defined by your Member State still relevant?
38. Which measures defined in the 2016 Recommendation are most relevant for achieving its objectives? How so? Have any measures become less relevant over time? Why?
39. To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to the needs of the target groups and economic sectors in your Member State?
40. Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the needs of the target group? In what ways?

Assessment of coherence

41. To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways (as defined in the 2016 Recommendation) been coherent with:
 - ▶ education and training, employment and social policies at national /regional level
 - ▶ other related EU level policies (e.g. Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning; the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning; Long-term Unemployment recommendation; Youth Guarantee; New Skills Agenda for Europe).
 - ▶ relevant EU funding mechanisms (e.g. European Social Fund; Erasmus+; EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI); Technical Support Instrument; etc.).
42. To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures of the Recommendation been internally coherent?

Assessment of EU added value

43. To what extent has the 2016 Recommendation supported a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled/qualified adults in the EU?
44. To what extent are upskilling pathways arrangements in your Member States converging with other EU Member States? Which factors can explain any trends observed?
45. Could the objectives of the 2016 Recommendation have been achieved without EU level intervention? If so, how? If not, why not?
46. To what degree do the objectives addressed by the Recommendation still require action and support at EU level? Why, and in what ways?

Final questions

47. Are there any policy documents, evaluation studies, or monitoring information relevant to the topic that you can share with us (e.g. outlining national upskilling pathways interventions, in particular those linked to the Recommendation).

48. Would you be able to share with us the Upskilling Pathways progress reports submitted to the European Commission?
49. Do you have any recommendations about which other stakeholders responsible for implementing upskilling pathways measures we should consult?
50. Do you have any recommendations about which experts (from your institution or others) would be best placed to attend an online expert meeting to discuss upskilling pathways in an EU context? [interviewer to provide a brief summary of the forthcoming online expert meeting to be organised with representatives of national authorities]

Note to interviewer: Before closing, please inform the interviewee that we will follow up on this interview with a request for them to verify the initiatives selected for the mapping.

Topic guide for EU level stakeholder interviews

Context, role & expertise

1. Please give an overview of your position, and areas of responsibility, focusing on aspects relevant to the 2016 Council Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and/or national-level upskilling pathways for low-skilled/ qualified adults.
2. What type of involvement have you had in designing/ informing the 2016 Council Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and other similar opportunities for adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences at the EU level?

Assessment of effectiveness

Overview of approaches

3. Are you aware of types of actions taken at Member State level/ in specific sectors in response to the 2016 Recommendation before December 2020 (e.g. legislative, financial)? What role (if any) did the Recommendation play?
4. To what extent did the COVID-19 pandemic or other external events such as the refugee crisis affect Member States' approaches to facilitate access to different upskilling pathways, including the involvement of social partners?

Key priority groups & economic sectors across the Member States

5. What were the key priority groups and economic sectors targeted at Member State level when setting up upskilling pathways, across the EU?
 - ▶ Were all low-skilled adults or specific groups targeted? Were different priority groups targeted in different economic sectors, regions or in relation to specific skills sets (e.g. digital skills)?
 - ▶ Was an intersectional approach taken to determine priority groups for upskilling pathways interventions (e.g. addressing the interaction of characteristics such as gender, migration background and age)? How?
 - ▶ Were the most in need/ disadvantaged effectively targeted (e.g. migrants, Roma, other vulnerable groups)?
6. What were the key barriers and success factors in reaching them?
7. What role did your organisation have at EU/ national in identifying priority groups, or economic sectors?
8. What were the results for the target groups that participated in the upskilling pathways across the EU? Could you provide examples?

Design of upskilling pathways

9. Did initiatives in the Member States adopt a pathway approach encompassing the three steps? [Probe: explain the three-step approach: skills assessment, a tailored and flexible offer, validation and recognition of skills] Could you provide examples from Member States or across economic sectors?
10. What types of skills assessment approaches were put in place in the Member States in relation to the implementation of the Recommendation?

11. How accessible were these skills assessments to the priority target groups in the Member States overall?
12. To what extent has the learning offer been tailored to the needs identified by the skills assessment in the Member States and for different target groups and economic sectors? Could you provide examples?
 - ▶ Were local, regional and national labour market needs taken into account?
 - ▶ To what extent have opportunities for language learning and preparation for training for migrants from third countries been included across the EU? Has this been a result of the Recommendation or other factors?
13. Have learning offers been flexible? How so? [Probe: provide example of how e.g. units of learning outcomes, modules, learners' plans/records]
14. Which approaches to facilitating access for low-skilled adults to upskilling pathways have proven most/ least effective across the EU?

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders

15. Which stakeholders at EU level have been involved at different stages in coordination/ collaboration activities in relation to the implementation of the 2016 Recommendation? In what ways? Which stakeholders did your organisation cooperate with?
16. How was the coordination of stakeholders ensured at national and regional level to implement the 2016 Recommendation?
17. How effective was it? What coordination or engagement mechanisms have been most/ least promising and why? Were there any gaps?
18. To your knowledge, have there been outreach and guidance services to employers to help them address obstacles to upskilling their employees? How well did these address obstacles?
19. To what extent were social partners involved in the design and delivery of upskilling pathways measures?
20. To your knowledge, have there been outreach and guidance services to learners to address obstacles to participation? How well did these address obstacles? What could be improved?
21. To your knowledge, was initial training and continuous professional development provided to staff engaged in the delivery of upskilling pathways at national level (e.g. teaching professionals)? To what extent were they used and effective?

Effectiveness of the 2016 Recommendation

22. To what extent has the 2016 Upskilling Pathways Recommendation contributed to observed changes with regards to levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills in EU Member States/ your specific sector? Could you provide any examples?
23. To what extent has the implementation of the Recommendation in the EU been facilitated by support at EU level? [Probe: give example of support, e.g. mutual learning opportunities, coordination with other relevant EU level processes, EU funding (ESF, EaSI) etc.]

24. Have measures relating to the implementation of the Recommendation been monitored and evaluated?
- ▶ How so and have relevant stakeholders been involved?
 - ▶ Please provide examples of good and bad practices.
25. What contextual factors have influenced the effectiveness of the implementation of the 2016 Recommendation at EU level?

Assessment of efficiency

26. Have EU programmes and funding sources (e.g. Erasmus+ and what key actions – mobility activities or strategic partnerships), ESF, EaSI, etc.) contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation?
- ▶ How so?
 - ▶ Which programmes provide the most/least cost-effective funding?
27. Which national funding sources/ streams been used to fund upskilling pathways interventions at MS level? Have they contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendations? How so and which funding sources/ streams provided the most/ least cost-effective funding?
28. What were the costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation at EU level and for your institution/ organisation in particular?
29. What were the benefits associated with the implementation of the Recommendation at EU level and for your institution/ organisation?
- ▶ Could benefits have been achieved at a lower cost?
30. To what extent are the costs of the actions defined by the Recommendation proportionate to the benefits brought to individuals, economy and society?
31. What were the key factors which affected the efficiency of the implementation of the Recommendation? In what ways?

Assessment of relevance

32. To what extent are the objectives defined in the 2016 Recommendation still relevant to the current socio-economic and policy context at EU level? How so?
33. To what extent are the target groups specified in the Recommendation and those defined by different Member States still relevant?
34. To what extent are the measures defined in the Recommendation still relevant to the needs of the target groups and economic sectors across the EU?

Assessment of coherence

35. To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways (as defined in the 2016 Recommendation) been coherent with:
- ▶ education and training, employment and social policies at national level
 - ▶ other related EU level policies (e.g. Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning; the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning;

Long-term Unemployment recommendation; Youth Guarantee; New Skills Agenda for Europe).

- ▶ relevant EU funding mechanisms (e.g. European Social Fund; Erasmus+; EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI); Technical Support Instrument; etc.).

36. To what extent have the objectives, target groups and measures of the Recommendation been internally coherent?

Assessment of EU added value

37. To what extent has the 2016 Recommendation supported a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled/qualified adults in the EU?

38. To what extent are upskilling pathways arrangements in Member States converging? Which factors can explain any trends observed?

39. Could the objectives of the 2016 Recommendation been achieved without the EU level intervention? If so, how? If not, why not? What are the benefits of EU level action in this area?

40. To what degree do the objectives addressed by the Recommendation still require action and support at EU level? Why, and in what ways?

Final questions

41. Are there any policy documents, evaluation studies, or monitoring information relevant to the topic that you can share with us?

Appendix 8: Case study reporting template

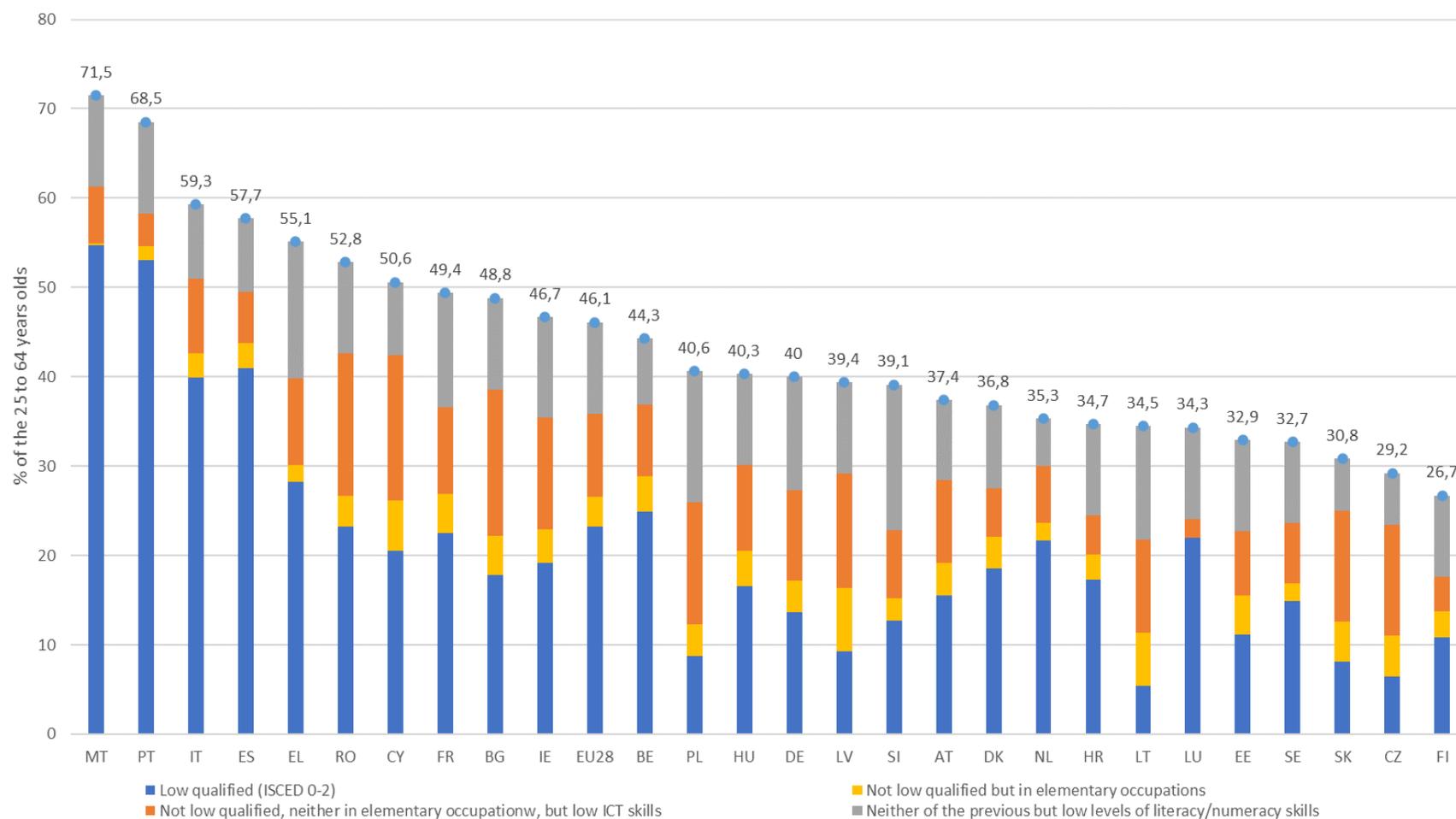
Case study [Member State]	
National operating context	
National and regional legislation and policies relevant to upskilling pathways and Lifelong learning	<i>Brief overview of the key national and regional legislative and policy frameworks operational in the national contexts and insights into recent reforms in these frameworks since 2016.</i>
Overview of the target population	<i>Brief presentation of the main statistics related to low-skilled/qualified adults in the Member State, incl. levels of numeracy, literacy, and digital skills. Information on participation in formal, non-formal and informal education will be presented. Where data is available, developments in adult learning and upskilling over the past decade will be presented. Similarly, information on specific priority groups will be presented where appropriate.</i>
Challenges/issues relating to upskilling pathways	<i>The main challenges / key issues relating to upskilling pathways and lifelong learning in the Member State over the past 8-10 years will be presented, as well as identifying any trends nationally or by region.</i>
Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation	
National approach to facilitating upskilling pathways	<i>Overview of the overall national approach to implementing the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, including information on priority target groups and economic. The way the Member State incorporated the three-step approach in the design of their Upskilling pathways will be presented, as well as any actions related to facilitating stakeholder cooperation and specific guidance and support measures.</i>
Examples of upskilling actions	<i>A presentation of the main actions related to upskilling low-skilled/qualified adults in the Member State will be presented as well as the relation of these actions to the Council Recommendation.</i>
Most significant change stories	<i>The main significant change stories that have been identified and verified by the National Expert will be presented, providing qualitative evaluation evidence of the outcomes and impacts of the implementation of the Council Recommendation in the Member State.</i>
Impact/influence of the Council Recommendation	<i>An overall assessment will be provided of the potential impact/influence that the Council Recommendation had on the design of upskilling pathways at national/regional/local levels.</i>
Effectiveness	
Priority target groups	<i>Overview of the key priority groups targeted in the Member State and a presentation of the key criteria used to identify these targets groups. The main barriers and success factors in reaching different priority target groups will additionally be presented.</i>
Priority economic sectors	<i>Overview of the key economic sectors targeted in the Member State and a presentation of the key criteria used to identify these sectors. The main barriers and success factors in reaching low-skilled/qualified adults in these sectors will additionally be presented.</i>
Application of the three-step approach in designing upskilling pathways	<i>Presentation of the manner in which skills assessments, tailored learning offers and the validation and recognition of skills are actioned in the Member State as a result of the Council Recommendation.</i>

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders	<i>Presentation of the way cooperation with relevant stakeholders in the Member State was facilitated as a result of the Council Recommendation.</i>
Provision of outreach and guidance services	<i>Presentation of the manner in which outreach and guidance services were provided in the Member State as a result of the Council Recommendation.</i>
Monitoring and evaluation measures	<i>Overview of the main monitoring and evaluation activities carried out as part of the implementation of the Council Recommendation.</i>
Examples of good or bad practices	<i>Specific examples of good or bad practices in relation to specific actions resulting from the implementation of the Council Recommendation will be presented.</i>
Overall assessment	<i>An overall assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Council Recommendation in the Member State will be provided</i>
Efficiency	
EU and national programming and funding	<i>An overview of the main EU and national funds used to support the implementation of the Council Recommendation in the Member State.</i>
Financial incentives	<i>Where appropriate, a description will be provided of how financial incentives were used by the Member State to encourage participation in upskilling pathways. Specific examples of such actions will be provided where possible.</i>
Costs and benefits of implementation	<i>Where possible, an overview of the main costs associated with the implementation of the Council Recommendation in the Member State at national and institutional level, as well as potential costs to adult learners will be provided. The main benefits associated with the implementation of the Council Recommendation at national, regional and institutional level will be presented. This cost data is mainly collected through qualitative sources.</i>
Overall assessment	<i>An overall assessment of the efficiency of the implementation of the Council Recommendation in the Member State.</i>
Relevance	
Relevance of objectives and measures	<i>An overview of the extent the objectives and measures of the Council Recommendation were (and still are) relevant to current socio-economic and policy contexts in the Member States (e.g., the needs of specific economic sectors and/or the needs of specific target groups)? Examples of relevant actions will be provided, where appropriate. If required, it will also be explained why particular objectives or measures are no longer considered relevant.</i>
Relevance to priority target groups and economic sectors	<i>A presentation on the extent the measures defined in the Council Recommendation were (and still are) relevant to the needs of the target groups and economic sectors in the Member State. If required, it will also be explained why particular target groups or economic sectors are no longer considered relevant.</i>
Overall assessment	<i>An overall assessment of the relevance of the Council Recommendation in the Member State.</i>
Coherence	
Coherence with national and regional policies	<i>A presentation of how the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskills pathways (as defined in the Council Recommendation) were coherent with (national and regional) education and training, employment and social policies in the Member State? Specific examples will be provided, where possible.</i>

Coherence with other EU funding mechanisms	<i>A description of the extent the objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskills pathways (as defined in the Council Recommendation) were coherent with relevant EU funding mechanisms (e.g., Erasmus+, ESF, EaSI. etc.) used in the Member State? Specific examples will be provided, where possible.</i>
Overall assessment	<i>An overall assessment of the coherence of the Council Recommendation with the main policies, programmes and funding mechanisms in the Member State.</i>
EU added value	
Overall assessment	<i>An overall assessment of the added value of the Council Recommendation in promoting, informing and supporting a common approach to offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled/qualified adults in the Member State? This will include an assessment on whether the objectives of the Council Recommendation have been achieved without an EU-level intervention and examples of overall benefits of an EU-level action in this area, where possible.</i>
Overall assessment	
<i>An overall assessment of the key changes and impacts resulting from the Council Recommendation at national level. This will include information on the main impacts, influence and added value of the Council Recommendation, as well as insights into the main challenges and success factors in implementing the Council Recommendation in the Member State.</i>	

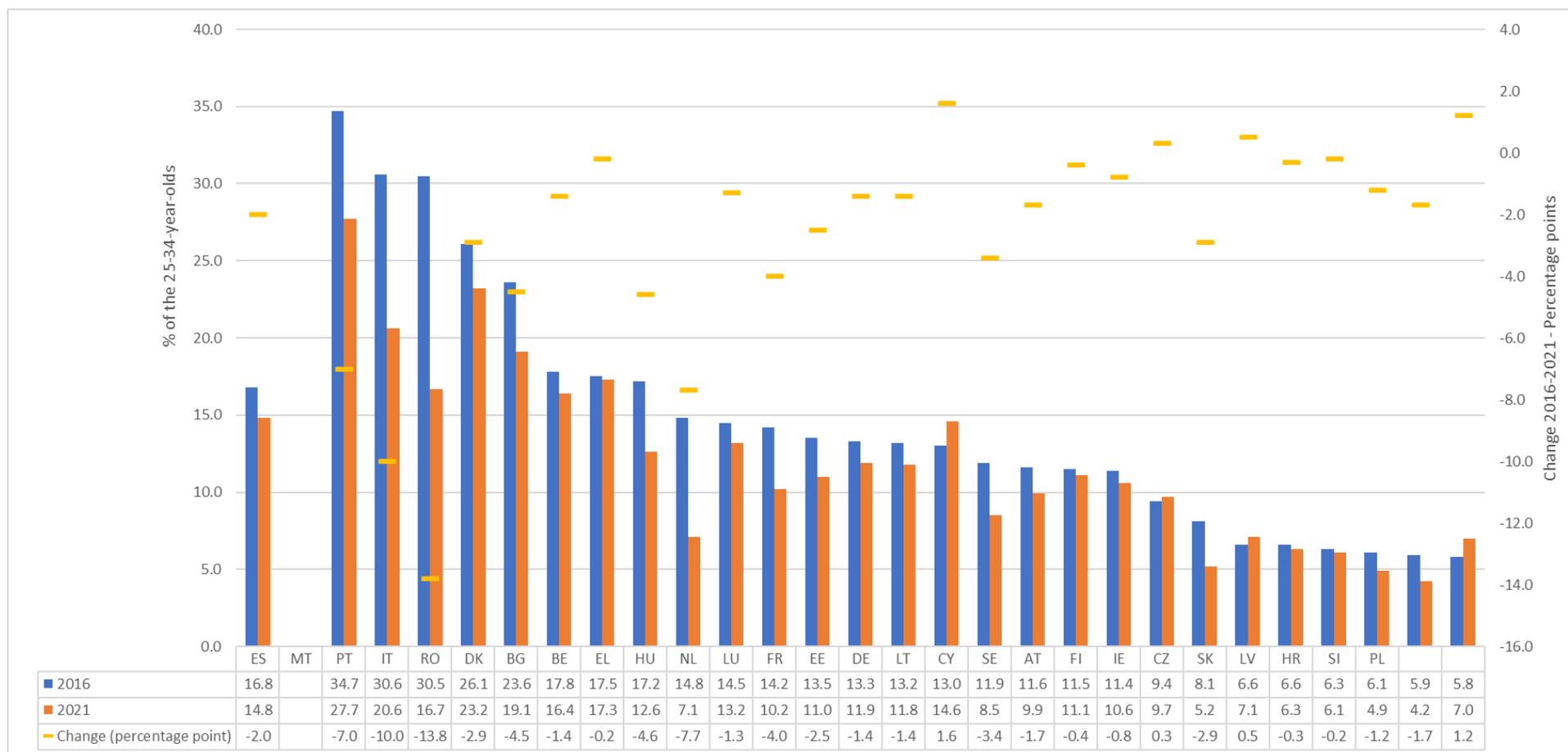
Annex 2 – Analysis of the indicators: Graphs complementing the mapping of indicators referred to in Section 3 of the report

Figure A2_1 Estimated adult population with potential for upskilling and with potential for upskilling and reskilling, by country (%) in descending order, EU-27



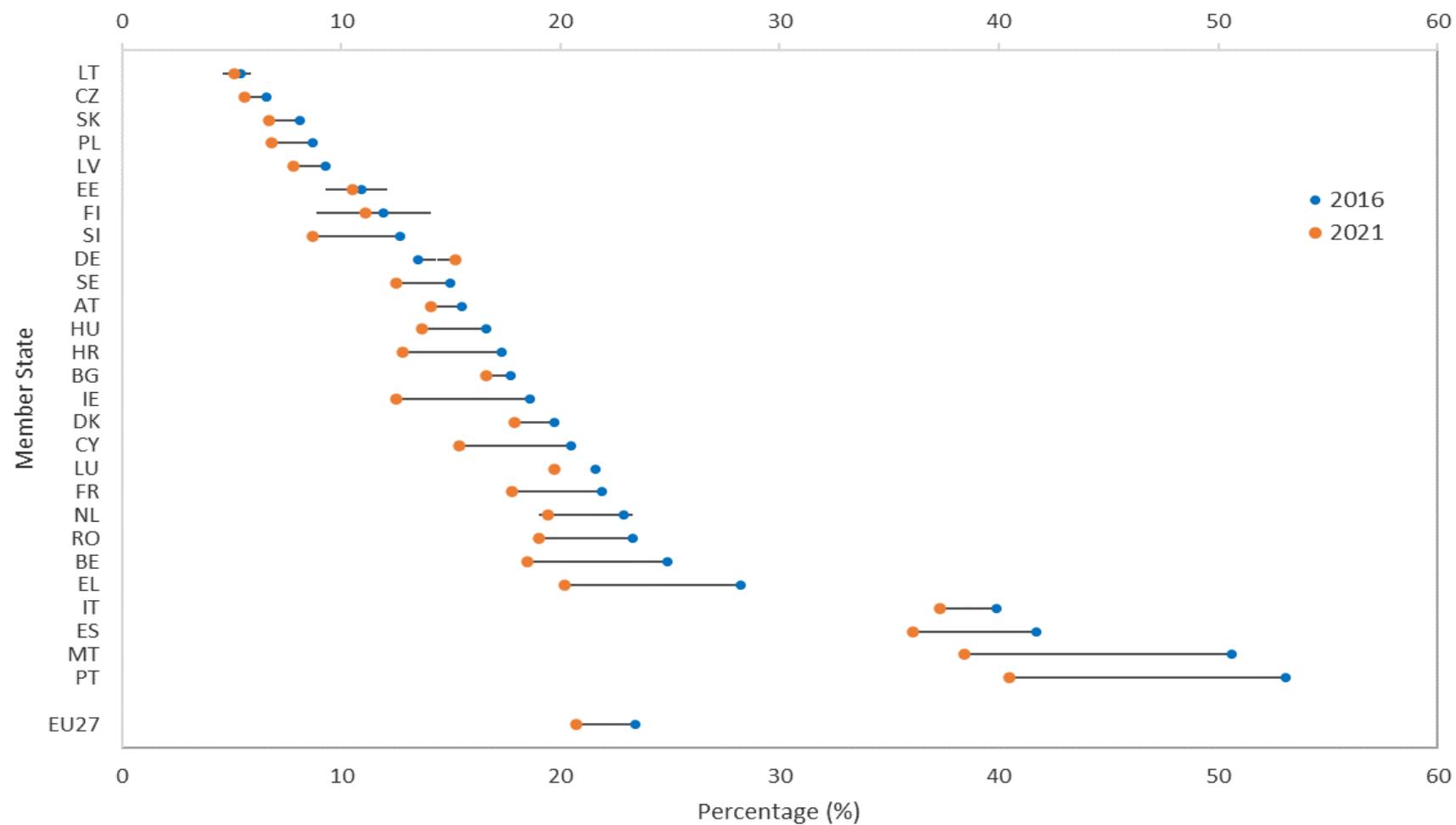
Source: Cedefop (2020). Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/475393>

Figure A2_2 Share of 25–34 year olds with low educational attainment 2016 and 2021, change in percentage points, sorted by geographical region



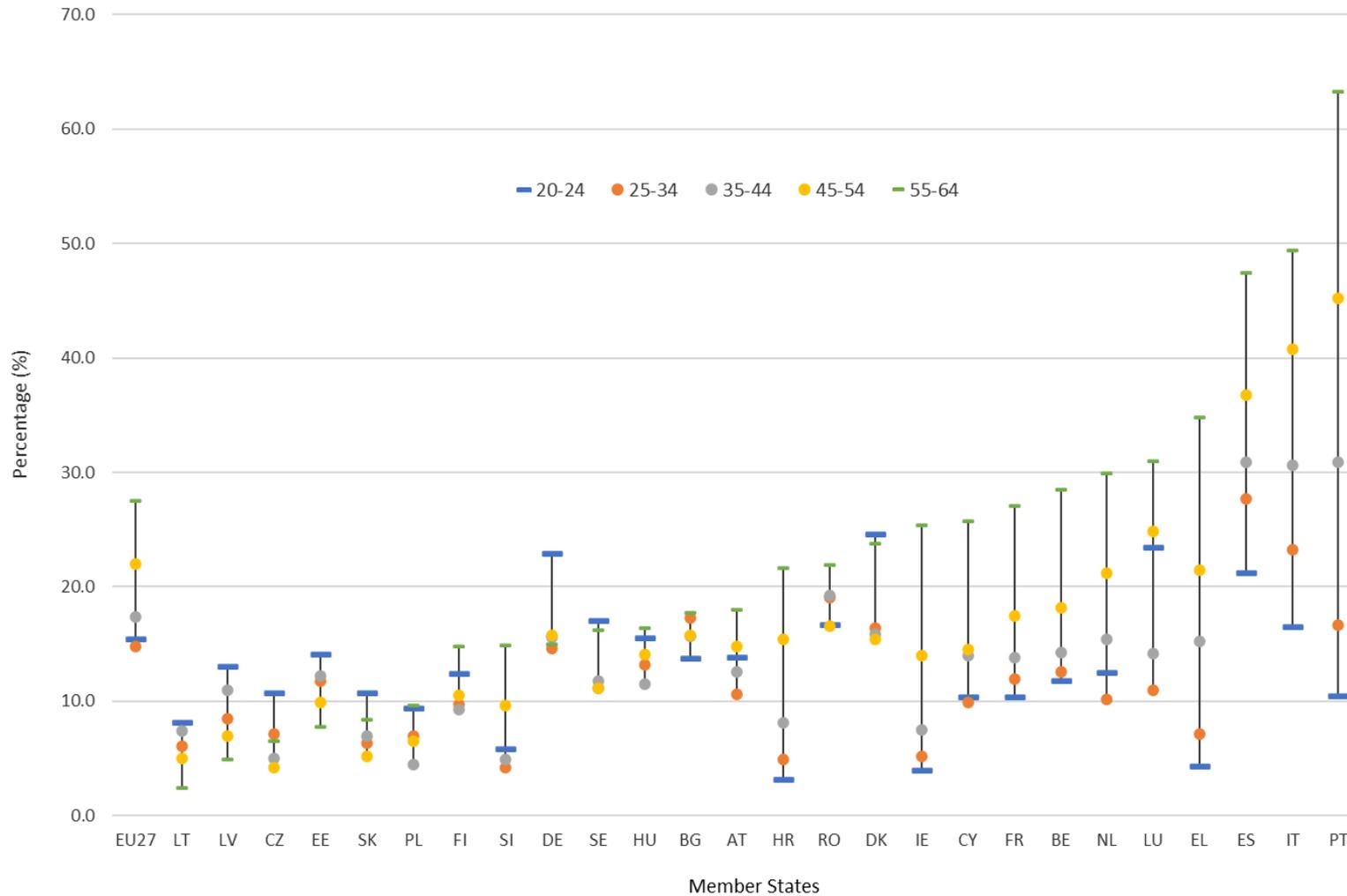
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) - main indicators, edat_lfse_03

Figure A2_3 Share of adults aged 25-64 with low educational attainment (ISCED 0-2) by Member State, 2016 and 2021 (%), sorted by lowest rate in 2016.



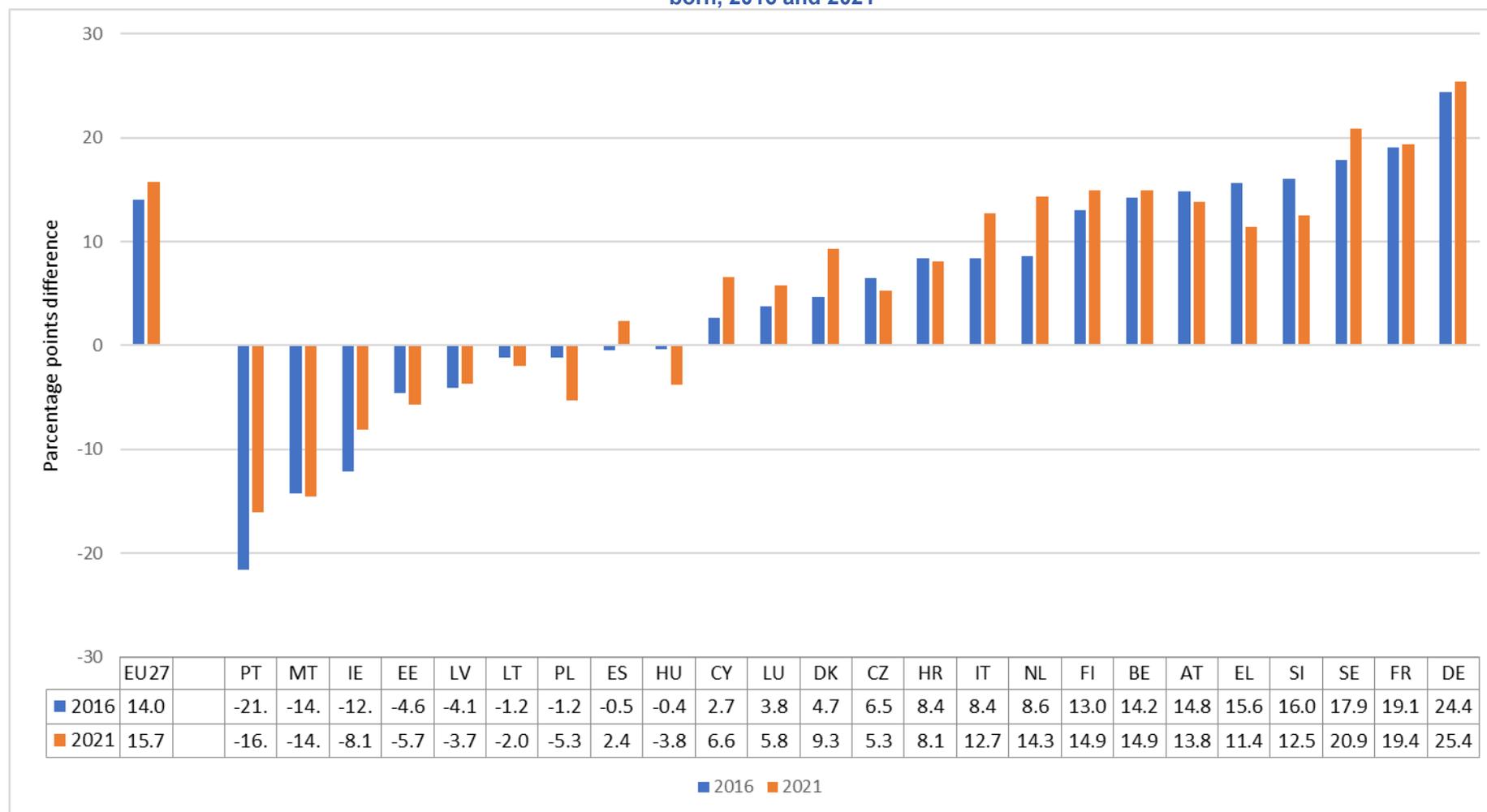
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) - main indicators, edat_ifse_03

Figure A2_4 Percentage (%) of adults with low educational attainment (ISCED 0-2) for each age-group by Member State, 2021, sorted by % for 55–64-year old age-group



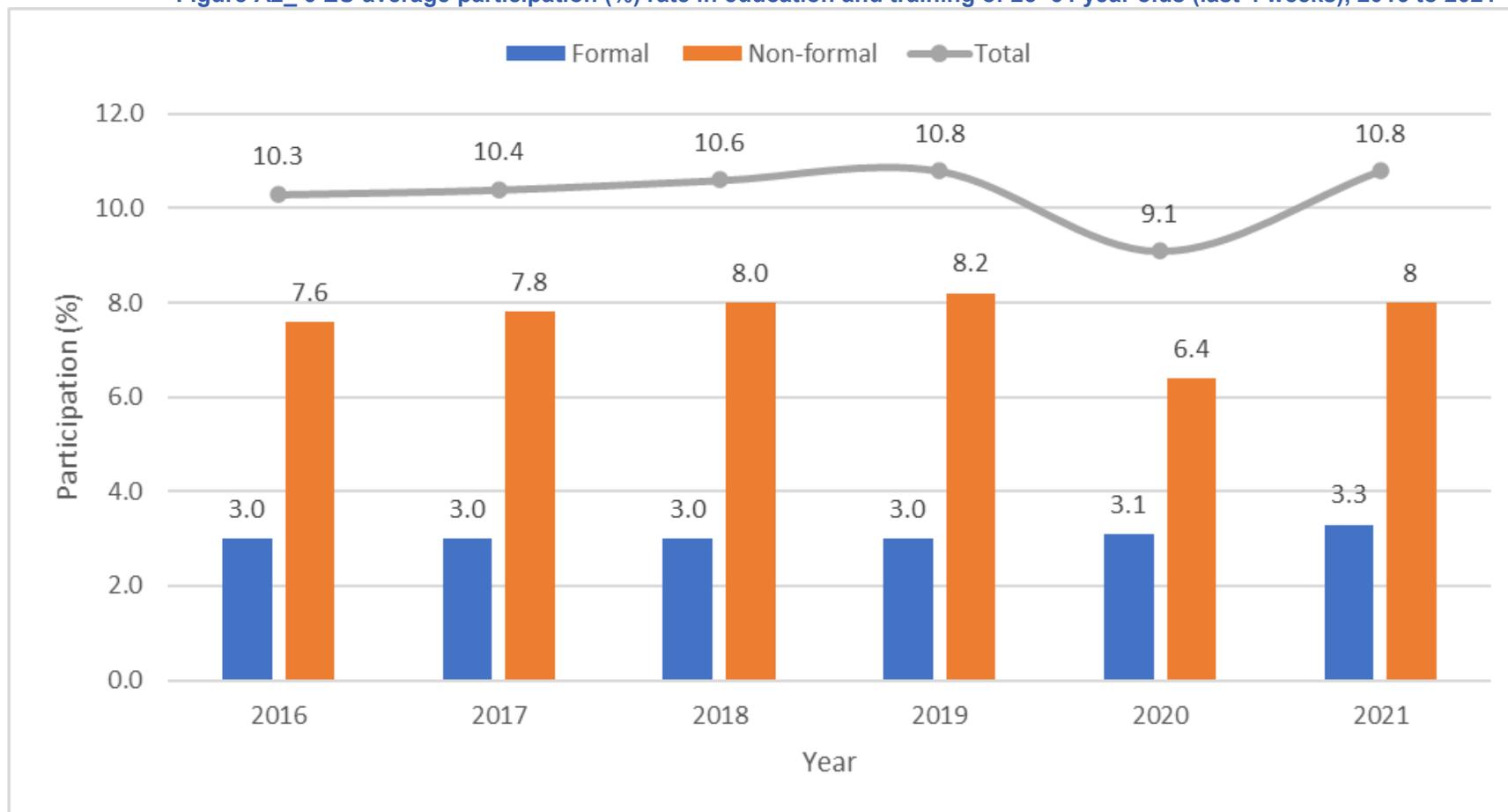
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) - main indicators, edat_ifse_03

Figure A2_5 Percentage point difference between share of low-qualified adults that are foreign born and share of low-qualified adults that are native born, 2016 and 2021



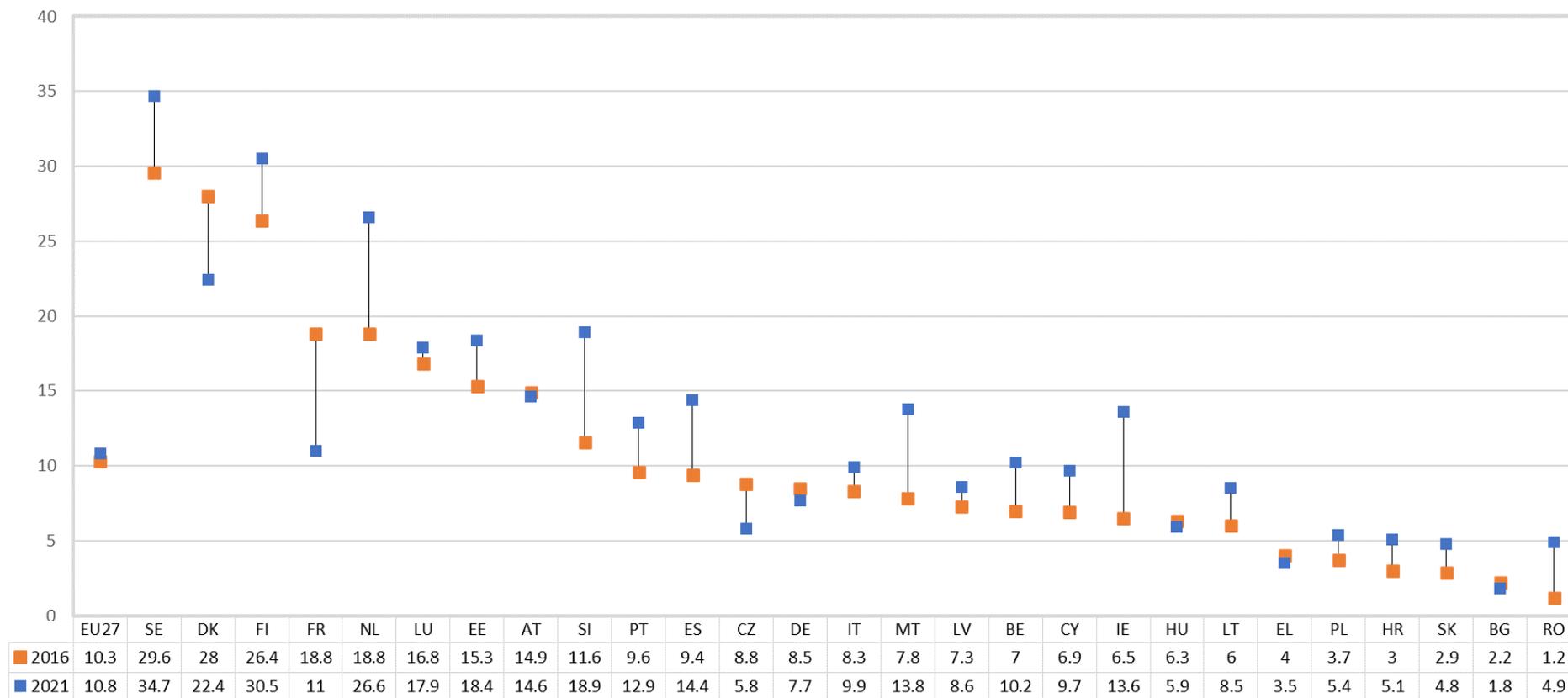
Source: Eurostat LFS, Population by educational attainment level, sex, age and country of birth, edat_lfs_9912

Figure A2_6 EU average participation (%) rate in education and training of 25–64 year olds (last 4 weeks), 2016 to 2021



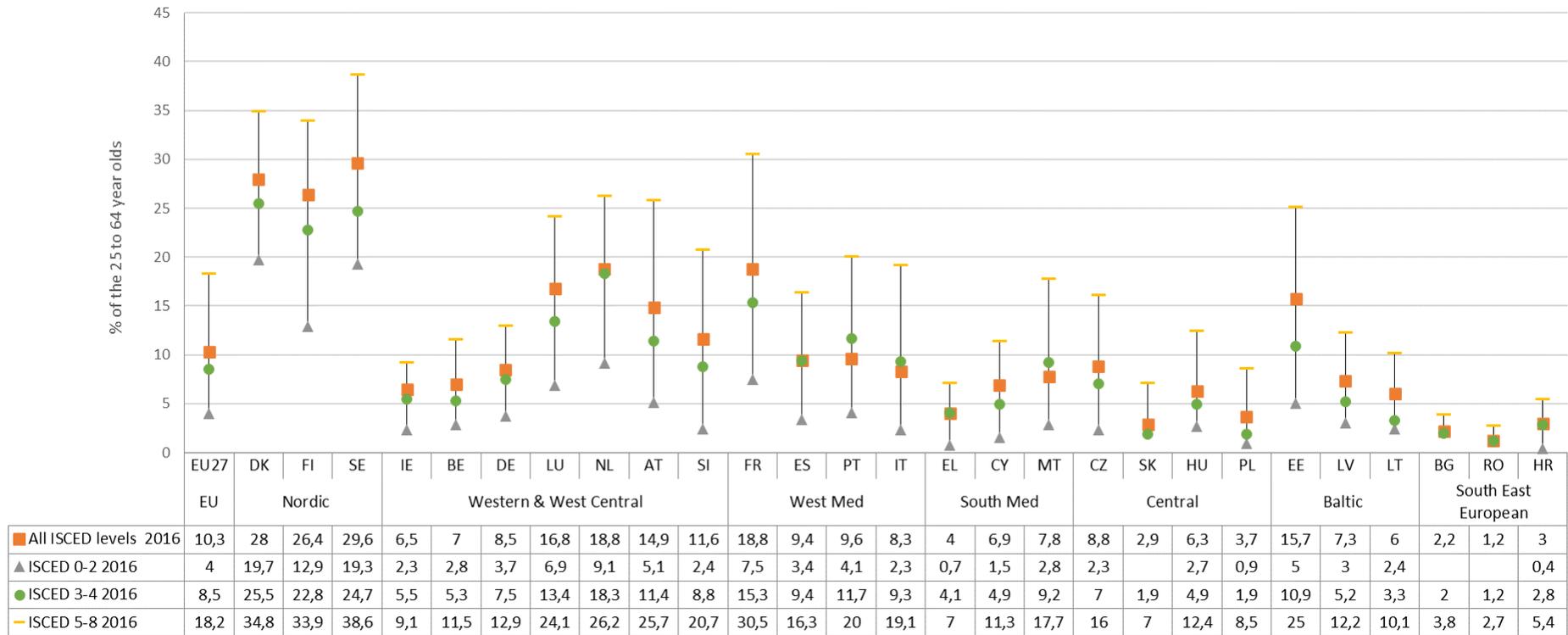
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex and age, TRNG_LFS_01

Figure A2_7 Participation in education and training, 25-64 year olds, all educational levels (ISCED 0-8), 2016 and 2021, (%)



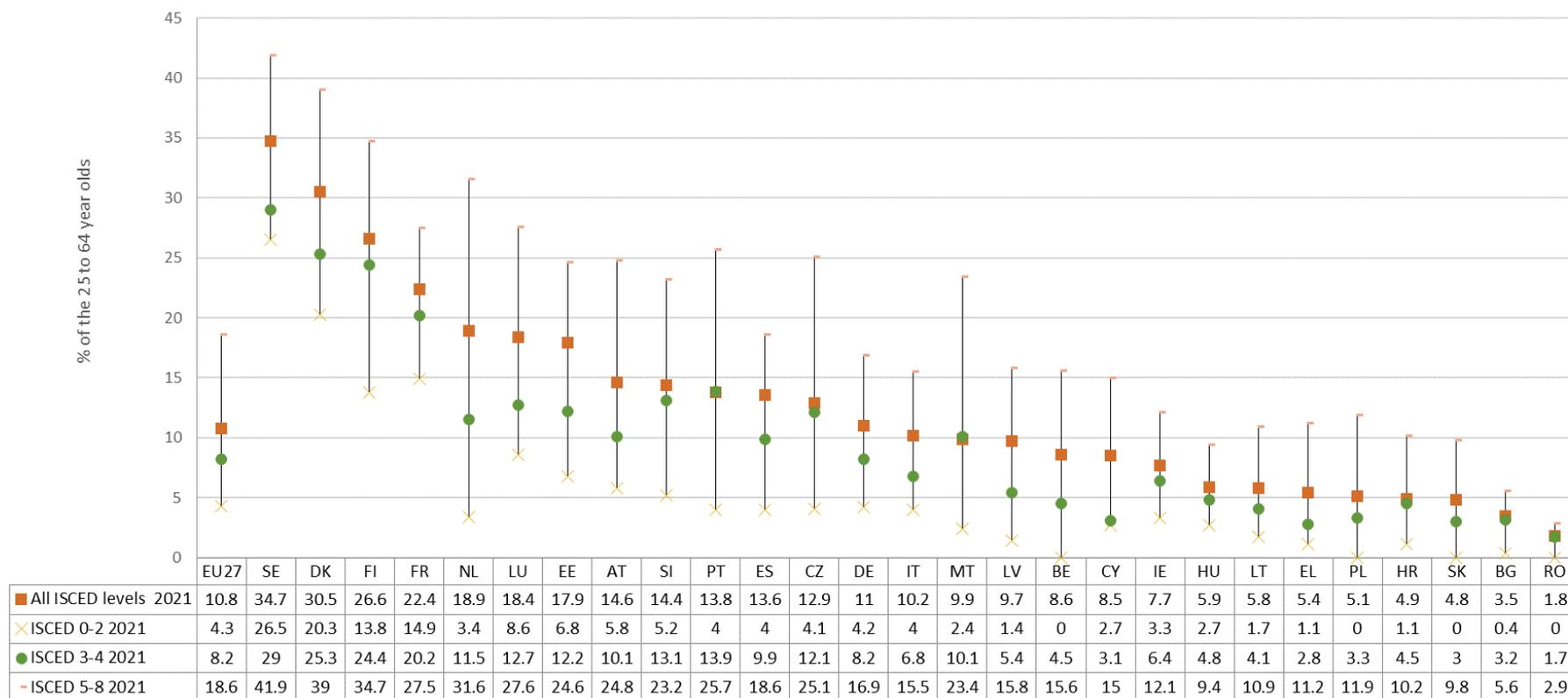
Source: *Ibid.*

Figure A2_8 Participation in education and training by educational attainment level (25-64) (2016) (%)



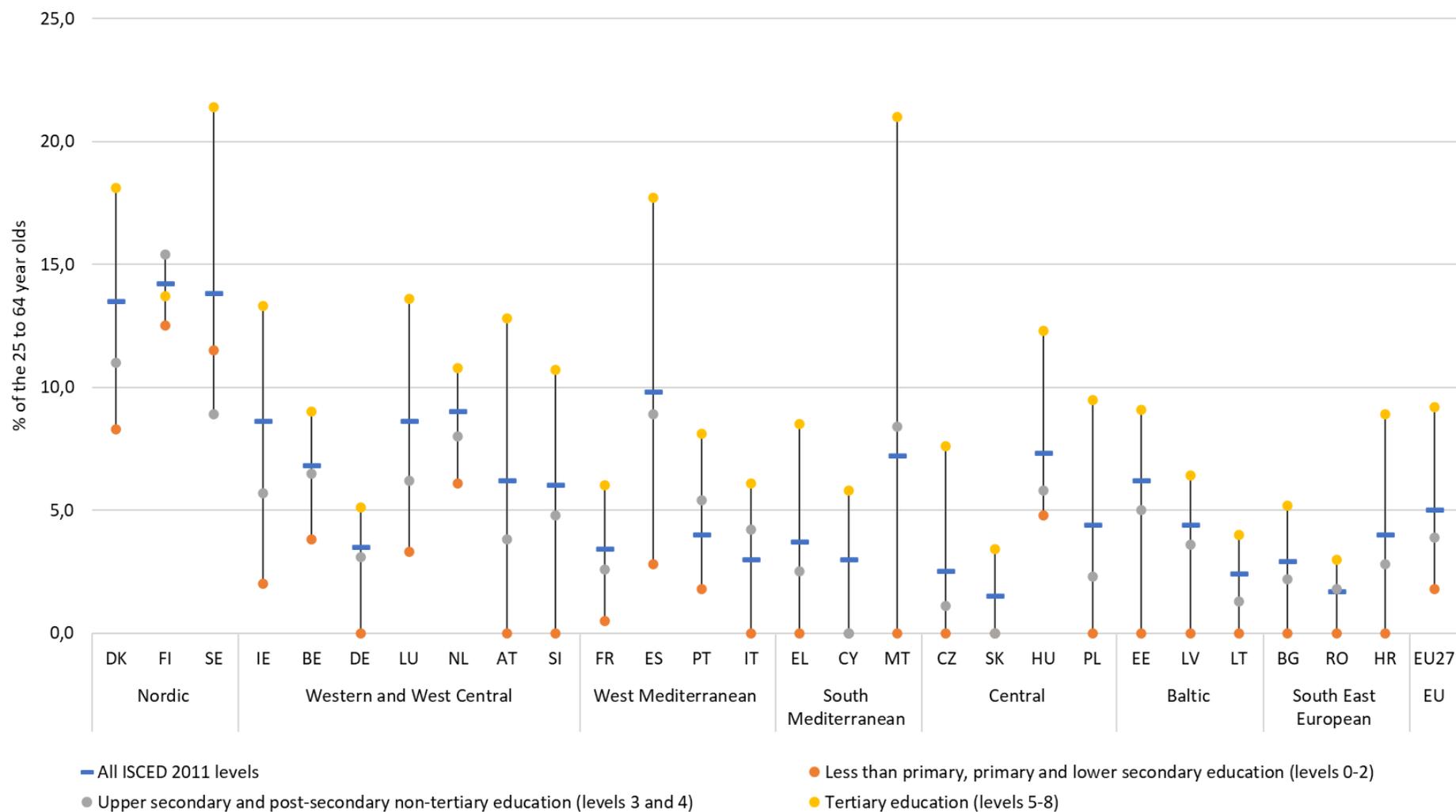
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex, age and educational attainment level, TRNG_LFS_02

Figure A2_9 Participation in education and training by educational attainment level (25-64 year olds) (2021) (%)



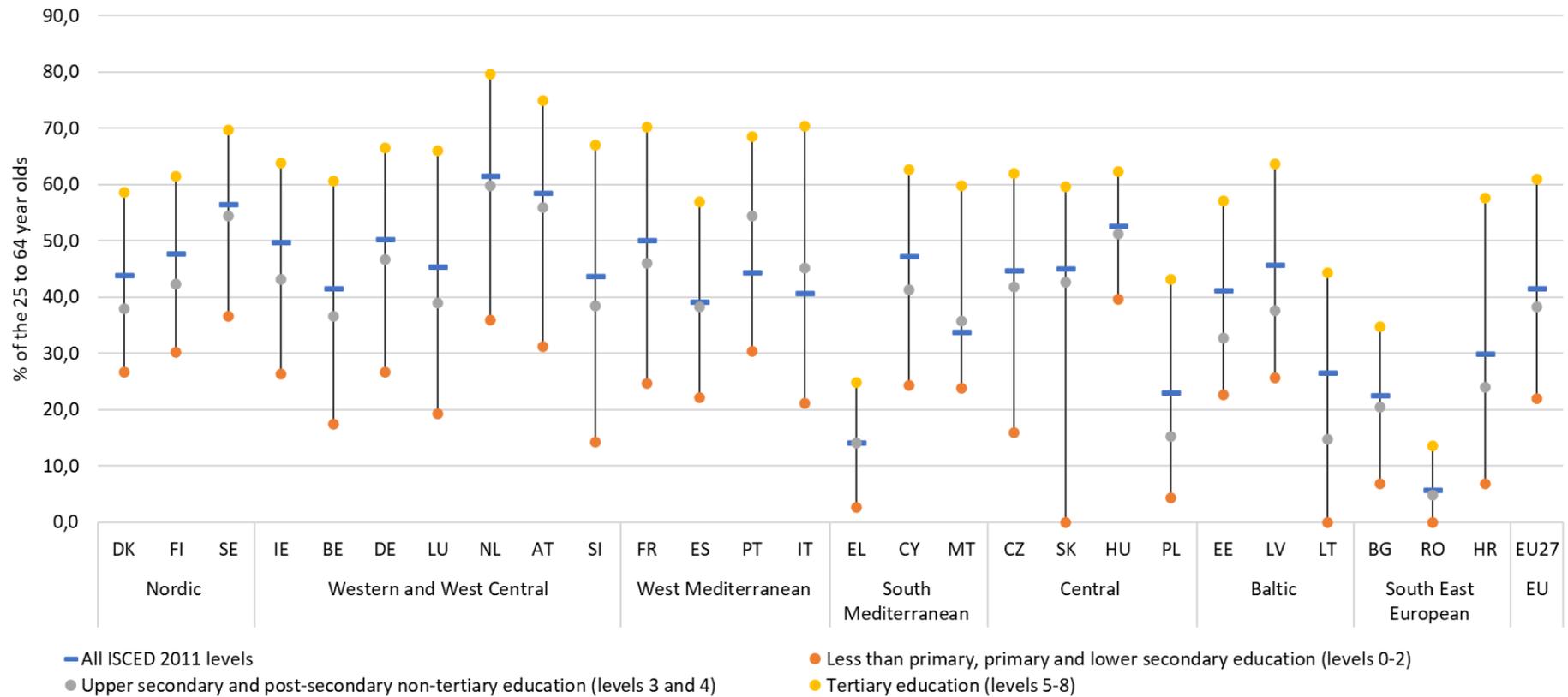
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex, age and educational attainment level, TRNG_LFS_02.

Figure A2_10 Participation in formal education by educational attainment level (25-64 year olds) 2016



Source: Eurostat, [trng_aes_102] Version: 08.02.21

Figure A2_ 11 Participation in non-formal education by educational attainment level (25-64 year olds) 2016



Source: Eurostat, [trng_aes_102], Version: 08.02.21

Figure A2_12 Participation in education and training, by labour status (25-64 years), 2016

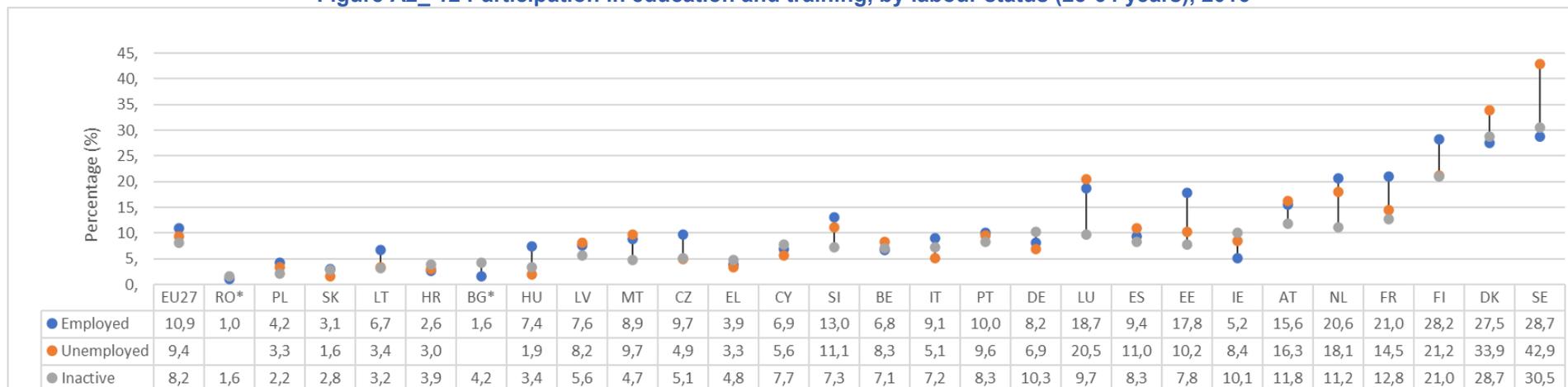
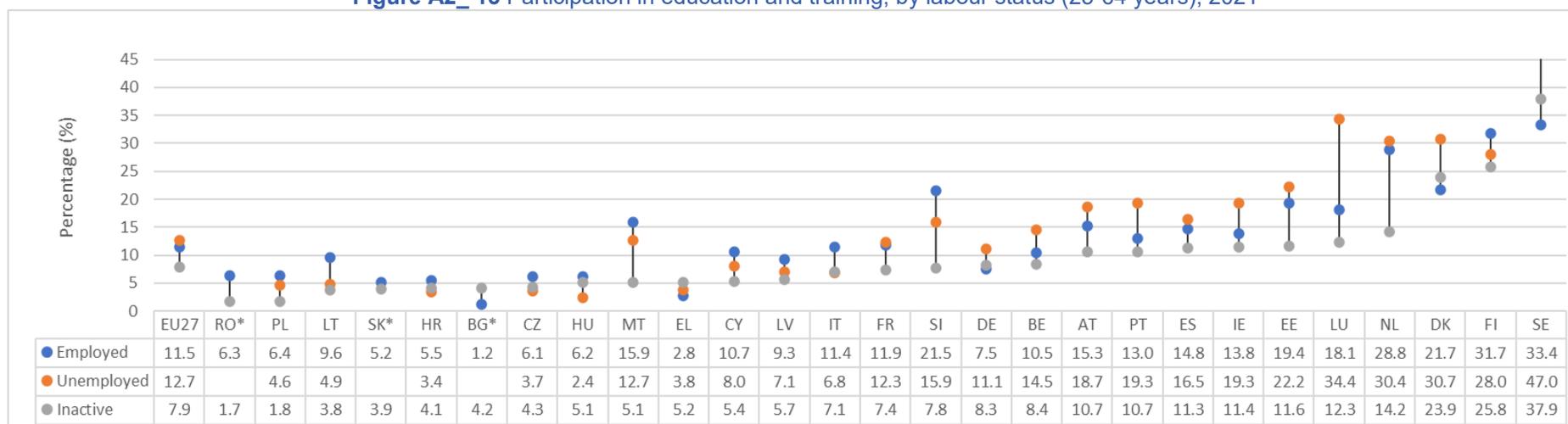
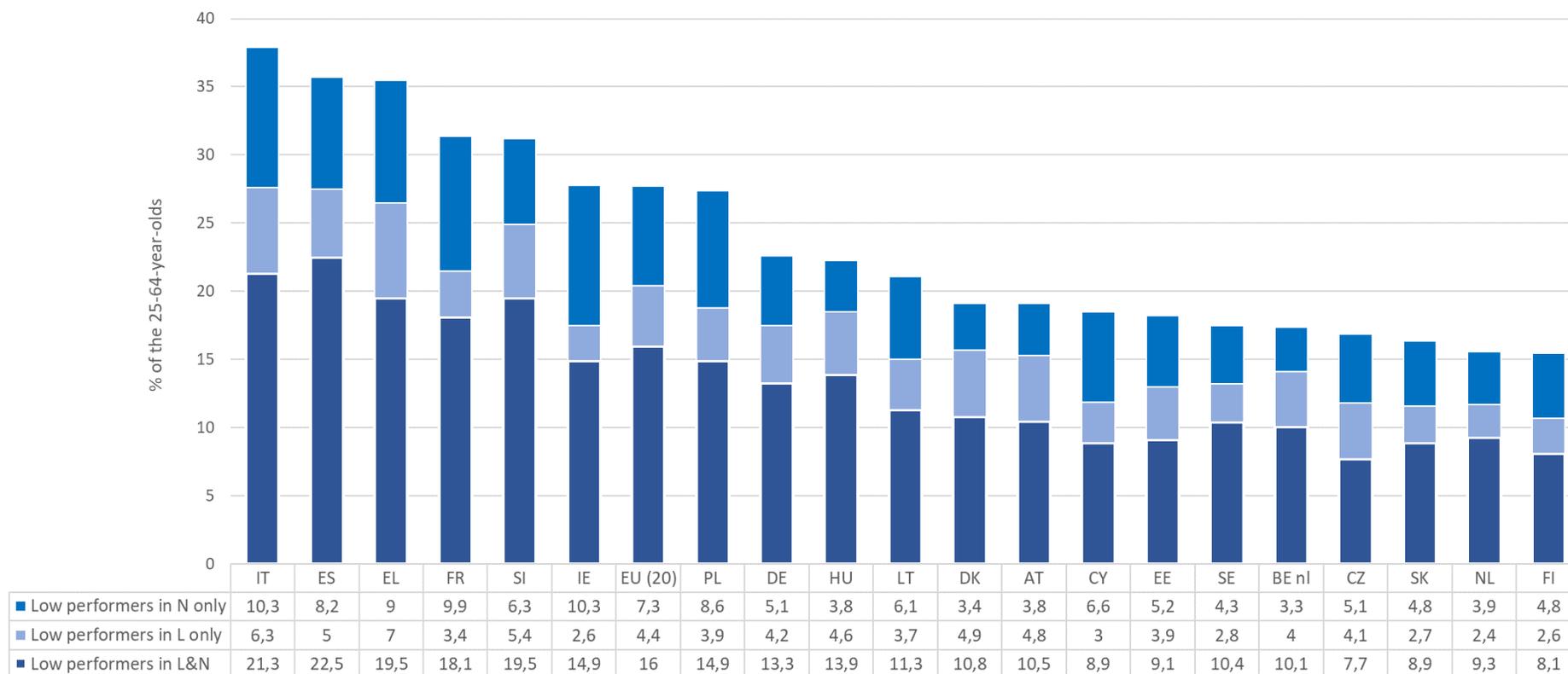


Figure A2_13 Participation in education and training, by labour status (25-64 years), 2021



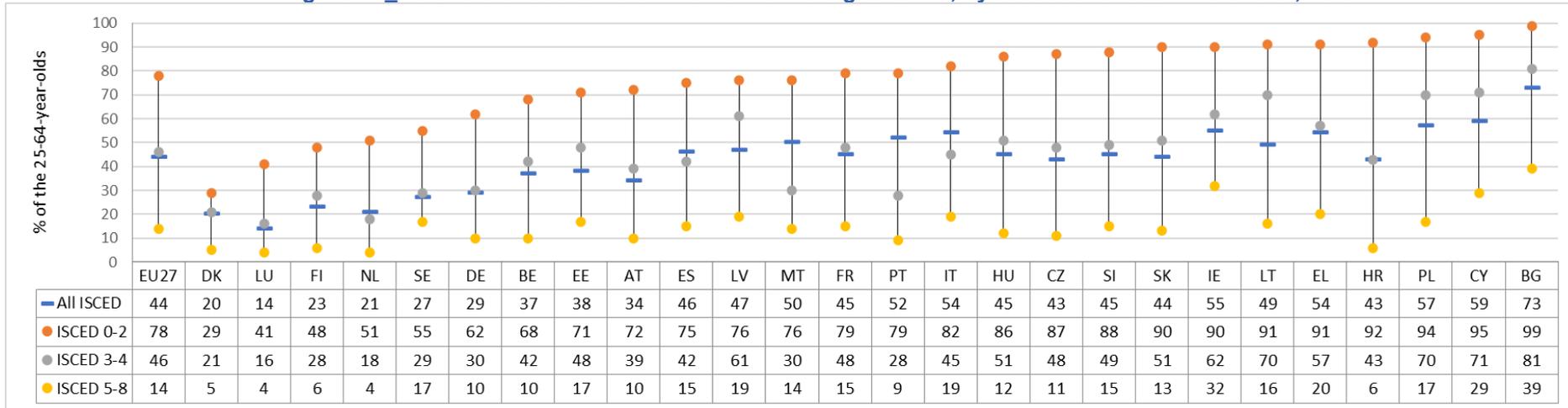
Source: Eurostat, LFS Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex, age and labour status TRNG_LFS_03. Note: data for Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania for subgroup unemployed not available

Figure A2_ 14 Share of adults with low numeracy and literacy skills; low literacy only, low numeracy only, both; EU-27+ countries, various years of reference between 2011 and 2017, (% of the 25-64-year-olds)



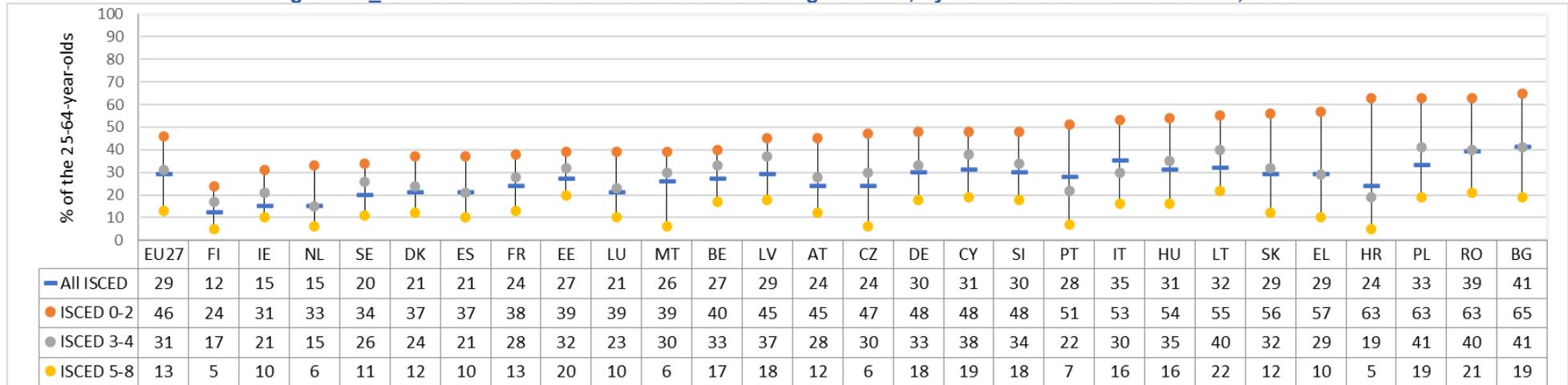
Source: European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). *Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report*. Retrieved from Luxembourg: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf; NB: years of reference: Measurement took place in 2011-2012 in Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden; in 2014-2015 in Greece, Lithuania, and Slovenia; in 2017 in Hungary. Data for the following countries is not available: Bulgaria, Croatia, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Portugal and Romania.

Figure A2_15 Share of adults 25-64 with low or no digital skills, by educational attainment level, 2016



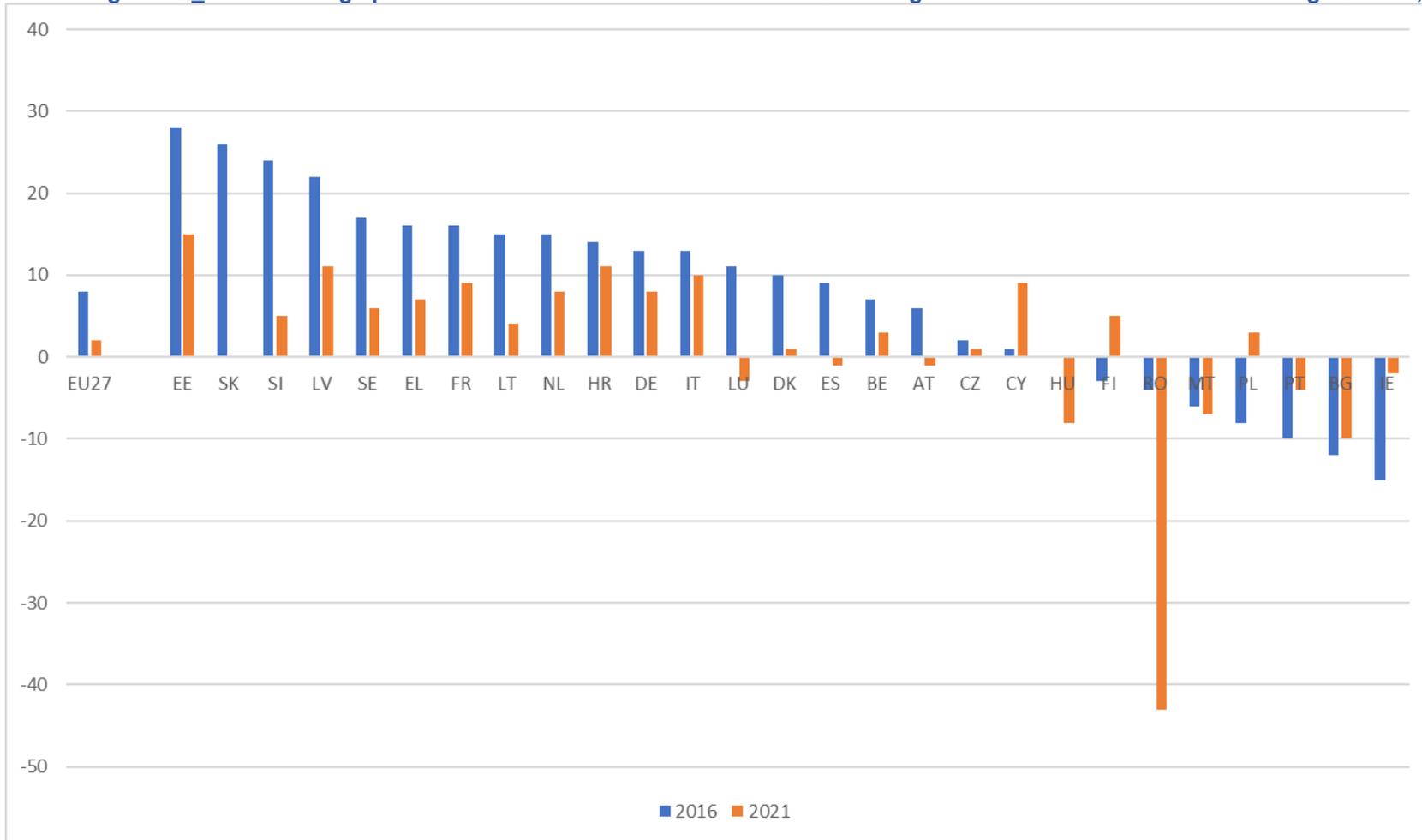
Source: Eurostat, Individual's level of digital skills, isoc_sk_dskl_i. Note: no data available for RO

Figure A2_ 16 Share of adults 25-64 with low or no digital skills, by educational attainment level, 2021



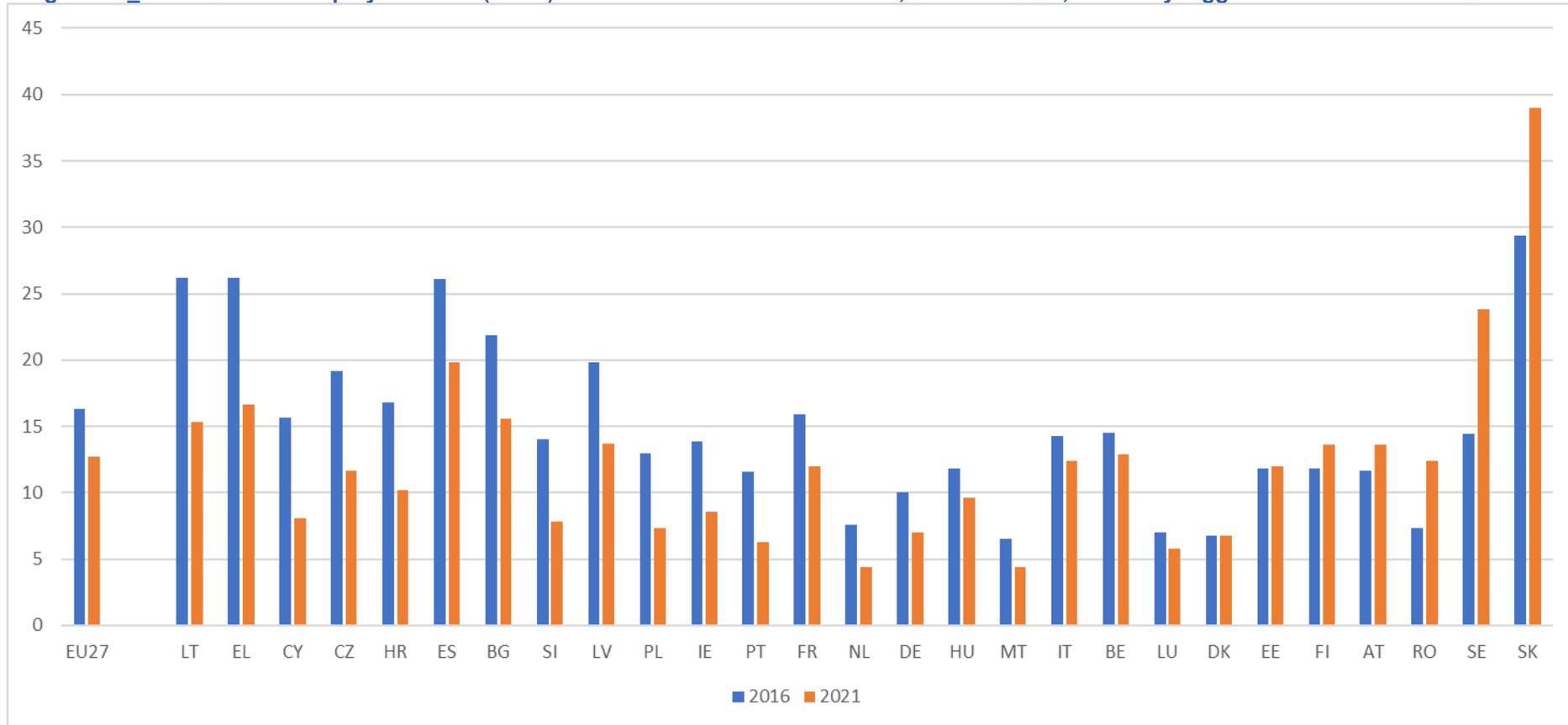
Source: Eurostat, Individual's level of digital skills, isoc_sk_dskl_i21. Break in time series

Figure A2_ 17 Percentage point difference in shares of native born and foreign-born individuals with no or low digital skills, 2016 and 2021



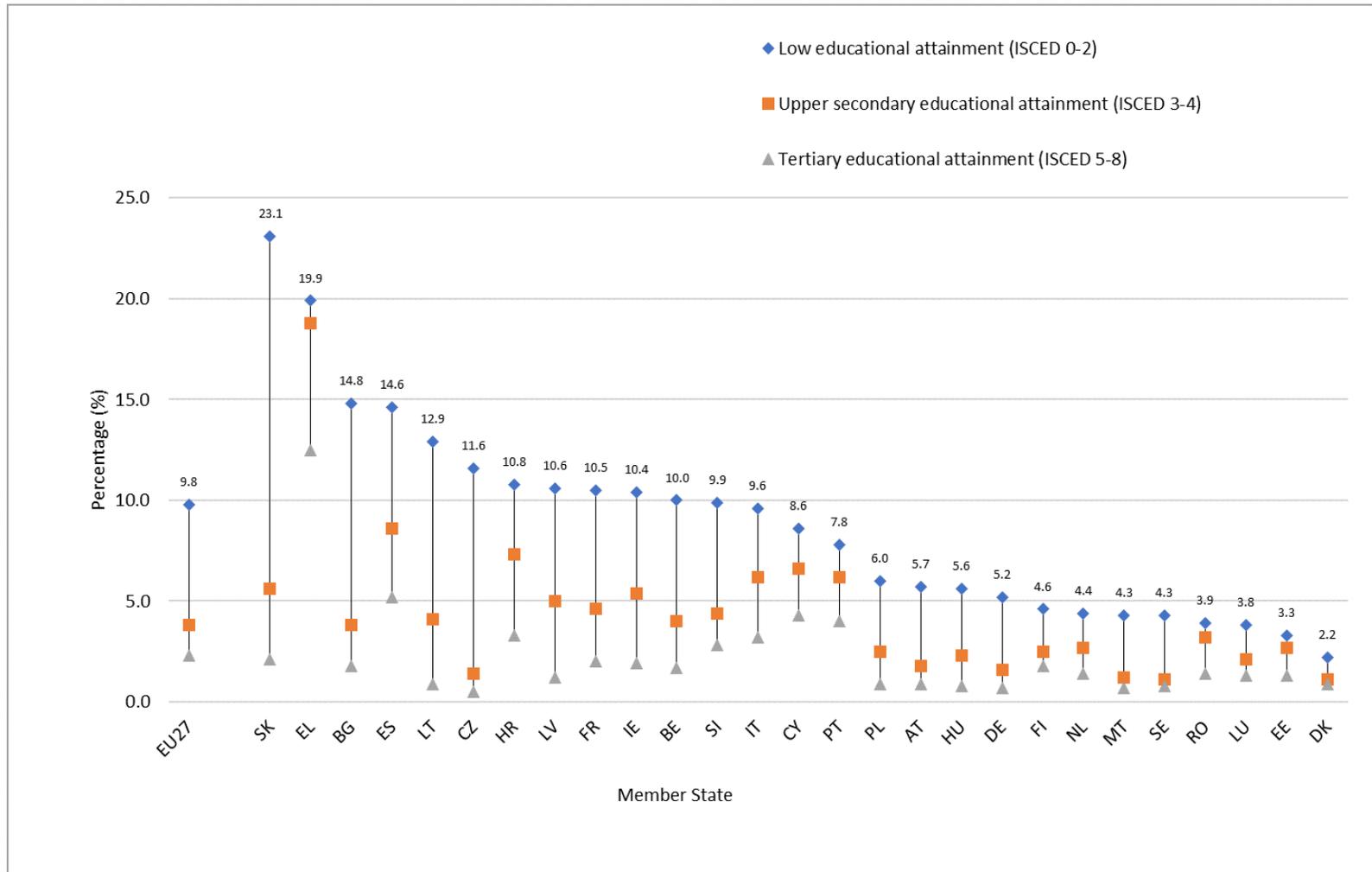
Source: Eurostat, Individual's level of digital skills, isoc_sk_dskl_i and isoc_sk_dskl_i21. Break in time series

Figure A2_18 Share of unemployed adults (25-64) with low educational attainment, 2016 and 2021, sorted by biggest decrease between 2016 and 2021



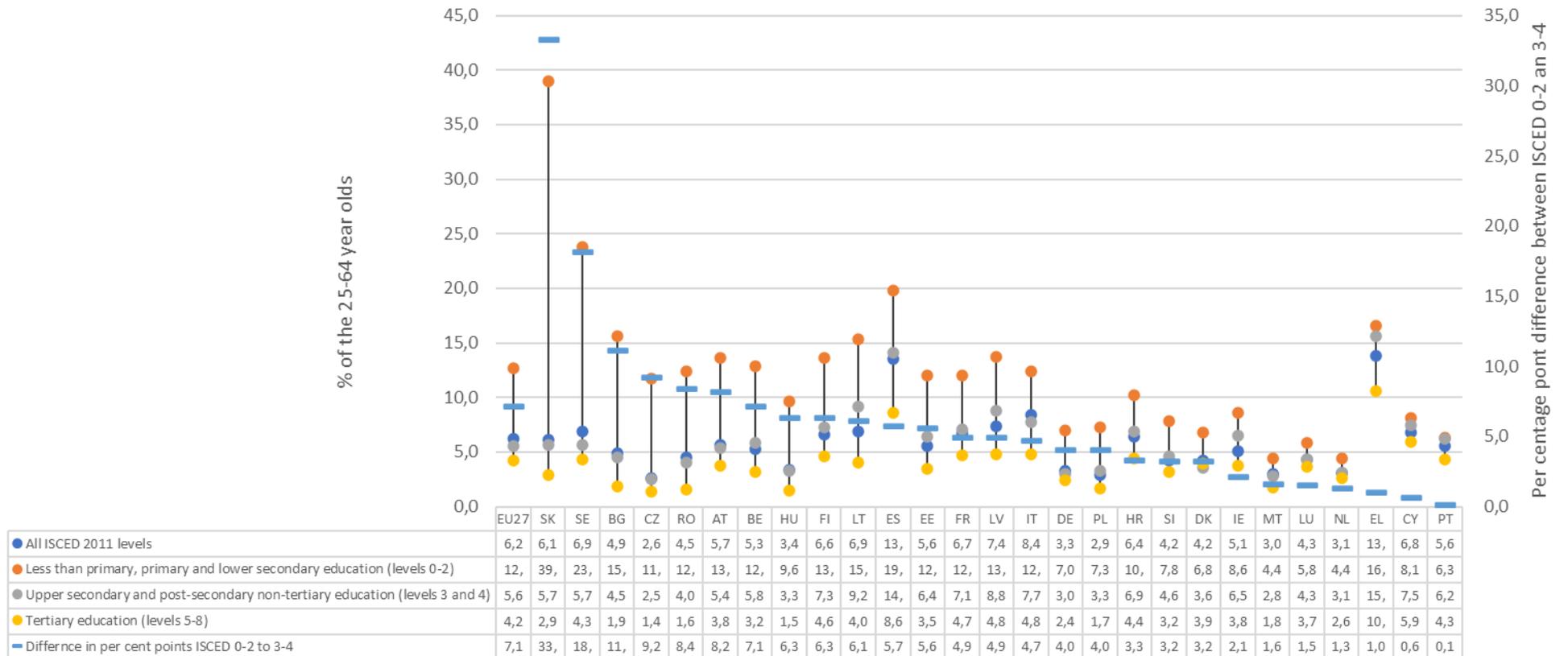
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Unemployment rates by sex, age and educational attainment level (%) [fsa_urgaed]

Figure A2_ 19 Long term unemployment rate (%) as a percentage of the population in the labour force (adults aged 20-64 years) by educational attainment level in 2016



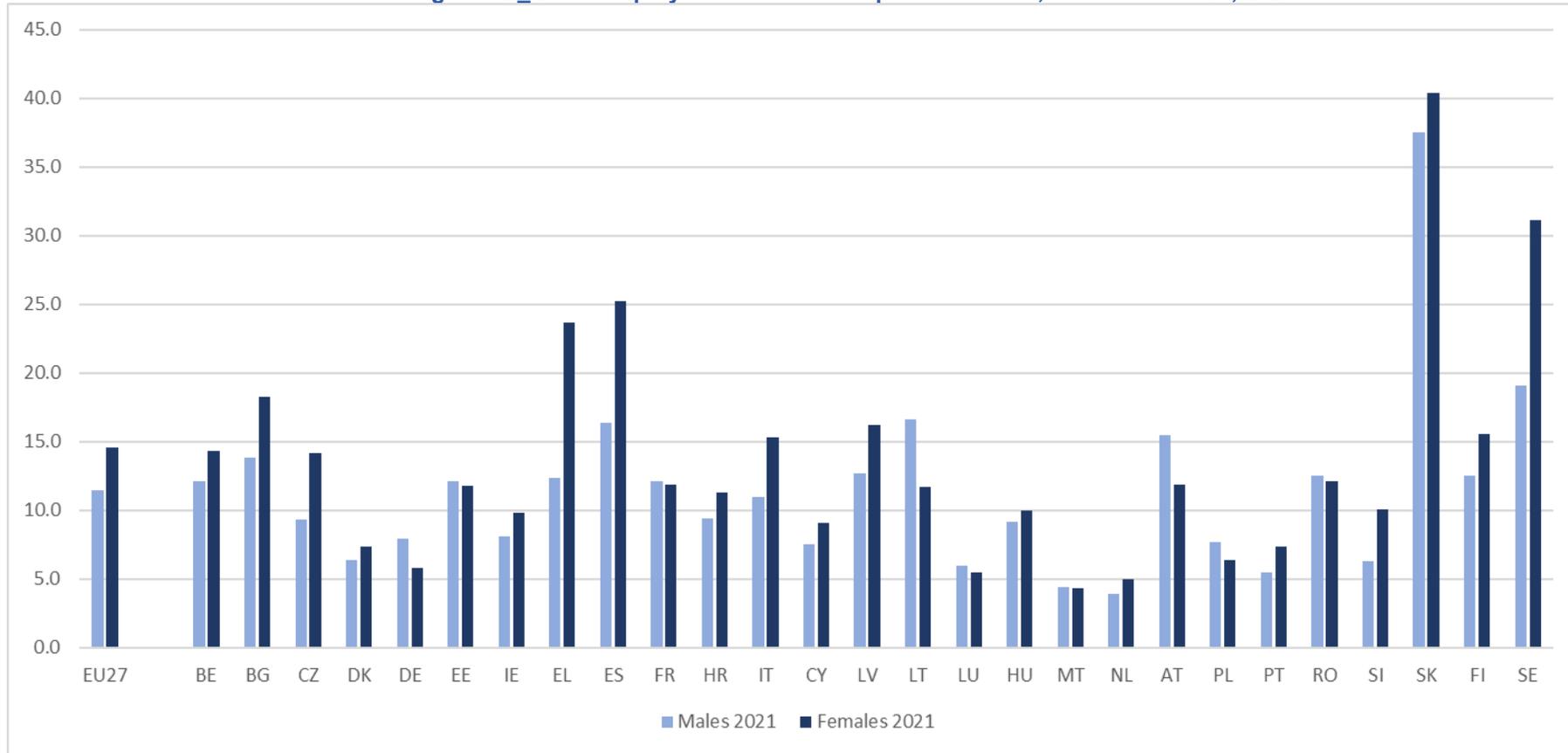
Source: Eurostat, Long-term unemployment 12 months and more by sex, age, educational attainment level, [lfst_r_lfu2ltu]

Figure A2_20 Unemployment rate (%) as a percentage of the population in the labour force (adults aged 20-64 years) by educational attainment level in 2021



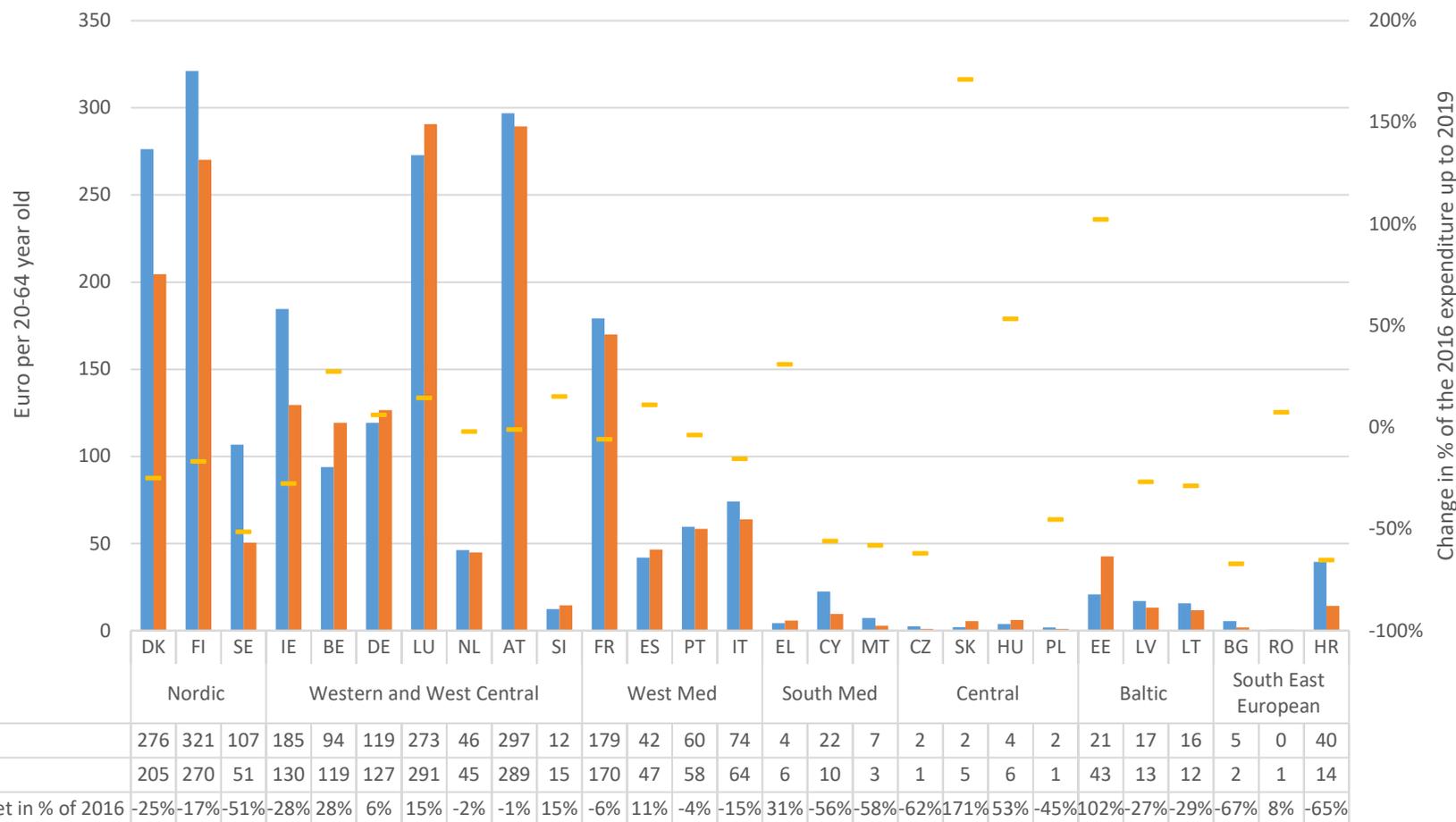
Source: Eurostat, Long-term unemployment 12 months and more by sex, age, educational attainment level, [fst_r_lfu2ltu]

Figure A2_ 21 Unemployment rate of low-qualified adults, female and male, 2021



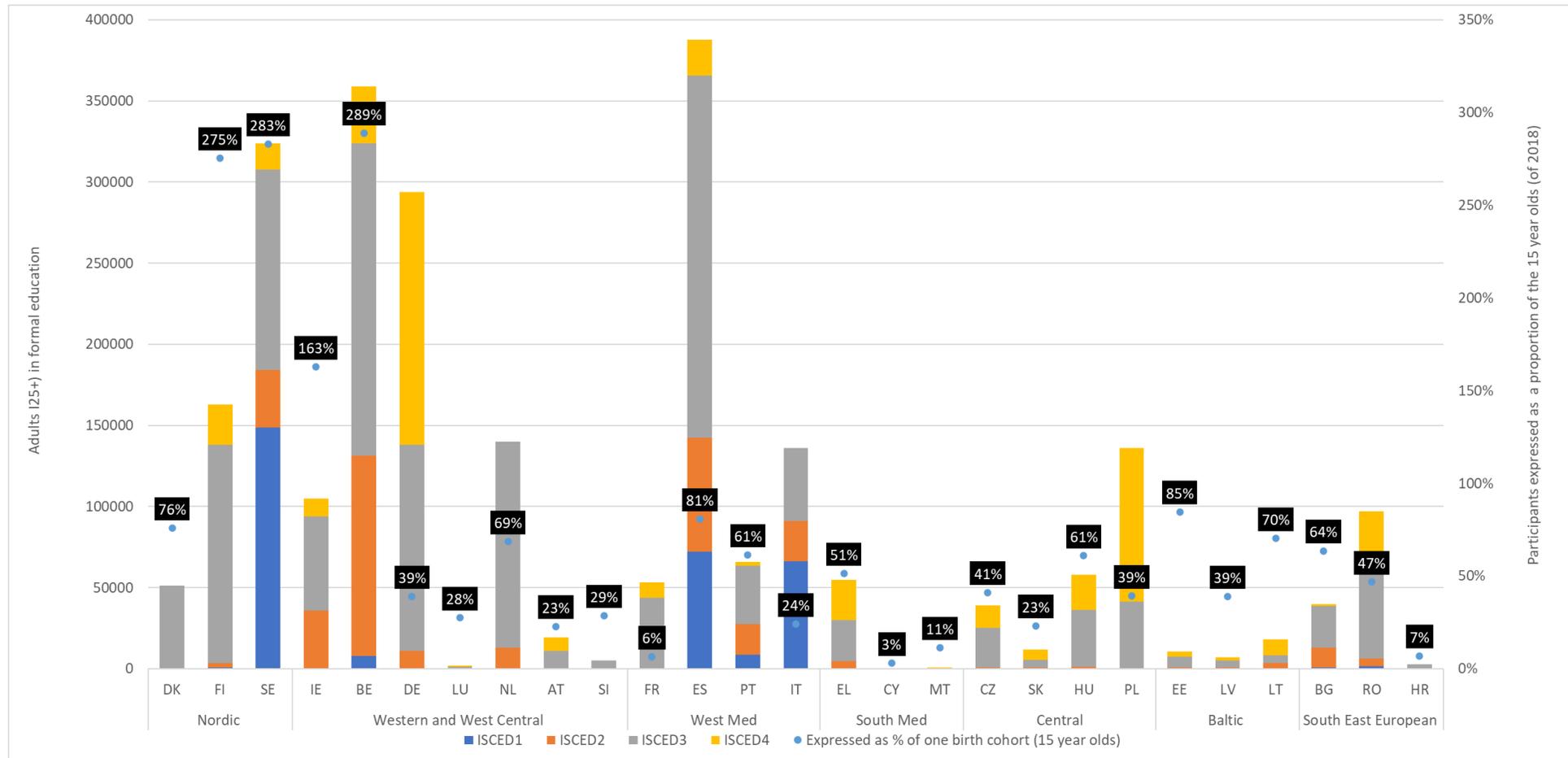
Source: Eurostat, LFS, Unemployment rates by sex, age and educational attainment level (%) [lfsa_urgaed]

Figure A2_22 Spending on training as part of Active Labour Market Policy per capita (20-64) – 2016 versus 2019; Change in spending between 2016 and 2019 as a percentage of the spending (in Mio Euro) of 2016



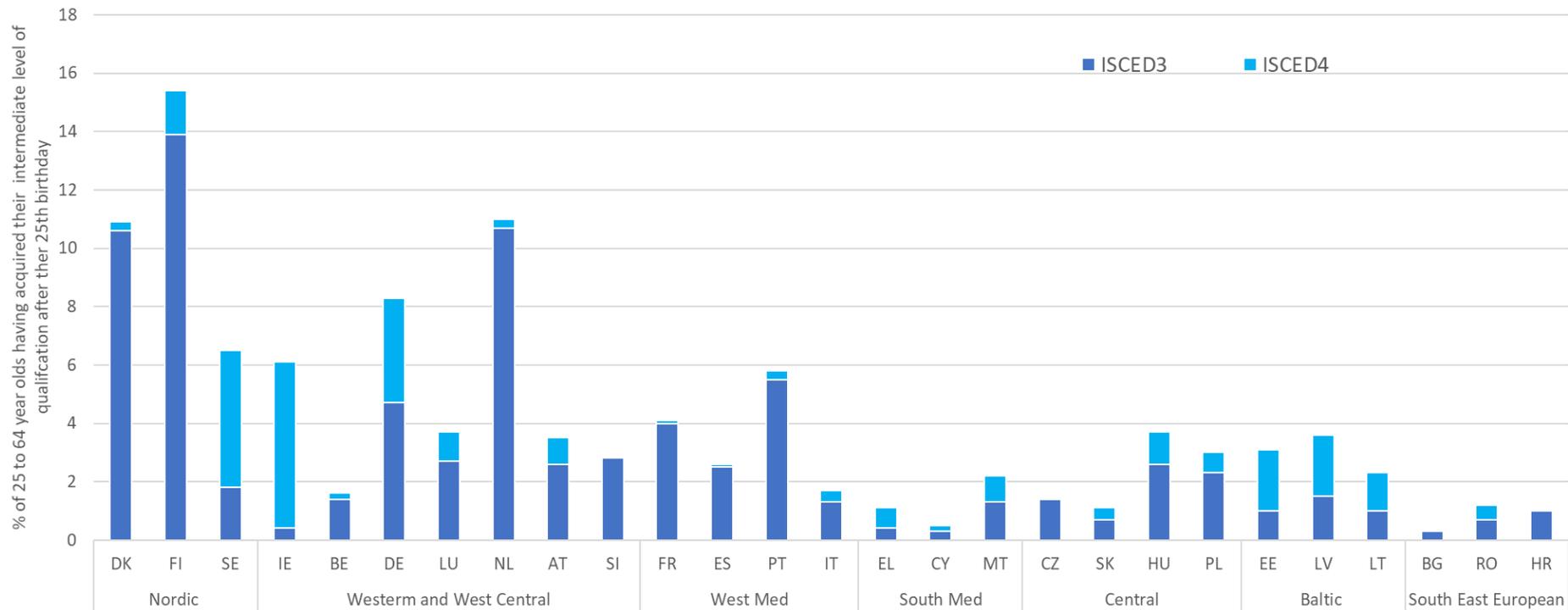
Sources: Own development based on Eurostat LMP_EXPSUMM (Vers. 03.01.2022) and Eurostat [demo_pjangroup] (Vers 05.07.2021)

Figure A2_ 23 Adult (25+) participants in formal education – School year 2018/2019: Absolute figures and figures expressed in relation to the cohort of 15 year olds (2018)



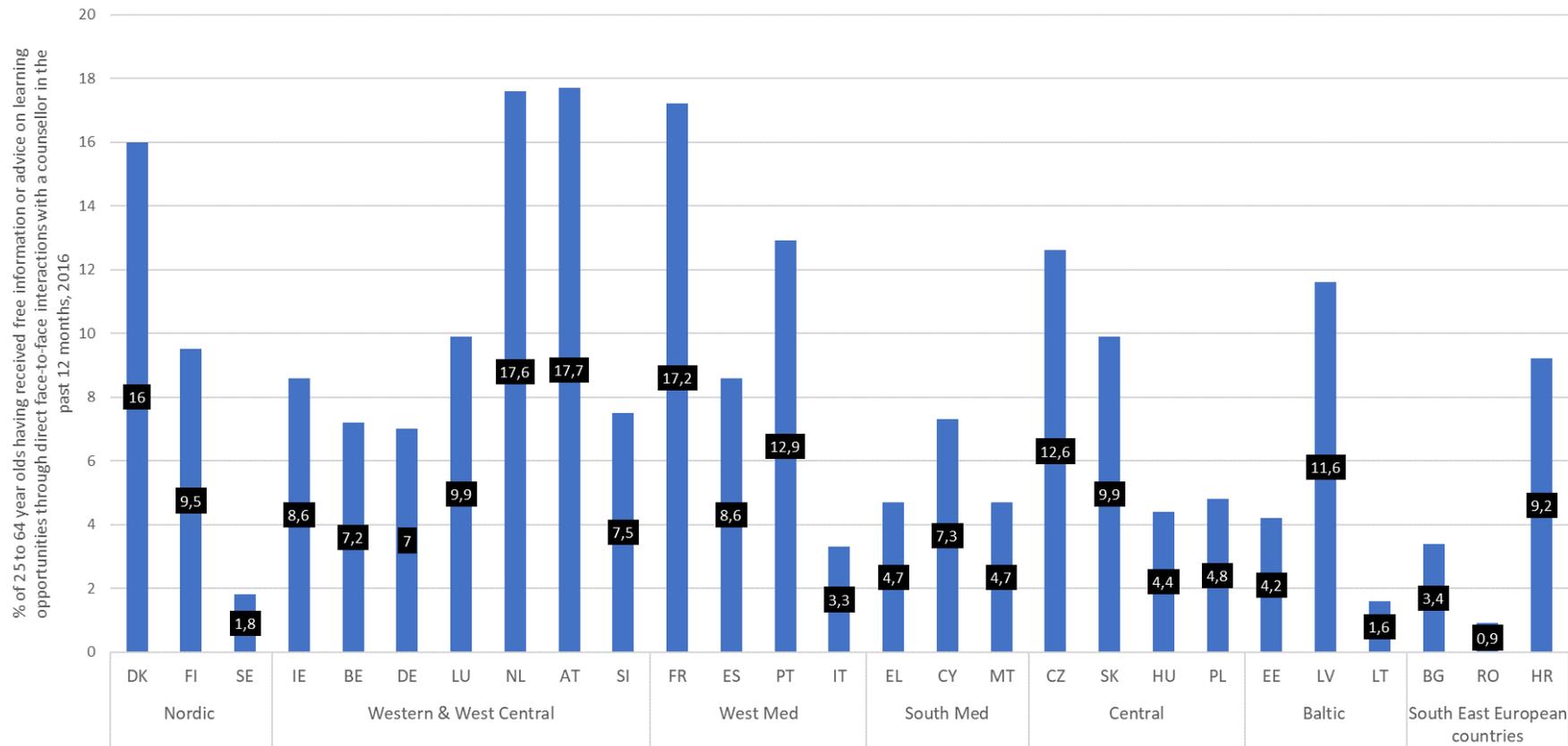
Source: Tables related to the levels: educ_uoe_enrp; NB: Figures include 'age unknown' cases, as the latter predominately cover participants of programmes available to adults only

Figure A2_24 Proportion of 25–64 year olds having acquired their medium level of qualification after their 25th birthday in 2019



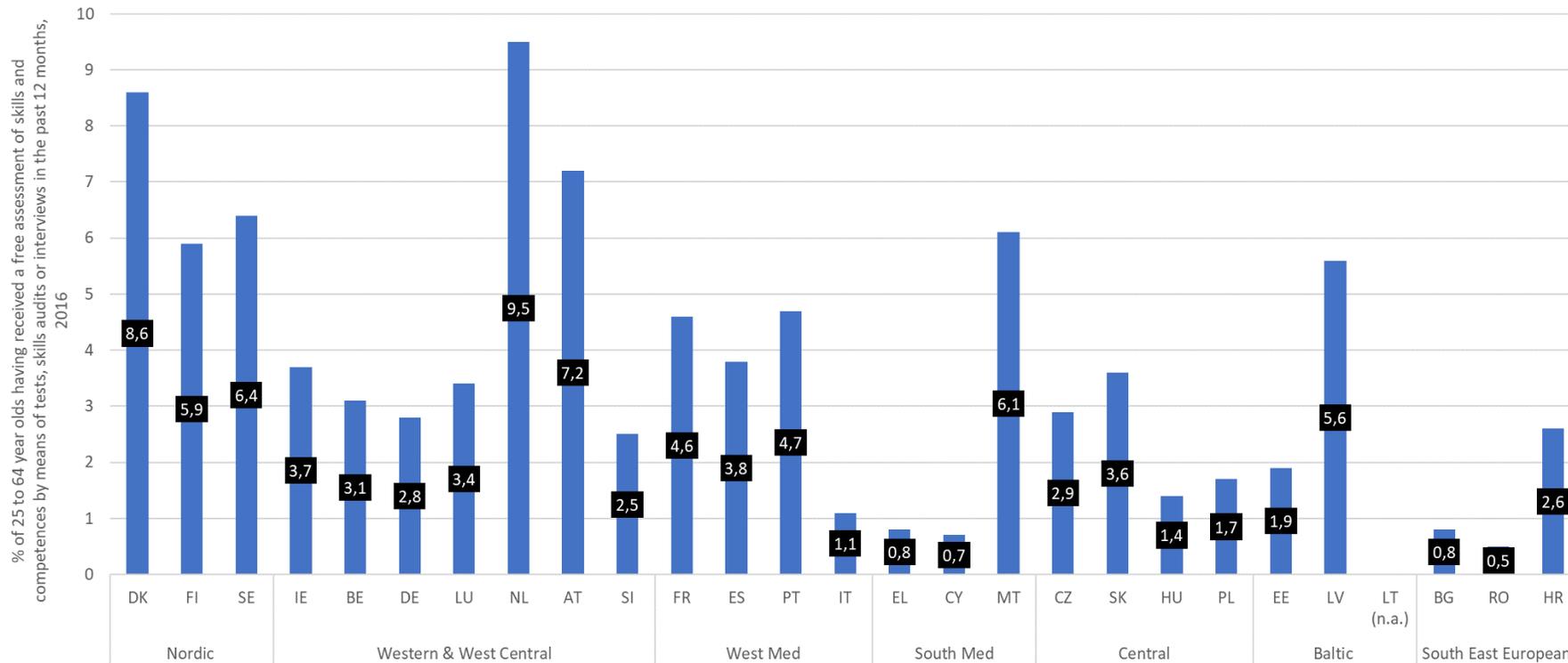
Source: Data from - as published in European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). *Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report*. Retrieved from Luxembourg: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf

Figure A2_ 25 Proportion of 25–64 year olds reporting having received information or guidance via a face-to-face setting in 2016



Source: Data from AES 2016 - as published in European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). *Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications*. Eurydice Report. Retrieved from Luxembourg: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf

Figure A2_ 26 Proportion of 25–64 year olds reporting having received a skill assessment in 2016



Source: Data from AES 2016 - as published in European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2021). Adult education and training in Europe Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications. Eurydice Report. Retrieved from Luxembourg: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/default/files/adult_education_and_training_in_europe_2020_21.pdf

Annex 3 – In-depth country mapping: The mapping of initiatives in each Member State (Task 1)

Notes for the reader:

The in-depth country mapping was based on longlist of relevant upskilling pathways measures in each Member State, developed by the research team on the basis of the following key sources:

- European Commission (2019). Staff Working Document ‘Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation ‘
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2015). Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning Opportunities: This is a report on the opportunities for adult learning for the low qualified and the low-skilled provided by the Eurydice network with the year of reference 2014, providing the starting point for constructing the base line scenario in 2016;
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (September 2021) Adult Education and Training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications;

A shortlist of measures was then identified in consultation with national authorities who were asked to select the measures that were considered to be most relevant to upskilling pathways in their country. Following the selection and validation of the most relevant measures, the in-depth mapping of these measures in each Member State was conducted to represent:

- Policies predating the Recommendation but continued in 2017 and later, which support in an exemplary way the implementation of the Recommendation
- Post-Recommendation policies initiated or at least supported by the Recommendation (up until November 2021)

The in-depth mapping was then sent to the National Experts for final validation, as well as their expert assessment on the degree of implementation of the Recommendation.

Explanation of symbols used for summarising the expert assessment of implementation of the three steps:

Abbreviation/symbol	Meaning
TP	Tailored, flexible, modular provision
As	Skills assessment
Va	Validation
EU	Measure is supported by EU funding
Na	Measure is supported by national funding
✓	Implemented (fully or partly)
x	Not implemented
○	Not a foreseen/relevant aspect of the policy/project described.

n/a

No assessment available.

Codes are used in the text to refer to specific measures (e.g. [AT#1]). The corresponding names of the measures are included in the relevant tables in each country section.

1. Austria

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Austria was 15.5 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25–64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 21.9 %, which is moderately high by comparison.²⁸⁸ Participation of the low-qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (5.1 %) while the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment almost (14.9%) reached the LLL-benchmark (15%).

According to Adult Education Survey (AES) figures, by comparison, lifelong guidance (17.7%) and skill assessment (7.2%) were well developed in 2016.

Austria has a **highly developed adult education and training system**, with a number of initiatives supporting the acquisition of basic skills for adults, with a significant aspect being measures led by the Ministry of Education, Science and Research and structured through the Initiative for adult education (including courses for the development of basic skills AT#3, lower secondary school leaving certificate courses AT#4), with around 30,000 participants between 2015 and 2018. The Adult Basic Education framework combines a skill assessment with a tailored provision in small groups; AT#4 has also a validation component as it awards a formal qualification ('school leaving certificate'), however, it offers no validation of more specific or vocational skills. The Preparatory courses for the vocational matriculation exam support participants towards the vocational matriculation examination (about 23.000 participants in 2015). The Public Employment Service (AMS) oversees relevant apprenticeship courses and programmes (Apprenticeship-intensive courses, Competence with a system AT#2, one framework providing a three-steps-integration in Austria targeting low-qualified during (frequent) spells of unemployment, allowing for earning a full qualification), which reached around 19,000 participants in 2019.

By 2016, the Austrian Lifelong Learning (LLL) strategy of 2011 was still operational ((Hefler et al., 2018; Republik Österreich, 2011), however, policy coordination in the field of lifelong learning was still not established beyond the field of Active Labour Market Policies.

By comparison, **generous demand-side funding schemes** for individual training costs exists (mainly on the regional level). On the national level, a rather **generous educational leave** exists, with individuals receiving a wage replacement payment from the Public Employment Service (PES) equal to their unemployment benefits for up to 12 months [AT#1]. The leave has developed into one key form of public support for adult learning.

EU-funding (ESF in particular) is used for some key initiatives relevant for upskilling (e.g. AT#3, AT#4).

²⁸⁸ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/austria_country_factsheet.pdf

Table A3_1 AT - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[AT#1] Educational leave (Bildungskarenz) Policy 1998-	Provision of three to 12 Month of wage replacement during participation in education (of a minimum of 20 hours per week or the equivalent in credits), equal amount as for the unemployment benefits	○	○	○	All employed adults aiming for education or training	x	x
[AT#2] 'Competence with a system' (Kompetenz mit System) Policy 2009-	Modular programme for a variety of different apprenticeships. It enables adults with low levels of qualifications (particularly women) to improve their competences and progress towards a formally recognised vocational qualification (Lehrabschluss).	✓	✓	✓	Low-skilled adults seeking employment (recurring phases of unemployment)		
[AT#3] Courses for the development of basic skills (Basisbildungskurse) Policy 2012-	In Austria, courses for the development of basic skills (Basisbildungskurse) are framed by the Initiative for adult education, which specifies different competence areas in basic education. This type of provision therefore consists of a wide range of courses delivered by different organisations.	✓	✓	✓	Low-skilled youth and adults in need of basic skills training in reading, writing, maths and IT	x	x
[AT#4] Lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (Vorbereitungskurse auf den Pflichtschulabschluss) Policy 2012-	The 'Initiative for adult education' enables adults with low levels of qualifications to participate in courses to prepare for the attainment of a lower secondary school leaving certificate (ISCED 2) free of charge.	✓	✓	✓	Low-skilled youth and adults aiming to gain a lower secondary school leaving certificate	x	x

Of the 4 measures identified for Austria, 3 are policies and 1 is a project, with all measures established before 2015. The main target group is the **low-skilled** across measures, with some differentiation in terms of learning needs and outcomes. 1 measure targets employed adults aiming to gain education or training. In terms of the profiles of the coordinating agencies, the measures are split, with 2 coordinated through the educational policy field and 2 through the employment policy field. All four measures are **coordinated through a single agency**. For the funding, the 3 measures with a financial allocation are financed through joint EU/national budgets.

Development post 2016

By 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified has somewhat increased (by 0.7 percentage points to 5.8 %), while the overall participation rate has decreased slightly (by 0.3 percentage points to 14.6 %).

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation has so far not triggered the implementation of new initiatives, which is also the effect of various changes in the Austrian government since 2017. However, for sustaining and further expanding the full set of policies developed mainly between 2005 and 2015 and regarded as important for upskilling (Nationalagentur Erasmus+ Bildung, 2018), the **Recommendation has been an important support**. For example, from 2016 onwards, public investment in the training leave scheme has been further expanded (AT#1), variations of (AT#2) have been implemented in the Austrian regions, AT#2 has been sustained and AT#3 and AT#4 prolonged (2017-2021) without cuts and once more (2022 onwards) with a small reduction of the foreseen funding (see also (Hefler and Steinheimer, 2020). **High investments for training** within Austria's Active Labour Market Policy has been further sustained between 2016 and 2019.

Overall, while no renewed Lifelong learning strategy had been adopted, the outflow of previous investment cycles are still visible, with EU initiatives providing support (for the latest monitoring see Hefler et al., 2018). Austria launched a National Strategy for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning" in 2017.

2. Belgium

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Belgium was 24.9 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was considered to be not exceptionally high (19.4%) by comparison.²⁸⁹ Participation in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was rather low for the low qualified (2.8%) and across all levels of educational attainment (7.0%).

Based on AES figures, in comparative view, lifelong guidance (7.2%) and skill assessment (3.1 %) were not strongly developed and with respective indicators below the EU-27 average in 2016.

Belgium has a **system distributed across the different regions**. In BE-fr, the Adult basic education initiative is designed for learners aged 15 and above, along with the Upper secondary education for adults leading to a qualification certificate and the Upper secondary education for adults leading to a full qualification programme (60,702 participants in 2018/19 for both programmes). BE-nl has schemes covering Basic adult education (39,727 participants 2018/19) and the Secondary adult education programme, led through centres for adult education, which reached 241,918 participants in 2018/19. (No information on the small German speaking subsystem is available). Overall, participation of adults in formal education is reported as being outstandingly high²⁹⁰. Belgium also has a **developed system of validation**²⁹¹, with different approaches established in Wallonia (see the BE#1 example selected for mapping) and Flanders.

Different strategic documents guiding policy-making exist in Belgium's different regions. BE-fr introduced the "Brussels' Youth Guarantee Action Plan" and the "Employment-

289 For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/belgium_country_factsheet.pdf

290 According to an earlier study, the Belgian UOE data on formal adult education, however, used to be not fully comparable, including activities typically not covered in other countries (Saar et al., 2013)

291 https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_BE_FR.pdf; [2016_validate_BE_NL.pdf](https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_BE_NL.pdf) (europa.eu)

Environment Alliance” in 2013 and 2011. Policy-making in BE-nl was guided by the “Strategic Plan to Raise Literacy Levels 2012-2016” and the “Career Agreement 2012-2013”.

Generous demand-side funding for training leaves exists, as employers continue wage payment during training participation and are reimbursed by the scheme. There are also other demand-side funding instrument supporting the individuals.

Table A3_2 BE - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[BE#1] Cooperation agreement regarding the validation of skills (Accord de coopération relatif à la validation des compétences), including Certification in Wallonia (CISPS) Policy [Regional]	The purpose is to issue certificates of competence in order to certify the skills acquired by learners in a formal, non-formal and informal contexts.	✓	○	✓	Adult learners	-	x

Development post 2016

By 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified slightly increased (by 1.2 percentage points to 4 %), with the overall participation rate increasing more (by 3.2 percentage points to 10.2 %).

BE-fr launched several strategies, for example the “Training Plan 2020” launched in 2019 to improve access to lifelong learning, and Get up Wallonia! [BE#3] in 2020, which emphasizes the importance of VET for developing and updating skills in multiple selected occupational fields. BE-nl introduced the “Strategic Literacy Plan” [BE#2] in 2017 targeting adults with low levels of literacy, as well as the “Concept Note on Adult Education” in 2016.

Table A3_3 BE - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[BE#2] Strategic literacy plan (Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid) Strategic Policy 2017	The strategic literacy plan includes five strategic goals to improve the literacy skills of the Flemish population.	n/a	n/a	n/a	Adults with low literacy levels	-	x
[BE#3] Get up Wallonia! Policy Strategic Policy 2020-	This policy document underlines the importance of vocational training and digital training; the development and updating of skills in connection with emerging and technical professions.	n/a	n/a	n/a	Employees, self-employed, job seekers	x	x

[BE#4] Skill Assessment and vouchers for the unemployed and disabled people	Skills assessment and systematic professional orientation (focusing on linguistic and digital skills for the unemployed).	✓	✓	○	Vulnerable job-seekers	x	x
Policy							
2021							

3. Bulgaria

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Bulgaria was 17.7 %. The potential for upskilling among 25–64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 31.0%, which is considered as being substantial by comparison.²⁹² The participation rate in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was very low (2.2 %).

Based on AES 2016, lifelong guidance (3.4 %) and skill assessment (0.8 %) were poorly developed with figures strongly below the EU-27 average.

In the baseline period, 1 measure has been identified through the mapping. The ‘New opportunity for my future’ [BG#1] project expanded the dimensions of assessment and validation in Bulgaria for the duration of the project, due to the lack of mechanisms and approaches for skills assessment. Overall, this project reached 3,639 participants who acquired professional qualifications. This project created and tested a system for the identification and recognition of informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences, although the system has not been widely applied beyond the project. This project was financed through ESF and national co-funding.

In 2014, Bulgaria introduced a “National Lifelong Learning Strategy”.

There is **no demand-side funding for training leaves** established. Individuals are entitled to a paid study leave for attending formal education programmes, in particular for preparing and sitting exams.

Table A3_4 BG - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[BG#1] 'New opportunity for my future' Project 2013-	System for recognition of informally acquired knowledge, skills and competencies.	✓	✓	✓	All adults	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training decreased (by 0.4 percentage points to 1.8 %). Data for the low qualified (0.6 %) are only available for 2019. In the 2019 Implementation Report of the European Commission, Bulgaria reported a total of 13 measures already in place that were mainly in line with the objectives of the Upskilling Pathways (p.8). These measures support the implementation of the Strategic Framework for the Development of

²⁹² For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/bulgaria_country_factsheet.pdf

Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)²⁹³, which was adopted in February 2021. Within the Framework, priority area 8 is dedicated to Lifelong Learning, with efforts aimed to create attractive and flexible opportunities for the acquisition of basic skills, new competences, qualifications and retraining in the formal education system and in non-formal learning, as well as creating conditions for non-formal learning²⁹⁴.

Bulgaria has a number of measures that are coordinated through the Ministry of Education and Science. 5 measures were identified for the post-2016 period in the mapping. The 'New Workplace 2015'[BG#2] project supported the expansion of step 2 of the Recommendation, in particular through workplace training and cooperation with businesses. The project led to 7,813 people gaining qualifications and was financed through European and national funding.

The on-going 'Training and Employment' project [BG#3] has helped to expand coverage of steps 1 and 2 in Bulgaria through linking PES and businesses to develop training plans for individuals. This project is jointly financed through European and national funding.

The 'Vouchers for employees' project [BG#4] aimed to increase the qualifications of employed persons in Bulgaria, with the target group having the opportunity to adapt to expand or acquire new knowledge and skills through the acquisition of qualifications and key competences. This measure supports the provision of steps 2 and 3 of the Recommendation in Bulgaria. At the end of June 2018, 22,671 employees were participating in the training, with 19,000 enrolled in training courses leading to a professional qualification, 4,922 in training courses to acquire a foreign language, and 2,031 in training to acquire digital competences. A key feature of this measure is the wide scope of the target group. This project was co-financed by the ESF and national contributions.

The 'New Chance for Success' project [BG#5] targets low-skilled adults, and therefore provides step 1 of the Recommendation to an underserved target group. At the time of mapping, 3,392 illiterate persons over 16 years old were involved in the first training stage, 1,627 in the second stage and 2,755 in the third stage. This approach was considered a positive measure in the upskilling of the most vulnerable groups by the national expert.

The project 'Training of adults who have completed literacy courses' [BG#6] targets some of the most vulnerable groups in society. This measure complements the BG#5 and led to 6,006 participants gaining a qualification. This measure addressed step 1 (partially) and step 2 (fully) of the Recommendation according to the country expert analysis. The measure was funded through joint ESF and national contributions.

Table A3_5 BG - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[BG#2] 'New Workplace 2015' Policy 2016-2018	The procedure aims to provide prerequisites for creating sustainable jobs for the unemployed and inactive. This goal will be achieved through a combination of measures to provide appropriate training, including in the workplace, as well as providing a variety of incentives for employers to create new workplaces.	✓	✓	○	Unemployed and inactive	x	x

²⁹³ Ministry for Education and Science (2021), available at https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/lifelong-learning-strategy-12_en

²⁹⁴ Eurydice (2021), Bulgaria Lifelong Learning Strategy, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/lifelong-learning-strategy-12_en

[BG#3] 'Training and Employment' Policy 2016-2023	The aim of the operation is the integration of unemployed persons over the age of 29, registered in the directorates "Labour Office" at the Employment Agency, in employment with an employer in real business or local government institutions through training tailored to individual needs in the workplace and an employment subsidy.	✓	✓	○	Unemployed persons over age of 29	x	x
[BG#4] 'Vouchers for employed persons'/'Vouchers for employees' Policy 2016-2021	The procedure aims to increase the qualification of the employed persons in Bulgaria who have an employment contract in enterprises outside the state administration and have a secondary or lower level of education.	✓	✓	○	Employees with an average or lower level of Educ. (below ISCED 4)	x	x
[BG#5] 'New Chance for Success' Project 2016-2023	The project aims to ensure access to literacy courses for adults and a suitable environment for overcoming, and compensating for, illiteracy-related problems.	✓	✓	○	Low skilled adults	x	x
[BG#6] 'Training of adults who have completed literacy courses' Project 2017-2019	The operation focuses on the integration of some of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market, namely people of working age who have primary and lower education (below ISCED 3) or have no education.	✓	✓	○	Unemployed low skilled adults	x	x

4. Croatia

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Croatia was 17.3 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25–64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 17.4 %, which is considered as considerably low by comparison.²⁹⁵ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was very low (0.4 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment (3.0 %) was also very low.

Croatia has a number of education and training programmes governed through the Ministry of Science and Education that support adults. After a project phase of 10 years, Basic education for adults [HR#1] was implemented as a regular programme in 2013. The programme reached 902 participants in 2019 and two vocational programmes (Vocational training and Vocational development training) reached around 12,000 participants in the period 2017-19. Teaching can be conducted as a regular or through in person consultations or correspondence consultations. In person consultations are intended for students who cannot attend regular classes. In this form of education, it is necessary to achieve at least 60% of the teaching hours provided by the curriculum. In the consultations, the emphasis is placed on those parts of the programme that participants find difficult to master by

²⁹⁵ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/croatia_country_factsheet.pdf

independent learning, i.e., from textbooks or other literature. Correspondence consultations are conducted through short joint or individual consultations. The rest of the programme is conducted remotely (didactically prepared textbooks and teaching materials). Also aiming at adults with low educational status, vocational development training programmes for simple professions [HR#2] were implemented in 2008.

In the baseline period, Croatia had launched the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports' Strategic Plan for 2013-2015.

Table A3_6 HR - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[HR#1] Basic primary education for adults Policy 2003-	This is the programme for adults that have not had completed primary education. It is divided into six educational periods, each lasting 18 weeks. At the end of the programme, participants can also enrol in a training programme for elementary occupations lasting 150 hours.	○	✓	○	Low educational attainment adults	-	x
[HR#2] Vocational development training programmes for simple professions Policy 2008-	Vocational training programmes provide theoretical and practical knowledge needed to perform simple tasks of the first degree of complexity according to the National Classification of Occupations.	○	✓	○	Low educational attainment adults	-	x

Development post 2016

Table A3_7 HR - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[HR#3] Curriculum for the development of basic adult skills, strengthening digital, mathematical and reading project 2019-	This new curriculum was developed as part of the fourth cycle of the EU Agenda for Adult Education 2017-2019 project implementation. The curriculum is published on the website of the Ministry of Science and Education and can be implemented by adult education institutions as an independent programme lasting 100 lessons or integrated - they can single out individual learning outcomes needed by the student and fit them into the training programme.	n/a	✓	✓	Adults with low basic skills	-	x

In 2021, the overall participation in education and training of the low qualified increased (by 2.1 percentage points to 5.1 %). No data are available for the proportion of low qualified in 2021. The Ministry of Science and Education in cooperation with the Agency for Vocational and Adult Education and the Agency for Education and Teacher Training released a curriculum for basic adult skills [HR#3], targeting people with low skills in reading, math and digital skills, to be implemented by adult education institutions. The curriculum will be implemented mostly through the programmes for the acquisition of basic vocational competencies within adult training programmes. If necessary, it can be integrated into other

educational programmes (professional training programmes). Implementation and organisation of activities is possible modularly, depending on the needs of participants.

5. Cyprus

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Cyprus was 20.5 %. The potential for upskilling among 25–64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 30.1%, which is considered as substantial by comparison. Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was strongly below the EU average (1.5 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment reached only a moderately high level (6.9%). Lifelong guidance (7.3 %) and skill assessment (0.7 %) were not strongly developed and below the EU-27 average in 2016. There is **no demand-side funding for training leaves** established. Generally, paid leave is accepted either through sectoral collective agreements or through individual employer/employee agreements.

Cyprus has evening schools for secondary general education (422 participants in 2019/20) and technical and vocational education (316 participants 2019/20), both of which are governed through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. In addition, there are one-year and three-year vocational education and training programmes (reaching around 700 participants in 2019/20) available to employed or unemployed adults. A three-year apprenticeship programme is also available for young people who have dropped out of formal education (129 participants 2019/20). Two key initiatives were identified from the mapping, both of which were established prior to 2016.

Evening gymnasiums/lyceum for secondary general education offer afternoon and evening classes, with the aim of developing the social, personal or professional skills of adults and pupils aged 15 or over [CY#1]. In 2019/20, there were 316 schools operating. Following completion of a programme, a leaving certificate is issued to learners. The programme implements the three steps of Upskilling Pathways.

Evening schools for technical and vocational education are established in the same way as the evening gymnasium schools and operate on the same premises (316 schools operating in 2019/20) [CY#2]. Similarly, the TVET evening schools were reformed in 2019 and took on the same changes. TVET schools are targeted at holders of high school diplomas. The measure implements all three steps of the Council Recommendation.

In Cyprus, a “National Lifelong Learning Strategy” guided policy-making from 2014-2020.

Table A3_8 CY - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[CY#1] Evening gymnasiums/lyceums for secondary general education Policy 1999-	Evening schools are public institutions under the Administration of Secondary Education. They offer academically oriented curricula equivalent to that of ordinary secondary day schools.	✓	✓	✓	Early school leavers (18+)	-	x

[CY#2] Evening schools for technical and vocational education and the apprenticeship system for vocational education and training	Evening Schools of Technical and Vocational Education offer a second chance to people who have not completed Secondary Education.	✓	✓	✓	Holders of a high school diploma	-	x
Policy							
1999-							

Development post 2016

Up to 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified even slightly decreased (by 0.1 percentage points to 1.4 %), while the overall participation rate increased slightly (by 2.8 percentage points to 9.7 %). The Implementation Report (2019) specifies that Cyprus has a national coordinator responsible for adult learning prioritizing Upskilling Pathways in their national work plan, with a target for 2018-19 of 40,000 learners, mainly young person's not in education, employment or training (European Commission (2019), 10). The evening schools were reformed in 2019, with the aim of implementing a new operating framework involving a reduction of teaching periods, the operation of basic literacy classes, the introduction of distance learning, and recognition of attendance in programmes, as well as certification of non-formal and informal learning. The measure implements all three steps of the Council Recommendation.

6. Czechia

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in the Czech Republic was 6.6 %. The potential for upskilling among 25–64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 22.7 %, which is considered as being moderately high by comparison.²⁹⁶ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (IV: 2.3 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was only moderately high (8.8 %).

Based on AES 2016 figures, in a comparative view, lifelong guidance (12.6 %) was well developed, while figures for skill assessment (2.9 %) were slightly below the EU-27 average.

Czechia has two major programmes overseen by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, with the “Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic” guided policy-making from 2014 until 2020. The Course for the completion of basic education is aligned to the framework education programme and had 236 participants in 2019/20. The Follow up courses are intended for graduates of three-year vocational upper secondary programmes that do not lead to an examination, with 13,520 participants in 2019/20. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs coordinates Retraining programmes for unemployed people or jobseekers through the Labour Office, leading to NQF linked qualifications (13,241 participants 2019/20).

2 key measures for the baseline period were identified during the mapping stage. The digital literacy strategy [CZ#1] expanded digital technology support for unemployed people and increased accessibility to retraining programmes for the unemployed. An online system to

²⁹⁶ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/czechia_country_factsheet.pdf

promote digital competences for employees and jobseekers was launched under this framework, with the aim of enabling self-assessment of digital skills based on the European Digital Competences Framework. Following the assessment, participants would be able to undertake tailored training for upskilling as well as receiving recommendations on improving their digital competences. This strategy therefore helped to expand provision of step 1 and 2 and the Recommendation to some extent in Czechia in the implementation period following the Recommendation.

A wider policy, aligned to the Europe 2020 strategy, was the policy goal of reducing early leaving from education [CZ#2]. One component of this policy was the assessment of skills of students by educational counsellors at schools, meaning there was some expansion of step 1 of the Recommendation through this measure. However, the overall goal of this policy (5.5% early school leaving) was not achieved (7.6%).

There is **no demand-side funding** for training leaves established. Employers and employees can agree on a paid or unpaid training leave.

Table A3_9 CZ - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[CZ#1] Digital literacy strategy (Strategie digitální gramotnosti) Strategic Framework 2015-2020	The objective of this strategy was the development of people's digital literacy to enable them to use the potential of digital technologies for their personal development, employability and adaptability in the labour market, to improve their quality of life and social inclusion.	✓	✓	○	Unemployed, workers with low skills in digital literacy; employees of the public sector, the employers, families, employees of the community centres, adult learners	x	x
[CZ#2] Early leaving from education Strategic Framework	Actions aimed at achieving the national goal (under the Europe 2020 strategy) of stabilising the % of people early dropping out of education on 5.5% or below.	n/a	○	○	Early school leavers	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified had decreased (by 0.6 percentage point to 1.7 %), as has the overall participation rate (by 3 percentage points to 5.8 %).

In terms of implementing the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, the 2019 Implementation Report finds that Czechia implements the Recommendation through existing legislation and strategies (p.8). These are the Long-term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic 2019-2023²⁹⁷ and the Strategic Plan for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until

297 MŠMT (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy) [Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports], 2019. Dlouhodobý záměr vzdělávání a rozvoje vzdělávací soustavy České republiky na období 2019–2023 [Long-term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic for 2019–2023]. [online], Praha. Available at: <http://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/dz-cr-2019-2023>

2030+²⁹⁸, with the latter having a strategic objective of focussing education more on acquiring competences needed for active civic, professional and personal life.

2 measures relevant to the Recommendation were identified in the mapping. The Upskilling Project [CZ#3] creates online tools to support assessment of professional skills, knowledge and competences and the training needs of the target groups are therefore considered, expanding the provision of step 1 of the Recommendation in Czechia. If further linkages are developed to the NQF, this could also lead to increased access to step 3, however this is not yet implemented. Overall, the numbers of this measure are currently low according to the pilot project, which trained 200 persons and supported 15 trained persons to implement educational courses in the area of digital workplaces.

Under the Digital Literacy Strategy 2015-2020, measure [CZ#4] created a systemic solution for the further development of transferable digital competences through a comprehensive IT tool Smart Online System (SOS). The measure supported the implementation of steps 1 (skills levels were assessed based on the European Digicomp 2 framework) and 2 (individual offers were made to beneficiaries for trainings and courses adapted to their needs). The budget of the measure was 17.5 million EUR over the 4-year implementation, with the number of beneficiaries unavailable at the time of mapping.

Table A3_1031 CZ - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[CZ#3] Project UpSkilling CZ – Systemic environment to strengthen competencies Project 2019-	The aims of the project are: - Support for deepening the competencies of adults in further education; Optimization of the network of authorized persons in the National Qualifications Framework; Creation of educational programs for the acquisition of digital competencies; International survey of adult competencies.	✓	✓	○	Persons leaving an Educ. system without secondary Educ.; low skilled workers; persons on labour market with a low level of Educ., i.e. at level of EQF 1, 2 and 3; people on labour market with need to develop digital competences.	x	x
[CZ#4] Development of further education system for employers and employees in the digital competence field Project 2017-2021	The project will create a systematic solution for the further development of transferable digital competencies primarily aimed at the target group and secondarily aimed at the general public.	✓	✓	○	All	x	x

7. Denmark

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 - Baseline

298 MŠMT (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy) [Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports], 2014. Strategie vzdělávací politiky ČR do roku 2020 [Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020]. [pdf] Praha. Available at: <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/strategie-vzdelavaci-politiky-2020-1>

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Denmark was 19.7 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64-year olds beyond the low qualified was considered as considerably low (18.3 %).²⁹⁹ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) is the highest across the EU (19.7 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was also very high (28.0 %).

Upskilling is supported by frameworks providing skill assessments, flexible provision and validation, while projected-based integration (Three-Steps-Projects) is not reported as being decisive. Lifelong guidance (16.0 %) and skill assessment (8.6 %) were well developed in 2016.³⁰⁰ (see also European Commission (2019), page 17). **A highly differentiated, system of provision is in place, using a supply-side funding approach,** both for Adult Basic Education and for adults' participation in education on upper secondary level, general and vocational. Adult basic education comprises of two basic types of programmes³⁰¹ with about 64,000 participants in 2018. Provision on upper secondary education is also differentiated with about 70,000 participants. Participation in the mentioned upskilling programmes is very high by comparison (about 200 percent of the 15-year olds of 2018). The levy-based sectoral labour market training system (AMU)³⁰², providing mainly shorter courses (up to two weeks) provides the lion share of places (about 480 000 participants in 2018). Frameworks for validation of prior learning are well-established.³⁰³

Provision of upskilling opportunities is mainly based on national sources (taxes, levies). **Generous demand-side funding** for training leaves exists, with either employers receiving contributions to the wage costs during training participation or individuals receiving a grant covering the living costs.

The Lifelong Learning Strategy of 2007 continues to guide policy making with regularly updated Tripartite Agreements allowing for adjustments (latest: 2017; next: 2022).

Key initiatives started pre-2016, considered by country representatives as core elements for providing upskilling opportunities

Table A3_11 DK – Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target group	Funding	
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[DK#1] Adult vocational training (Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser (AMU)) Policy 1960-	Short-term adult vocational training courses (from one to six weeks) designed to accommodate workers' needs. They cover specific job-related skills, general skills and labour management skills and are recognised at EQF levels 2-5.	✓	✓	✓	adult employees	-	x

²⁹⁹ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/denmark_country_factsheet.pdf

³⁰⁰ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-denmark-0>

³⁰¹ Preparatory adult education (Forberedende voksenundervisning) and General adult education (Almen voksenuddannelsen)

³⁰² Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser (AMU)

³⁰³ https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_DK.pdf

[DK#2] Preparatory adult education (Forberedende voksenundervisning)	aimed at adults aged 25 and over who do not have the qualifications needed to undertake higher level education.	✓	✓	✓	Low skilled adults	-	x
Policy							
Policy							
2001-							
[DK#3] Danish State Educational Support for Adults (SVU); grant or paid training leave	The State Educational Support for Adults scheme is intended towards those active in the Danish workforce, who wish to participate in supplementary or further education.	✓	✓	✓	Adults active in the workforce	-	x
Policy							
2001 -							

Development post 2016

By 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified decreased (by 5.0 percentage points to 14.7 %), although it remained one of the highest across the EU. The overall participation rate also fell (by 5.7 percentage points to 22.3 %).

Table A3_12 DK - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[DK#4] Tripartite agreement (Trepartsaftale), 2018-2021	Agreement with the aim of reaching adults with low levels of basic skills and qualifications to enhance their general and vocational competences.	✓	✓	✓	Low skilled adults	-	x
Strategic Framework							
2018-							

With upskilling opportunities well established prior to the Recommendation, Denmark has declared that the goals of the Recommendation are met by the existing system of provision (European Commission (2019), 9). Country representatives have reported no policies as an immediate response to the Recommendation, however, the 2018 Tripartite Agreement [DK#4] (Mailand, 2020, p. 71ff) has increased the support for basic and digital skills and stressed the importance of upskilling opportunities (diploma programmes, professional degrees), with a new, additional funding vehicle ('Transition Fund') further expanding the available co-funding for individual training costs. (see also European Commission (2019), page 22).

8. Estonia

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Estonia was 11.4 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 21.8 %, which is

moderately high by comparison.³⁰⁴ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was low. However, the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was substantial (15.7 %) and reached the ET2020 benchmark (15%).

In 2016, based on AES indicators, by comparison, lifelong guidance (4.2 %) and skill assessment (1.9 %) were poorly developed and strongly below the EU-27 average.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund [EE#3] nevertheless represents a key source of support for upskilling and provides free career counselling to the adult population. In recent years the scheme has grown in scope, with further career centres being established. The target groups are students, young people, parents, job seekers, working people and the retired, although the scheme is open to all. The scheme had 17,499 participants in 2019 and 15,126 in 2020.

Estonia has a number of initiatives led through the Ministry of Education and Research covering basic, general and vocational education and training. Basic education programmes reached 626 participants in 2019/20, vocational education and training support (levels 2 and 3) reached 1,056 participants in the same time period and the general upper secondary programme reached 4,950 participants. General secondary education for adults [EE#1] in the non-stationary form of study is the most significant measure for adults without an upper secondary qualification in Estonia. About one sixth of all upper secondary school students are enrolled in an adult upper secondary school, principally learners who are in work or who have dropped out of full-time education. A further programme, State-commissioned continuing education, which provides free courses linked to labour market needs, had 14,328 participants in 2019/20. Participation in the mentioned programmes equals to 85% of the 2016 cohort of 15-year olds, a value comparatively high, with the exception of the much higher corresponding figures in the Nordic countries.

Coordination is supported by a forecast tool, considered as important in the context of the Recommendation [EE#2]. OSKA is a skills and labour market matching instrument that provides data and analysis to shape labour market and education policy in Estonia. OSKA analyses the need for labour and skills, along with recommendations for training requirements, are prepared annually for 5 sectors, with all economic sectors covered in 5-6-year cycles. This shapes the content of curricula and the overall medium to long-term policy for lifelong learning in Estonia.

Estonia introduced strategic documents in the baseline period, including the “Development Plan for Estonia Adult Education 2009-2013” and the Lifelong Learning Strategy from 2014 (running up to 2020).

Demand-side funding schemes supporting adults ‘further education cost are available. There is no demand-side funding for training leave. For formal and work-related study leave, the employer is obliged to pay average salary up to 20 calendar days.

Table A3_13 EE - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			EU	Na
		As	TP	Va		

304 For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/estonia_country_factsheet.pdf

[EE#1] General upper secondary education for adults in the non-stationary form of study Policy	Programme mainly intended for learners aged 17 and above who have not completed upper secondary education (ISCED 3). It can be followed in general upper secondary schools for adults (adult gymnasiums), specific departments established in schools for young people or vocational education and training centres.	✓	✓	✓	Adults without upper secondary education	-	x
[EE#2] Skills forecasting and analysis system OSKA Policy	OSKA is a programme for regular and systematic forecasting and monitoring on future labour and skills needs necessary for Estonia's economic development over the next 10 years.	○	○	○	All adults	x	x
[EE#3] Adult career counselling Policy	Unemployment Insurance Fund provides career counselling for the adult population, no matter the employment status.	✓	✓	✓	Low skilled adults	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, the participation in education and training of both the low qualified (by 3.6 percentage points to 8.6 %) and the overall participation rate have increased (by 3.1 percentage points to 18.4 %).

Estonia has an **incremental approach to implementation**, based around identifying the existing building blocks and filling the gaps, with a focus on developing flexible, individualized offers of guidance and learning, along with popularizing lifelong learning in general (European Commission, 2019, p.8).

Estonia has developed a strategic framework and approach to lifelong learning, the 2020 Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy³⁰⁵, which covers the three steps of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, and has a particular focus on flexibility and access to guidance services. While not explicitly mentioning Upskilling Pathways, the latest Estonian lifelong learning strategy covers the three steps, with a particular focus on flexibility and support services. The next lifelong learning strategy is currently in preparation.

One post-2016 initiative selected for in-depth analysis [EE#4] concerns projects supporting low-skilled adults to return to formal education funded 18 projects with a 1 million EUR budget. The projects supported a number of activities to help educational institutions to support adults, including: finding and motivating adults; creating supporting and conducive conditions to support learning; developing remedial courses; provision of training, individual guidance and counselling to improve learning skills and abilities; develop capacities in learning institutions to make learning more flexible. As a result of the support, the number of students in part-time studies has increased and adults have been able to successfully return to studying³⁰⁶.

Table A3_14 EE - Policies initiated 2016 and following

	Short description	Three Steps		
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305 https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf

306 <https://rtk.ee/meede-keskhariduseta-taiskasvanute-tagasitoomine-tasemeoppesse>

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[EE#4] Supporting low-skilled adults to return to formal education and participate in learning Policy 2018-2020	18 projects were designed and implemented by educational institutions to support adults to return and graduate basic and general secondary education	✓	✓	✓	Low-skilled adults	x	x

9. Finland

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Finland was 11.9 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was considered as being considerably low (15.9 %) as well.³⁰⁷ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was substantial (12.9 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was also at a very high level (26.4%). Recent migrants and refugees represented an important target group for upskilling.

According to AES 2016 figures, in a comparative view, Lifelong guidance (9.5 %) and skill assessment (5.9 %) were well developed. For young people, [FI#2] One-Stop Guidance Centres Ohjaamo can be highlighted as a key form of provision.

Finland also has a **highly developed system**, which closely links the general education system to the adult education and training system. The main approaches focus on Basic education for adults (3.700 participants 2018) and General upper secondary education for adults (6.400 participants 2018). The vocational education pathway at preparatory and upper secondary level is a major element of the adult education and training system (111,281 participants 2018). The Further vocational qualification initiative mainly supports adults who have already completed IVET (44,600 participants 2018). Adapting quickly to changing skill demands thereby forming a key issue not only for IVET but for adults' CVET as well [FI#3]. Overall, participation in formal adult education is outstandingly high, matched only by Sweden.

In Finland, several relevant strategic documents were released up to 2016, including the "Education and Research Development Plan 2011-2016" and the "Strategic Goals for the Development of Lifelong Guidance" from 2011.

Generous demand-side funding for training leaves exists, with employees on leave eligible for receiving a grant (adult education allowance) covering the living costs. The unemployment benefits can be kept during participation in education [FI#1].

Table A3_15 FI - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target group	Funding	
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na

307 For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/finland_country_factsheet.pdf

[FI#1] Maintaining unemployment benefits while studying	Unemployed registered with the TE-office can enrol in part time or full-time studies without losing unemployment benefits.	○	○	○	Unemployed adults or those at risk of unemployment	-	x
Policy							
Policy (2009) ³⁰⁸							
[FI#2] One-Stop Guidance Centres Ohjaamo ³⁰⁹	The One-Stop Guidance Centre is a place where you can get help in matters related to work, education and everyday life. Part of the Youth Guarantee.	✓	○	○	Wide range of assistance to under 30-year-olds.	-	x
Policy (2015-)							
Policy							
[FI#3] Reform of vocational upper secondary education	This reform updates the entire vocational education and training (VET) by 2018. VET need to respond more swiftly to the changes in work life and operating environment and to adapt to individual competence needs.	✓	✓	✓	All VET-learners	-	x
Policy							
Policy							
2015-							

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training increased, both of the low qualified (by 7.4 percentage points to 20.3 %) and for the overall adult population (by 4.1 percentage points to 30.5 %).

In response to an OECD review³¹⁰, Finland has started a reform agenda of its Adult Education System. [FI#4]. New bridging programmes helping adults to acquire elementary basic skills required for entering VET programmes were developed, which should start in 2022. [FI#5] Moreover, in 2019, Finland also launched “Inclusive and Competent Finland”, a new government programme which specifically targets adults with low levels of basic skills and addresses labour shortages. It runs until 2023.

Table A3_16 FI - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target group	Funding	
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[FI#4] Reform on continuous learning	The parliamentary reform of continuous learning will respond to people’s lifelong need for upskilling and reskilling. The reform promotes learning in working life and a service system for continuous learning and increases equal participation.	✓	✓	✓	25-64-year olds	-	x
Policy							
Strategic Framework							
2019-							

308 OECD (2020). Getting Skills Right Continuous Learning in Working Life in Finland. OECD Publishing.; Box 3.1

309 <https://ohjaamot.fi/>

310 OECD (2020). Getting Skills Right Continuous Learning in Working Life in Finland. OECD Publishing.

[FI#5] TUVA (Preparatory training to obtain degree-level education abilities)	Provides extra support for learners in VET to obtain the basic skills needed in order to be able to successfully complete their education	✓	☒	☒	Young VET learners	-	x
Policy							
Policy							
2022-							

10. France

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in France was 21.9 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 26.9 %, which is moderately high by comparison.³¹¹ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was moderately high (7.5%) while the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was substantial (18.8 %).

Based on AES 2016 figures, Lifelong guidance (17.2 %) and skill assessment (4.6 %) were well developed in 2016.

France has in place various strategies, action plans and financial and institutional frameworks that provide the basis for the delivery of publicly subsidised education and training programmes, including programmes for adults with low levels of basic skills or those with low or no qualifications.

The Individual Learning Account [FR#1] (ILA) is a significant policy that supports the implementation of steps 1 2 and 3 of the Recommendation. Data up until 2018 showed that the policy gained momentum rapidly but utilisation by the economically active has remained low and replicated the unequal access to training that is present in traditional training access schemes. The bulk of certifications obtained do not attest to the attainment of a specific level of skill. In 2017 there were around 2 million participants of at levels 2 and 3, in comparison to 1.5 million in 2016 and 730,000 in 2015, showing a strong growth in participation. The ILA is funded through the compulsory contribution of businesses with over 10 employees. This policy has a broad applicability to Upskilling Pathways, as this supports an individual's learning through their working life.

The Knowledge and Occupational Competences Certificate [FR#2] is a policy addressing the uptake of validation (step 3) in France, and also includes an assessment step. In 2019, 20.000 files were set up for individuals and 8.824 people were certified, which was a drop from 2018 when 16.500 people were certified. Currently, the measure is only well-established in 3 regions: Ile-de-France, Hauts-de-France and PACA [Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur]. This measure was funded through national sources.

Table A3_17 FR - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			EU	Na
		As	TP	Va		

311 For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/france_country_factsheet.pdf

[FR#1] Individual learning account (Compte personnel de formation (CPF))	In France, within the Individual learning account (Compte personnel de formation (CPF)), the least qualified individuals receive funding of EUR 800 per year for their training activities.	✓	✓	✓	Employees lacking specific qualification levels	-	x
Policy							
2015-							
[FR#2] CléA, the Knowledge and Occupational Competences Certificate	Cléa certifies the knowledge and skills of individuals in seven areas. It is on these benchmarks that candidates will be assessed to measure the skills they have and those they need to strengthen.	✓	○	✓	Low-skilled people in employment	-	x
Policy							
2015-							

Development post 2016

By 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified decreased (by 3.3 percentage points to 4.2 %). The overall participation rate also decreased (by 7.8 percentage points to 11.0 %).

The French Plan for Investment in Skills [FR#3] is a major policy with a national scope that is implemented through regional councils as part of the Regional Skills Investment Pacts. The Plan covers the years 2018-2022. The funding for this plan was significant, with the policy mobilising almost 15 billion EUR to finance actions aimed at developing the skills of low-skilled job seekers and unqualified young people, meeting the recruitment needs of companies, and contributing to the transformation of skills in the workforce, in particular linked to the digital transformation and green transition. According to the Mid-term Review of the Invest Plan³¹², by the end of 2020 over 1 million additional people excluded from employment had been trained due to the investment plan (a little over half of the initial objective). This has led to the rate of access to training for jobseekers increasing strongly, with 1 in 6 jobseekers accessing training in 2020 compared to 1 in 10 in 2015. The plan was also found to have widened the variety of training courses and to have allowed for innovation (800 million allocated to innovative projects) and more individualised training and support. Overall, the proportion of training courses leading to recognized certification has increased in all 3 years assessed, and certification success is achieved for 4 out of 5 trainees.

A newly created national body oversees financing and regulation of vocational education and training and apprenticeship.

France Compétences [FR#4] is a national policy that aims to improve the efficiency of the VET and apprenticeship market. It coordinates the actors through the system (companies, regional skills centres, OPCOs, education and training providers) and supported the issuing of 1.000 certifications in 2020. The measure addresses step 3 of the Recommendation and is funded mainly through compulsory contributions (levy) from businesses with over 10 employees.

312 <https://www.centre-inffo.fr/site-centre-inffo/inffo-formation/les-infographies/plan-dinvestissement-dans-les-competences-pic-2018-2022-bilan-a-mi-parcours>

In France, a strategic document called the “Plan for Investment in Skills” was launched in 2018 and runs up to 2022, aiming to increase employability through training low or unskilled jobseeker and NEETs.

Table A3_18 FR - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[FR#3] Plan for investment in skills (Plan d'investissement dans les compétences), A (Strategic) Policy (or institutional) Framework 2018-2022	The objective of the PIC is strengthening the competence - upskill- and improve the qualification, through education and training, of young people and unemployed people, to allow for a return to work.	○	○	○	Low or unskilled job seekers and young people far from the labour market.	-	x
[FR#4] France Compétences A (Strategic) Policy (or institutional) Framework 2019-	France Compétences was created with the ambition of improving the efficiency of the vocational training and apprenticeship market.	○	○	○	Companies, public authorities, education providers	-	x

11. Germany

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Germany was 13.5 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 26.4%, which is considered as substantial by comparison.³¹³ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was rather low (3.7%) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment reached only a moderately high level (8.5 %). Recent migrants, including refugees, were a particularly important target group for upskilling (proportion of foreign born 25-29 year olds more than 15%).

According to AES 2016, lifelong guidance (7.0 %) and skill assessment (2.8 %) were not strongly developed with figures for the two areas slightly below the EU-27 average.

In Germany, an **advanced adult education system is in place** with the majority of adult education programmes and initiatives are delivered through the federal states. At the national level there are a number of smaller initiatives that are coordinated through the states, including Evening classes leading to the a school leaving certificate (Hauptschulabschluss; ISECD2), Evening classes leading to the acquisition of the Mittlerer Schulabschluss, and the Evening classes for the acquisition of a higher education entrance qualification. Availability of programmes varies a lot across the 16 States, with currently no fully comprehensive overview study available (Käpplinger and Reuter, 2020). In programmes mapped in ISCED, there were 42,332 participants in 2018. **Active Labour Market Policy played a relevant role in providing upskilling opportunities for the**

³¹³ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/germany_country_factsheet.pdf

unemployed and, by dedicated programmes, the employed also (see DE#3 for the most prominent framework relevant for upskilling of the employed).

Frameworks for validation of prior non-formal and informal learning were established³¹⁴, however, with limited systemic impact. For vocational qualifications, a project framework aiming at extending the involvement of the relevant stakeholders were piloted (see DE#4 for the continuation of the pilot). Concerning strategic policy documents, Germany introduced the “Joint National Strategy for Literacy and Adult Basic skills” in 2012, guiding policy-making until 2016.

A range of demand-side funding schemes contributing to individual training costs existed, both on national [see DE#2 for the key example] and federal level, including some generous ones, in particular supporting the acquisition of VET qualification on higher levels (ISECD11 5-6). Provision for short paid training leave (typically 5 days per year) to be paid by the employers existed in most states, regulated by regional laws, however, uptake were typically very low (1-3% of the entitled). (Heidemann, 2021).

Following the mapping exercise, 3 key initiatives in Germany of relevance for this study were identified for the baseline period, as shown in the table below.

Table A3_19 DE - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[DE#1] General agreement on the national decade for literacy and basic education. Reducing functional illiteracy and raising the level of basic skills in Germany Strategic Framework 2016- 2026	At the level of the Bund, the aim is to reduce functional illiteracy and raise the level of basic skills in Germany.	✓	✓	○	Adults with low levels of literacy	-	x
[DE#2] Bildungsprämie Policy 2008-	The scheme shows a broad approach. Specific, vulnerable groups are eligible to receive State funding to cover part of their education and training costs.	✓	✓	○	Age: 25 or older; employed: 15 hours or more employed per week; with income not above EUR 20 000 EUR per year per individual or EUR 40 000 per household	x	x
[DE#3] Zukunftsstarter Policy 2013-	The Initial Training of Young Adults Initiative of the Employment Agencies and the Jobcenter supports young adults aged 25 to 35 in completing a vocational qualification.	○	✓	○	25-35 year old Employed and unemployed with occupational qualification, disabled or refugees	-	x

Development post 2016

314 https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_DE.pdf

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified (by 0.4 percentage point to 3.3 %), slightly decreased. The participation rate overall also decreased marginally (by 0.8 percentage point to 7.7 %).

Nevertheless, the period after the Recommendation has seen a high number of policy activities, with major previous policies renewed and expanded (see e.g. [DE#1], shortly predating the Recommendation as the continuation of a major attempt to build up a strong Basic Literacy provision. The pilot project on involving the relevant stakeholders into the provision of validation procedures has been continued and expanded (DE#4). A reform of the laws governing the Public Employment Service provided the opportunity to agree on a new strategy for further education (National Weiterbildungsstrategie - 2019³¹⁵) with the main goal of upskilling low qualified (including recent refugees) while minimising the gap in provision of skilled workers (Rahner, 2018). The Public Employment Service received more scope in supporting further education of the employed, both by providing individual support and via instruments targeting employers (see DE#5).

Table A3_ 2032 DE - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[DE#4] Valikom Project 2018-2024	The goal of this instrument is to support low-skilled adults in the validation of non-formal and informal learning and make their learning outcomes visible.	✓	☒	✓	25+ without formal qualification	-	x
[DE#5] Qualifizierungschancengesetz Policy 2019-	The Qualifizierungschancengesetz (Qualification Opportunities Act) came into force on January 1, 2019 as part of the Federal Government's "Qualification Offensive" and has replaced the previous WeGebAU program.	○	○	☒	All employees, low qualified in particular, Persons engaged in occupational activities which can be replaced by technology	-	x

12. Greece

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Greece was 28.2 %. The potential for upskilling among 25–64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 26.9 %, which is considered as being substantial by comparison.³¹⁶ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was strongly below the benchmark (0.7 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment (4.0 %) was also very low. For the baseline period, lifelong guidance (4.7 %) and skill

315 https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/de/bildung/weiterbildung/nationale-weiterbildungsstrategie/nationale-weiterbildungsstrategie_node.html

316 For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/greece_country_factsheet.pdf

assessment (0.8 %) were poorly developed and strongly below the EU-27 average, and no training leave provision was established.

Pre-2016, Greece had a number of programmes linked to the general education frameworks and governed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (Second-chance schools, Lower secondary education evening school, Upper secondary general education evening school) that reached 13,631 participants in 2019. For the vocational sector, there are Upper vocational education evening schools and OAED (PES) vocational apprenticeship schools (supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) that reached 32.294 participants in 2019.

The measures identified in the mapping for Greece cover a number of areas, including VET institutes, lifelong learning centres and schools (second chance and vocational apprenticeship). The OEAD vocational apprenticeship schools [EL#1] is the main long-established apprenticeships support in Greece, reaching 50 schools and incorporated work-based learning. It implements step 2 (flexible offer) and 3 (validation and accreditation) of the Council recommendation. The Public Vocational Training Institutes [EL#2] create new learning pathways at levels 3 of the NQF/EQF, and have the aims for providing vocational education and training services for graduates, confront early school leaving and upskill the basic skills of holders of compulsory education certificates, and care for the inclusion of vulnerable social groups into professional life³¹⁷. It implements step 2 (flexible offer) and 3 (validation and accreditation) of the Council recommendation. Lifelong learning centres [EL#3] were established in 2009 and reformed in 2020, and are established in the framework of non-formal adult learning to support continuous vocational education, reskilling, upskilling, general adult education and career guidance and orientation³¹⁸. It implements step 2 (flexible offer) and 3 (validation and accreditation) of the Council recommendation.

Second-chance schools [EL4] are part of an established policy that was reformed in 2020. Second-chance schools operate an open and flexible curriculum and have a developed network, with 66 second-chance schools (and 22 branches) operating in all Districts of Greece. In the year 2020-2021, 5,903 learners were enrolled with 2,349 graduates³¹⁹. It implements step 2 (flexible offer) and 3 (validation and accreditation) of the Council recommendation.

In Greece, the “National Lifelong Learning Programme” guided policy-making from 2013 to 2015.

Table A3_21 EL - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target group	EU	
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[EL#1] OAED vocational apprenticeship schools (EPAS Mathiteias) Policy 1952-	The Labour Employment Office (OAED) implements a dual apprenticeship system in 32 specialities at 50 vocational apprenticeship schools all over Greece. Apprenticeships combine two years of theoretical and practical education	✓	✓	✓	Persons aged 15-23, who have finished secondary education	x	x

317 EACEA, National Provision, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/main-types-provision-32_en

318 EACEA, National Provision, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/main-types-provision-32_en

319 EACEA, National Provision, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/main-types-provision-32_en

STUDY SUPPORTING THE EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON UPSKILLING PATHWAYS:
NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

	with on-the-job training in the workplace.						
[EL#2] Public Vocational Training Institutes Policy 2009-	The purposes of IEK are the provision of initial vocational training to graduates of non-compulsory secondary education, as well as to holders of equivalent degrees and the provision of corresponding qualifications to the trainees, with the teaching of scientific, technical, professional and practical knowledge and the cultivation of corresponding skills.	n/a	✓	✓	Persons aged 15-23, who have finished secondary education	x	x
[EL#3] Lifelong Learning Centres [Kentra Dia Viou Mathisis - KDVM] Policy 2010-	In KDVM, non-formal education actions are implemented, and in particular general adult education actions. KDVM are targeted to unemployed and employed adults, regardless of gender, educational level, country of origin, religion, place of residence, young people, students, etc., with the sole condition that they are interested in knowledge and active participation. Educational services are provided in-person and / or e-learning. According to law 4763/2020, they provide services in the following: (a) continuing vocational training; (b) reskilling; (c) upskilling; (d) general adult education; (e) counselling and career advice.	✓	✓	✓	Adults	x-	x
[EL#4] Second-Chance Schools [Sxoleia-Deuteris-Eukairias] Policy 1997-	The purpose of the SBS is: the completion of compulsory education for persons aged eighteen and over; the reconnection of trainees with education and training systems; the acquisition of modern knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help them in their socio-economic integration and development;	n/a	✓	✓	Low skilled adults	x	x

	strengthening learners' self-esteem; the contribution to their integration or to the improvement of their position in the workplace.							
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Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified (by 0.3 percentage point to 0.4 %), and the overall participation rate have decreased slightly (by 0.5 percentage point to 3.5 %).

In Greece, assessment of basic skills is addressed as part of EU-funded EaSI project to support Upskilling Pathways and through the work of the National Coordinator for adult learning (European Commission (2019), 13).

Two of the above identified measures were reformed in 2020 (Lifelong learning centres and second-chance schools), resulting in their closer alignment to the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and, in the case of lifelong learning centres, a specific mentioning of upskilling as an aim.

13. Hungary

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Hungary was 16.6 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64-year olds beyond the low qualified was 23.7 %, which is considered as being moderately high as well.³²⁰ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (IV: 2.7 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was only moderately high (6.3 %).

Lifelong guidance (9.2 %) was well developed, while skills assessment (2.6 %) was below the EU-27 average in 2016.

Following the mapping exercise, 2 key initiatives in Hungary of relevance for this study in the pre-baseline period were selected. Training of the low-skilled and those employed in public work schemes [HU#1] addressed step 2 in the Recommendation, through allowing individual learning plans to accommodate personal preferences, with exemptions from completion of certain modules in case prior knowledge is certified. This certification process fulfils some of the step 3 validation requirement, although it is not possible to validate whole qualifications but only parts or modules could be validated by training providers in this measure. Over the course of the programme (2015-2021), 85,000 participants accessed training with 68,000 successfully completing training, of which 64,000 people were those with a low educational level. The Combating the Digital Gap Project [HU#2] contributed to the provision of steps 1 and 2 of the Recommendation in Hungary. A self-assessment questionnaire was used for entering the programme and selection of the participant at level 1 or level 2. Courses were linked to the digital competence courses and adapted to learner groups' contexts and needs by the training providers. Overall, the project involved 260,000

³²⁰ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/hungary_country_factsheet.pdf

people, with the number of people successfully completing digital competence development training being 234,000.

Hungary introduced a “Framework Strategy for Lifelong Learning Policy” in 2014, which guided policy-making until 2020.

Table A3_22 HU - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	As.
[HU#1] Training of low-skilled and those employed in public work schemes Project 2015-2021	The aim of the project is to provide training and other supplementary services in order to improve employability and enable participants of public employment to move to labour market.		✓	✓	Long term unemployed	x	x
[HU#2] Combating the Digital Gap Policy 2015-2021	Aims to promote digital inclusion and develop the digital competencies of mostly disadvantaged population.	✓	✓		Citizens with low digital skills	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified remained the same (2.7 %), while the overall participation rate slightly decreased (by 0.4 percentage point to 5.9 %).

The majority of relevant programmes are coordinated through the general education system and the Ministry of Human Capacities and the Ministry for Innovation and Technology and cover grades 1-13 (i.e. from primary school level to upper secondary level for vocational schools). Altogether, these programmes reached around 56,000 participants in 2019/20. Additional programmes include the Springboard class, School workshop and Actively for knowledge, that support different specific target groups. In the 2019 Implementation Report, Hungary reported the most relevant measures already in place (i.e. prior to the 2016 baseline), with 17 relevant measures identified. Hungary has established a working group including main stakeholders, and national coordinators for adult learning are prioritising Upskilling Pathways (European Commission, 2019, p.10).

2 post-baseline measures have been identified as of particular relevance in the mapping exercise. Developing labour market competences in convergence regions [HU#3] has contributed to the expansion of the steps 1 and 2 of the Recommendation in Hungary. Depending on the SME, different tools are used, with SME employees accessing the ‘Skills guarantee’ component completing a digital-self assessment tool to assess basic skills and other key competences. Customised learning programmes are available for key competences, language competences, soft skills, digital learning and others are available through community-based open learning centres. The number of participants in the programme over the implementation period was 30,000, with 25,000 completed courses.

The ‘Improving the quality and content of 21st century vocational training and adult education’ project [HU#4] contributed to the provision of steps 2 and 3 in the implementation period, with one component of the project focussing on the development and testing of validation procedures, methods and toolsets. Overall, the project had the aim of contributing to the systemic development of VET and Adult Education and did not follow an integrated

approach to upskilling, although many different project outputs and outcomes can be used as building blocks to support the Recommendation. The project led to the development of 20 new teaching materials and methodologies, with 300 experts trained in their usage. The validation tools were tested by 300-400 participants.

Table A3_23 - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	As.
		As	TP	Va			
[HU#3] Developing labour market competences in convergence regions Policy 2016-2021	The aim of the programme is to increase the participation of a working age population on training of work-related key competences and further develop the model of the Network of Open Learning Centres	✓	✓	☒	Employees in small and medium-sized enterprises, especially low skilled	x	x
[HU#4] Improving the quality and content of 21st century vocational training and adult education Project 2016-2021	The aim of the project is to improve the quality of school-based learning and adult vocational education.	n/a	○	✓	Adults in VET	x	x

14. Ireland

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Ireland was 18.6 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64-year olds beyond the low qualified was 27.5 %, which is considered as substantial by comparison.³²¹ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly low (2.3 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was also at a very low level (6.5 %).

Lifelong guidance (8.6 %) and skill assessment (3.7 %) were well developed in 2016. Ireland has **well developed adult education system** composed of a diverse set of education and training initiatives for adults, often developing out of different institutions that are now being coordinated and are governed through the Department for Education (Skills for work, skills to advance, specific skills training, Post-leaving certificate, Adult literacy, Traineeships, Explore Programme) which have different target groups and course content.

Key elements of the system of provision, highlighted for their importance for upskilling include the Skillnet project [IE#1] is a major national programme to support businesses to up-skill staff that is well-established and embedded throughout many sectors. In 2020, 81,895 people in 21,695 companies undertook Skillnet training. Another key example is the Youthreach programme [IE#2] is well-targeted in terms of the educational qualifications possessed by young people on entry, with the 2019 evaluation finding that learners were

³²¹ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ireland_country_factsheet.pdf

very positive about their experiences and contrasting them favourably against experiences in formal full-time education.

The "Further Education and Training Strategy" introduced in 2014 guided upskilling policies in Ireland up to 2019.

There is no training leave established in Ireland.

Table A3_24 IE - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target groups		
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[IE#1] Youthreach programme Project 1989-	The objective of Youthreach is to support young people to make the transition from school to work.	n/a	✓	○	Unemployed early school leavers	x	x
[IE#2] Skillnet Ireland Project 1999-	Skillnet Ireland is a national agency dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of workforce learning in Ireland.	✓	✓	○	All employed	-	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training increased (by 1.7 percentage points to 4%) for the low qualified. The overall participation rate also significantly increased by 7.1 percentage points to 13.6 %. The total number of participants reached through the Department of Education programmes was around 134.000 in 2019.

In Ireland, the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation has been implemented as part of existing strategies and are part of a broader strategy to upskill the workforce, the National Skills Strategy 2025³²². A specific Upskilling Pathways Steering Group has been convened by the Department of Education and Skills to provide a forum for the main stakeholders and undertake detailed analysis of the main target groups (European Commission (2019), 10). The expert assessment is that the three steps are embedded well into both instruments and strategies in Ireland.

Measured endorsed as good representation of relevant activities include the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) [IE#3] has reached a total of 70,859 people since 2018 and has regularly exceeded the target set for people supported. There has also been clear evidence of positive effects for participants, with SICAP employment supports in 2018 leading to an approximately 18% greater likelihood for jobseekers to progress into employment or self-employment after 3-6 months. Moreover, the Adult Literacy for Life policy [IE#4] stressing the need of flexibility in provision with providers trying to put the learner at the centre and working around them.

322 Department for Education and Skills (2016), National Skills Strategy 2025, <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/69fd2-irelands-national-skills-strategy-2025-irelands-future/#:~:text=The%20Department%20of%20Education%20published%20the%20National%20Skills%20Strategy%20in%202016.&text=The%20strategy%20provides%20a%20structure,social%20growth%20up%20to%202025.>

Table A3_25 IE - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target groups		
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[IE#3] Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) Project Policy 2018-	SICAP aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality. It does this through Programme Implementers, agencies and companies, who work with the most disadvantaged and the hardest to reach in communities.	✓	✓	✓	Dis-advantaged children and families	x	x
[IE#4] Adult literacy Policy 2021 Strategic Policy	Building on a decade of FET policy, in 2021 a new 10 year 'Adult Literacy for Life' strategy was adopted to ensure that every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society.	✓	✓	✓	Illiterate adults, Second Language learners	x	x

15. Italy

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Italy was 39.9 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was considered as being considerably low (19.4 %) by comparison.³²³ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was very low (IV: 2.3 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was only moderately high (8.3 %) and below the LLL-benchmark (15 %).

Lifelong guidance (3.3 %) and skill assessment (1.1 %) were poorly developed and strongly below the EU-27 average.

Italy has three national level education courses that support adult education and training for those with low levels of basic skills. These cover the first and second teaching periods of First-level education courses (around 50,000 participants in 2020) and Second-level education courses (82.117 participants in 2020). These courses are led by the Ministry of Education and have some minor costs.

Following the mapping exercise, 3 key initiatives in Italy of relevance for this study were selected for the baseline period. The Centres for Adult Education [IT#1] forms a significant national policy that addresses all 3 steps of the recommendation. According to a monitoring exercise on 126 centres for the years 2015/2016 and 2016/17, 108,000 adults were enrolled in the year 2016/17, an 18.4% increase on the previous year. Similarly, the figures increased to 14,000 (+14.1%) in first-level courses and +16.9% for second-level course. Between 2015 and 2018 the number of centres increased from 126 to 131. In terms of total participation, there were 225,000 in 2017/18, of which 153.000 attended a first-level course³²⁴

The Training course for all unemployed adults + New Skills Fund [IT#3] offers a varied training course for unemployed adults or adults at risk of unemployment. There is a varied training courses (annual or biennial aimed at basic qualifications or specialised courses), with special activities targeted at specific groups. The New Skills Fund was established to counteract the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, and allows companies to adapt workers competences and reserve part of their working time for training, supported via national funds and the ESF. In 2021, there were 2.751 companies with approved plans and 243.000 employees participated, with a total of 24 million hours used for training 5 months after implementation. The target for 2025 is 3 million beneficiaries.

Some measures are more modest in terms of scale but target specific underserved target groups. [IT#2] is a project that supports all 3 steps of the recommendation but is targeted at basic language education and professional training courses for refugees and asylum seekers.

Concerning strategic documents, Italy introduced a “National Reform Program” that also addressed upskilling in 2014.

³²³ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/italy_country_factsheet.pdf

³²⁴ See also: https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/skills-and-work/adult-learning/CPIA_What_how_who.pdf and https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/skills-and-work/adult-learning/CPIA_recognition-of-competences.pdf

Table A3_26 IT - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[IT#1] Centres for Adult Education (Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti – CPIAs) Policy 2012-	Learners who have not completed primary education will be able to follow 200 hours' provision to acquire the basic skills associated with this educational level.	✓	✓	✓	Adults and young people who are re-entering training, adults with low levels of education and low skills, migrants, and prisoners.	x	x
[IT#2] Definition of type of adult learning provisions offered to asylum seekers and refugees Project 2013-	Professional training courses, leisure and basic language education	✓	✓	✓	Refugees and asylum seekers	-	x
[IT#3] Training course for all unemployed adults + New Skills Fund (Fondo Nuove Competenze) + GOL programme (Garanzia di Occupabilità dei Lavoratori) Policy 2015-	The training offer is varied, it may include: annual or biennial courses aimed at a basic qualification, specialisation courses. Special activities are also devoted to people with disabilities, to unemployed foreign immigrants, to young people at "risk".	✓	✓	✓	Unemployed, workers at risk of unemployment, NEET; Workers whose working hours have been reduced; unemployed with or without benefits; workers with very low income; NEET youths; women in disadvantaged conditions; people with disabilities; mature workers; independent workers	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified has remained largely the same (increasing just by 0.1 percentage point to 2.4 %). The overall participation rate has slightly increased (by 1.6 percentage points to 9.9 %).

In Italy, the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation is being addressed by legislation and lifelong learning strategies (European Commission, 2019, p.8), namely the National skills guarantee plan for the adult population (*Piano nazionale di garanzia delle competenze della popolazione adulta*), 2018-2019.³²⁵

325 "The plan aimed to transpose the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. It focused on five main measures: promoting and supporting the participation of provincial centres for adult education (centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti) in the construction and operation of networks for lifelong learning; promoting and supporting – in accordance with the 'Agenda 2030' and the 'New European skills agenda' (Nuova Agenda europea delle competenze) – the activation of 'Skills guarantee pathways' (Percorsi di Garanzia delle Competenze) for adults of working age, aimed at the acquisition of basic and transversal competences; strengthen and consolidate centres for research; promoting and supporting the implementation of flexible tools in adult education programmes, in particular distance learning; and promoting and supporting the activation of integrated education programmes aimed at the acquisition of qualifications that allow access to tertiary education." (European Commission 2021, p. 175)

Activities were prepared in 2017, as an OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report was produced for Italy³²⁶, which identified a number of recent reforms that contribute to skills policy³²⁷. These form a long-term and comprehensive strategy that involves the development and implementation of skills policies that respond to Italy's national and regional conditions and challenges. In addition, the Skills Assessment System was approved at the Unified State-Regions Conference on 8 July 2021, which supports shortening of training courses but does not lead to personalisation. The recognition of prior learning is not yet practiced at the system level but can take place at the level of individual companies.

The mapping identified 2 key measures supporting the Recommendation post-2016. The Skills assessment by PES [IT#4] is targeted at step 1 of the Recommendation. An online assessment tool has been developed to profile individuals by socio-demographic characteristics, cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills, which leads to participants receiving a summary document during a meeting with a PES employee. With a planned expansion of PES employees to 11,600 (from 8,000 in 2019), the aim is to increase the total participations in adult learning to 400,000 by 2025. Around 600 million EUR has been made available to support the implementation plan.

[IT#5] supports the development of flexible and assessment-based learning pathways for inmates in the penitentiary system, with the support to fulfil courses that allow the accreditation of EFQ1, EFQ2 and EFQ3, alongside A2 level Italian. As such, this programme supports all 3 steps of the Recommendation.

Table A3_27 IT - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[IT#4] Skills assessment by PES + Ministerial Decree 22 May 2020 Employment Services Strengthening Plan (Piano straordinario di potenziamento die Centri per l'impiego e delle politiche attive del lavoro) Policy 2017-	The plan aims to strengthen 500 PES (SPI) with the goal of reducing unemployment, decreasing welfare spending and subsidies, generate a more skilled workforce, and increase the country's productivity.	✓	○	○	Adults with low levels of education and low skills	x	X
[IT#5] To promote the individualization of the re-educational treatment and the differentiation of the penitentiary paths in relation to the type of crimes committed and the personal characteristics of the sentenced person Policy 2017-	Changes to the penal code, to the criminal procedure code and to the penitentiary system, LAW 23 June 2017, n. 103, adopting several measures supporting forms of treatment for inmates.	✓	✓	✓	Inmates of all nationalities	x	x

326 <https://www.oecd.org/skills/buildingeffectiveskillsstrategiesatnationalandlocallevels.htm>

327 The Good School Act, the Jobs Act and the Industry 4.0 Policy

16. Latvia

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Latvia was 9.3 %. The potential for upskilling among 25–64-year-olds beyond the low qualified was 30.1 %, which is considered as being substantial by comparison.³²⁸ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (IV: 3.0 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was also moderately low (7.3 %) and strongly below the LLL-benchmark (15 %).

According to AES 2016 data, by comparison, lifelong guidance (11.6 %) and skill assessment (5.6 %) were well developed.

Latvia coordinates the adult education and training delivery for those with basic skills through the Ministry of Education and Science. The Continuous vocational education programme has 3 programme levels (EQF levels 2, 3 and 4). The In-service training programme provides training programmes that does not lead to qualifications but are used to acquire or improve licensed and accredited vocational skills. Both identified key initiatives are financed through joint EU and national funding. Following the mapping exercise, 1 key initiative in Latvia for the baseline period was identified, as shown in the table below. [LV#1] strives to ‘foster the qualifications and skills of the unemployed with labour market demand’. This is a relatively large initiative, targeted at the unemployed, that contains all three steps of the Recommendation. For step 1, the assessment is being updated gradually, with the skills assessment system being complicated and requiring on-going refinement. In terms of scale, the funding (joint EU and national) is for 98 million EUR in the implementation period, with 43,000 learners in 2017 and 48,000 in 2018.

In the baseline period, Latvia had introduced relevant strategic documents like the “Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020” or the “National Reform Programme for the Implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy” (2014).

In terms of training leave, there is no demand-side funding for training leaves established. Employers and employees can agree on a paid or unpaid training leave.

Table A3_28 LV - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[LV#1] Growth and Employment; Fostering the qualification and skills of the unemployed in line with labour market demand - Support for education of unemployed persons Policy 2015-2023	The purpose of specific support is to promote the competitiveness of the unemployed and job seekers in the labour market.	✓	✓	✓	Unemployed adults	x	x

³²⁸ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/latvia_country_factsheet.pdf

Development post 2016

In 2021, the overall participation rate in education and training has slightly increased (by 1.3 percentage points to 8.6 %). No data are available for the participation in education and training of the low qualified in 2021.

Latvia has a broad strategy to upskill the workforce through the 2021-2027 national skills strategy, developed in the context of an OECD-European Commission project³²⁹. This strategy is explicitly linked to EU-level commitments (New Skills Agenda for Europe, European Skills Agenda, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU Semester) and the SDGs, and contains 4 priorities: Strengthening the skills outcomes of students; fostering a culture of lifelong learning; reducing skills imbalances in the labour market; and strengthening the governance of the skills systems. Moreover, an Adult education governance model (*Par Pieaugušo izglītības pārvaldības modeļa ieviešanas plānu*), 2016-2020, has been prepared.

1 key initiative post-2016 was identified in the mapping [LV#2]. The initiative for ‘improving the professional competences of employed persons’ complements initiative LV#1, as this measure targets the employed. All three steps of the Recommendation are included in the implementation. This measure is around half the size of LV#1, with an ESF and national co-financing budget of 45.5 million EUR.

Table A3_29 LV - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[LV#2] Growth and Employment, enhancing equal access to lifelong learning for all age groups Project 2017-2023	A part of the ESF Operational Programme "Growth and Employment" 8.4.1. Regulations for the Implementation of the Specific Support Objective "Improving the Professional Competence of Employed Persons".	○	✓	✓	Employed adults	x	x

17. Lithuania

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Lithuania was 5.4 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64-year olds beyond the low qualified was 29.1 %, which is considered as being substantial by comparison.³³⁰ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was low (2.4 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was also moderately low (6.0 %).

Lifelong guidance (1.6 %) and skill assessment (- %) were poorly developed and strongly below the EU-27 average.

329 OECD (2020), OECD Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Latvia: Developing Latvia's Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ebc98a53-en>.

330 For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/lithuania_country_factsheet.pdf

Lithuania has two main programmes for adult education and training, governed through the Ministry of Education and Sport and local municipalities. The General lower secondary (basic) education programme for adults takes between two and six years to complete and had 1.890 participants in 2019/20. The General upper secondary education programme for adults takes two years to complete and provides adults with the general upper secondary education (3.757 participants 2019/20).

A significant development in Lithuania prior to 2016 was the development of a modular system in general and vocational education [LT#1]. This policy was implemented between 2010 and 2018 and supported the implementation of all three steps of the Recommendation, although the greatest contribution is to step 2. By 2015, 60 additional modular programmes in vocational education and training were expected to be created and, since 2018 (post-baseline period), the policy has led to all VET programmes having a modular structure and credits.

In the baseline period, Lithuania had the “State Education Strategy” in 2013, which guides policy-making until 2022”.

Prior to 2016, there was no demand-side funding for training leaves established. Employers and employees could agree on a paid or unpaid training leave.

Table A3_30 LT - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[LT#1] Development of modular system in general and vocational education Project (2010-2018) available from 2018-	Since 2018, all VET programmes have had to have a modular structure and be credit based. Formal VET programmes must have no less than 30 and no more than 110 credits. Non-formal VET programmes must have no more than 30 credits.	✓	✓	✓	Young adults	-	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified remained largely the same (increase by 0.3 percentage point to 2.7 %). The overall participation rate slightly increased (by 2.5 percentage points to 8.5 %).

In Lithuania, implementation of the Recommendation is associated with lifelong learning strategies, with a significant focus on vocational skills (European Commission, 2020, pp.8; 16). The subsidies to employer’s policy [LT#2] was planned prior to 2016 but important systemic changes were enacted in 2017 when the legal changes were ratified, followed by an accelerated implementation of activities in 2019. Significant progress has so far been observed in the VET area following the reform, according to the country expert assessment. All three steps of the Recommendation are implemented through this measure.

The ESF-funded measure for improving the assessment and recognition of competencies [LT#3] and qualifications acquired in various ways expands capacity in Lithuania to address step 3 of the Recommendation. The monitoring data states that there was a target to validate prior learning for 18.000 people in 2018.

The initiative covering personal guidance services from the PES [LT#4] is implemented across multiple projects. The projects have supported the creation of the position of Careers

Counsellor in PES, a new role, and support the expansion of provision for steps 1 and 3 in the Recommendation in Lithuania. In terms of overall participants in the projects, 11,482 people participated in the strand 'increasing the social competences of young people', 6,051 in 'promoting youth employment', 108 in 'model of employment promotion and motivation services for the unemployed and recipients of social support', 13,642 for 'Take the opportunity', 16,929 in 'Creating your future prospects', and 851 in 'Vocational rehabilitation'. The projects under this measure are all funded through joint EU and national contributions.

Table A3_3133 LT - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[LT#2] Subsidies to employers providing apprenticeship training Policy 2017-	In Lithuania, employers providing apprenticeship training can receive a subsidy covering 70 % of the salary specified in the apprenticeship contract (with some ceilings referring to the national minimum wage).	○	✓	✓	Apprentices	x	x
[LT#3] Improve the system for the assessment and recognition of skills Project 2016-2023	The measure is a part of a bigger ESF project that finances two areas: 1) Formation of Lithuanian qualifications structure and modern educational content; 2) Improving the system for the assessment and recognition of competencies and qualifications acquired in various ways.	✓	○	✓	Adult learners in need of validation of prior learning	x	x
[LT#4] Personal guidance services provided by PES Policy 2017-	The employment service provides recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. The employment service provides individual career guidance as part of multiple projects funded by ESF since 2017	✓	○	✓	Young people, unemployed, LTU, unemployed (age 54+)	x	x

18. Luxembourg

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Luxembourg was 21.6 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 12.3 %, which is considered as not exceptionally high by comparison.³³¹ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was only moderate (6.9 %), while the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment (16.8 %) was relatively high.

Lifelong guidance (9.9 %) and skill assessment (3.4 %) were well developed in 2016.

Luxembourg has a small number of programmes that support adult education and training. The ISCED 2 lower secondary education level is provided through the Second-chance education: grade 5 programme (300 participants 2018/19) coordinated through the Adult

³³¹ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/luxembourg_country_factsheet.pdf

Education Department and secondary schools. The Access to higher education diploma is a 1- or 2-year programme that leads to a diploma equivalent to a secondary school leaving diploma and is delivered through the National School for Adults (107 participants 2017-20). There is also a Basic skills and foreign language integration pathway, which supports individualised learning pathways (1.000 participants 2019/20).

Following the mapping exercise, 3 key initiatives in Luxembourg of relevance for this study for the baseline period were identified.

The 'Intensive basic skills and foreign language integration courses' [LU#1] are focussed on language skills, with a focus on immigrants or those who have never attended school. As such, this measure implemented step 1 (assessment) and step 2 (individualised learning pathways) in Luxembourg for a specific target group. The courses offered are also flexible dependent on individual needs (120 to 480 hours) and is tailored to individual situations.

The 'Second qualification route' [LU#2] offers participants the opportunity to choose from 3 options for adults at secondary level: (1) classes of 5e which give access to vocational training and general secondary education; (2) vocational training programmes for adults in a combined work/training scheme; (3) curricula leading to a diploma of classic or general secondary studies (Individual offer of education and training is made). This measure supports around 1,200 learners per year.

The 'Skill you up' [LU#3] measure targets job seekers wishing to retrain professionally or gain further skills. The measure expands contributes to steps 1 and 2 of the Recommendation, as on the basis of an assessment a programme is tailored to individual needs and objectives, including an initial skills assessment, individual support (coaching), personalised development plans and a development interview. Over 2 years, 200 learners have participated in the support.

Luxembourg introduced several strategic documents before 2016 guiding upskilling policies, including the "National Strategy for Lifelong Learning" in 2012 and the "National Plan for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth" from 2014, which guided policy-making until 2020.

In the baseline period, generous demand-side funding for training leave was available. Individuals receive wage compensation for each day off that is equal to the beneficiary's average daily wage to cover living costs. In addition, paid leave is established for Luxembourgish language training, with employers receiving contributions to the training costs and individuals receiving a compensatory allowance that is equal to the hourly wage.

Table A3_32 LU - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target groups		
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[LU#1] Intensive basic skills and foreign language integration courses (parcours d'instruction de base et parcours d'intégration linguistique) Policy	In Luxembourg, intensive basic skills and foreign language integration courses (parcours d'instruction de base et d'intégration linguistique) are aimed at those who have never attended school or who are not familiar with the Latin alphabet. Literacy courses are provided in the French language.	✓	✓	○	Immigrants; adults with low levels of literacy	-	x

[LU#2] Second qualification route (2e voie de qualification)	Programme aimed at increasing the level of qualification, with 3 available options for adults at secondary education level.	n/a	n/a	n/a	Low qualified adults	-	x
Policy							
[LU#3] Skill you up	Tailor-made program that aims to support job seekers, affected by a social plan or a dismissal, in their personal and professional development.	✓	✓	○		-	x
Project							

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified remained largely the same (decreased by just 0.1 percentage point to 6.8 %), while the overall participation rate has increased slightly (by 1.1 percentage points to 17.9 %).

In Luxembourg, national coordinators are responsible for the implementation of the Recommendation (European Commission, 2019, p.8). One measure post-2016 was identified as of particular relevance in the mapping stage. The 'Future skills' initiative [LU#4] contributes to the provision of Step 2 of the Recommendation in Luxembourg, and is aimed at supporting the development of soft skills, digital skills and project management skills for French-speaking job-seekers. In the first year of implementation 480 learners participated in the scheme.

Table A3_33 LU - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[LU#4] 'Future skills' initiative	Training for labour market needs (digital skills). Three components of this online training: (1)up/reskilling of job seekers; (2) national and sector level studies; (3)up/reskilling of employees. The programme was launched in response to the Covid-19 crisis.	✓	✓	○	Job seekers	-	x-
Project							
2021-							

19. Malta

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Malta was 50.6 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64-year olds beyond the low qualified was 18.6 %, which is rather low by comparison.³³² Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (IV: 2.8 %). This also applies for the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment (7.8 %), which was below the LLL-benchmark (15 %). Lifelong guidance (4.7 %) was not well developed and clearly below the EU-27 average, while skill assessment (6.1 %) was well developed and strongly above the EU-27 average. There is no training leave provision established in Malta.

³³² For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/malta_country_factsheet.pdf

In Malta there is a wide diversity of provision. The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education and Employment provides over 450 courses in 77 subjects, including vocational subjects. The courses are held at 8 lifelong learning centres, 27 local councils, and 17 non-governmental organisations. Adults can take formal and non-formal courses at the Malta College of Arts Science and Technology.

Following the mapping exercise, 5 key initiatives in Malta of relevance for this study were selected, with 1 having started prior to 2016. The provision of courses in basic skills for adults [MT#1] became part of the mandate of the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability in 2009, with courses beginning in most cases prior to 2015. As such, this is a well-established provision with the main challenge being to attract more low-skilled learners to the training.

A wide network of 7 Adult Learning Centres, 35 local councils, 17 NGOs and Visual and Performing Arts Schools deliver the courses, with around 450 courses in 77 different subjects available. In 2019/2020 8,222 learners were reported to be enrolled in courses, of which 1,385 were in basic skills courses and over half (57%) were in Maltese as a foreign language courses. The largest cohort is 30-40-year-olds. The measure implements a flexible and tailored offer and validation and accreditation.

In Malta, the “Education Strategy 2014-2024”, the “Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving” (2014) and the “National Literacy Strategy” (2014-2019) guided upskilling policies.

Table A3_34 MT - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[MT#1] Provision of Courses in Basic Skills for Adults Policy 2009-	Adult training courses among which one also finds courses in basic skills such as English and Maltese for foreigners.	✓	✓	○	Adult learners (16 years and over) - courses offered by the Visual and Performing Arts Schools are also open to children	-	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified slightly increased (by 1 percentage point to 3.8 %). The overall participation rate also increased more substantially by 6.1 percentage points to 13.9 %.

The 2019 Implementation Report reports that Malta has a steering group led by the Ministry for Education and Employment had been convened, with national coordinators prioritizing Upskilling Pathways in their work plans for 2018-19. The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020-2030 links directly to the EU Skills Agenda and references Action 3: EU support for strategic national upskilling action³³³.

4 post-2016 measures were identified in the mapping. The development of an internet HUB to support adults with access to online learning [MT#2] is a specific measure established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to support adult learners who do not have access to

333 Ministry for Education (2020), National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020-2030, Directorate for Lifelong Learning, Research and Employment, https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Pages/Consultations/NationalStrategyforLifelongLearning20202030.aspx

the internet or computers following the shift to online or hybrid learning following school closures. The hub is hosted by a lifelong learning centre and the support was extended for 2021.

The guidance counselling service for adult learners [MT#3] has started to provide structured support to adult learners through an established guidance team consisting of four guidance educators. This service is aligned to the EU Adult Learning Strategy and is included in the National Strategy for Lifelong learning 2020-2030³³⁴. There is an intention to expand this service to the national level if successful.

The CITO skills checker [MT#4] tool has been developed as part of the Erasmus+ Check In, Take Off (CITO) project covering 3 countries (MT, IE, NO). The tool enables individuals to carry out an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and digital skills and guides them with respect to their options regarding flexible learning opportunities. The tool has been piloted and released, with its use promoted by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employment in the Ministry of Education. The measure implements all three steps of the Council Recommendation.

As part of the EU Agenda for Adult Learning, the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability has continued to invest in the professional development of its adult educators, producing handbooks and leading professional development sessions for basic skills educators [MT#5].

Table A3_35 MT - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[MT#2] Development of an internet HUB to support adults with access to online learning Policy 2020-	The lifelong learning Centre at Msida has invested in the setting up of an internet hub area which can accommodate over 50 adult learners.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adult learners who have low skills in ICT	-	x
[MT#3] Development of a guidance and counselling service for adult learners Project 2020-	The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability has also started to provide structured support to adult learners through an established guidance team consisting of four guidance educators.	✓	○	○	Adult learners attending Lifelong Learning Centre	x	x
[MT#4] CITO Skills Checker Project 2020-	The SkillsChecker tool will enable persons to carry out an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. It will also guide them with respect to their options regarding flexible learning opportunities as well as recognising their prior skills while providing further pathways.	✓	○	○	Low-skilled adults	x	

334 Ministry for Education (2020), National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020-2030, Directorate for Lifelong Learning, Research and Employment, https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Pages/Consultations/NationalStrategyforLifelongLearning20202030.aspx

[MT#5] Training of Adult educators in Basic skills teaching	The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability has continued to invest in the professional development of its adult educators through capacity building.	○	○	○	Adult Education providers		x
Project							
2020-							

20. Netherlands

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in the Netherlands was 22.9 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 13.6 %, which was considered as not exceptionally high by comparison.³³⁵ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was substantial (9.1 %), which is also the case for the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment (18.8 %).

Based on AES 2016, by comparison, lifelong guidance (17.6 %) and skill assessment (9.5 %) were well developed.

The Netherlands has a highly developed adult education and training system, with a significant component of the available measures covering general secondary education through part-time provision for adults as part of second chance programmes that lead to the same qualifications as full-time education programmes. Programmes available included Junior general secondary education for adults (Voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs –Middelbaar algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (VAVO-MAVO niveau) (2 700 participants), Senior general secondary education for adults (Voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs – Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (VAVO-HAVO)) (10 000 participants), Senior general secondary education for adults (Voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs –Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs (VAVO-VWO)) (4 400 participant), Vocational education and training (Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs) EQF 1-4 (62 807 participants), and Dutch as a second language (Nederlands als tweede taal I en II) (20 800 participants). Overall participation in formal adult education on low and intermediary level is comparatively high (about two thirds of a cohort of 15 year olds).

The Netherlands introduced a “Illiteracy Action Plan” in 2012 that guided policy-making until 2015. At the baseline period, there was no training leave established in the Netherlands.

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training both of the low qualified (by 4.7 percentage points to 13.8 %) and the overall participation rate have increased (by 7.8 percentage points to 26.6 %).

Implementation in the Netherlands is part of the Government’s wider and established policy to achieve a breakthrough in developing lifelong learning, including support for low-skilled adults and those with the greatest learning needs³³⁶. Three projects were launched in 2018 to improve flexibility between training offers, better tailoring and skills assessment and guidance for employees over 45 years in selected occupations, to empower them to take

³³⁵ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/the_netherlands_country_factsheet.pdf

³³⁶ https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/plf_upskilling_pathways_2020_netherlands.pdf

their careers on to retirement age (European Commission, 2019, p.8). The Netherlands is also engaged in a National Skills Strategy process, with a Diagnostic Report published in 2017³³⁷. As part of this process, the priority areas of fostering more equitable skills outcomes, creating skills-intensive workplaces, and promotion of a learning culture were identified, all of which align to supporting the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation even if they are not explicitly linked to it.

Key measures implemented post 2016 include the following.

In terms of basic skills coverage, the ‘Dutch language, arithmetic and digital skills’ [NL#1] measure is aimed at adults lacking literacy, numeracy or digital skills. The policy is implemented through several projects and depending on content, there are language and skills assessments made by the implementing organisation, supporting step 1 of the Recommendation. With a focus on accessibility and availability, the courses and training offered also provides some contribution to step 2 delivery in the Netherlands, although this is not an explicit focus of the programme.

The ‘SLIM subsidy’ [NL#2] is available for SMEs to develop adult learning, with a focus on agriculture, catering and recreation industries. The subsidy is a flexible policy measure that supports tailored learning offers for adults and supports education and training providers through extending provision to 1-on-1 meetings, thematic national and regional meetings, and service documents. This measure therefore supports the delivery of step 2 of the Recommendation in the Netherlands. The subsidy itself is also flexible and SMEs can apply across a wide range of learning and development initiatives (such as researching educational needs in a company, implementing methods to develop knowledge of employees, or upscaling of successful projects).

The ‘Count on skills’ programme [NL#3] supports the policy letter ‘Joining forces for a higher skill level in the Netherlands 2020-2024’³³⁸ in addressing basic skills. This programme aims to reach adults through agreements with regional and local governments and a wide range of activities to promote the improvement of basic skills. The measure is implemented through schools, local libraries, youth healthcare institutions, pre-educational facilities, and employers and contributes to step 2 of the Recommendation.

The STAP-budget is an individual learning budget for adults, foreseen to be implemented in January 2022 (drafted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science). As with [NL#2], this is a flexible policy measure that tailors support to the needs of adults, contributing to the implementation of step 2 of the Recommendation. The subsidy makes a maximum of 1.000 EUR available to be spent on courses delivered by recognised training providers. This programme will be administered by the national PES and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

In 2019, the Netherlands also launched a “Policy Letter For Lifelong Learning”, elaborating various policy measures of its action programme on adult learning. It is in effect up to 2022.

Table A3_36 NL - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na

337 OECD (2017), OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: Netherlands 2017, <https://www.oecd.org/skills/nationalskillsstrategies/OECD-Skills-Strategy-Diagnostic-Report-Netherlands-Executive-Summary.pdf>

338 Available here:

https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/letter_to_parliament_about_the_low_literacy_approach_2020_-_2024.pdf

[NL#1] Taal, rekenen en digitale vaardigheden Policy 2018-	Courses aimed at adults who want to boost their literacy, numeracy or digital skills. Target groups include	✓	✓	○	Illiterate adults, adults who want to improve basic schools to enrol in VET, adults for whom Dutch is a second language.	-	x
[NL#2] SLIM-subsidy Policy 2020-	A subsidy measure to stimulate adult learning in individual and cooperating SMEs, in agriculture, catering and recreation industries.	○	✓	✓	Employees in specific sectors	-	x
[NL#3] Count on skills' programme Policy 2021-2024	This programme intends to provide people with the necessary basic skills (reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills) to participate in society, both online and offline.	✓	✓	✓	All citizens who are illiterate, innumerate and who lack digital skills	-	x
[NL#4] STAP-budget Policy 2022-2027	The STAP-budget is an individual learning budget for adults, foreseen to be implemented in 2022.	✓	✓	✓	Employed and unemployed citizens looking for work	-	x

21. Poland

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Poland was 8.7 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 31.9 %, which is considered as substantial by comparison.³³⁹ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was only marginal (0.9 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was also very low (3.7 %).

In 2016, lifelong guidance (4,8%) and skill assessment (1,7%) exists, however, the proportion of users is below EU average.

Poland organises the adult education and training system through the Ministry of Education and Science, with programmes available covering the levels of the initial education system (primary schools for adults, general upper secondary schools for adults, post-secondary schools for adults), which reached around 330,000 participants in 2018/19. A Vocational qualification course, preparing learners for the vocational examination, and the Vocational skills course, which covers the competences but does not lead to the vocational examination, reached around 105.000 participants in 2018/19. Adults are also able to take

³³⁹ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/poland_country_factsheet.pdf

a General competence course, that follows a more modular approach that can lead to learners completing upper secondary education (13,037 participants in 2018/19).

Strategic documents on lifelong learning had been issued in 2013³⁴⁰ and inter-ministerial coordination group exists³⁴¹.

The opportunity for validation for prior learning via extramural examinations existed by 2016³⁴².

Poland introduced strategic documents aiming to increase the skills and consequently employment rate of people aged 50+ (2014) as well as improve lifelong learning (Lifelong Learning Perspective 2013).

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified remained largely the same (increase of just 0.2 percentage points to 1.1 %), and the overall participation rate have slightly increased (by 1.7 percentage points to 5.4 %).

The 2019 Implementation Report finds that Poland implements the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation principally through legislation and lifelong learning strategies (p.8), such as through the 2013 policy report Lifelong Learning Perspective³⁴³ and the Strategy for Responsible Development, which is the main strategic document in Poland. In 2019, Poland prepared a national skills strategy³⁴⁴, with a key emphasis on developing a culture of lifelong learning in Poland, linking the formal education system while increasing the awareness of, flexibility and funding of adult learning to boost participation. In addition, the strategy emphasises the role that can be played through employers boosting adult skills 'on the job'. In 2020, this was enhanced by the adoption of the Integrated Skills Strategy 2030³⁴⁵, which is explicitly linked to the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

Following the mapping exercise, 2 key initiatives in Poland responding to the Recommendation had been identified. The LOWE [PL#1] project creates a network of Local Knowledge and Education Centres to support adults to gain skills. The measure supports the implementation of steps 1 and 2 in the Recommendation, with an individual skills assessment (which can also include a social needs diagnosis) and learning offers adjusted to the needs of individuals and the local resources available. Since 2017, 50 LOWE centres have been operating in 13 provinces, with 100 more centres established by autumn 2020.

The CHANCE [PL#2] project supports adults with low basic skills with mathematical reasoning, digital skills and social competences. The approach uses a three-step model, reflecting the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, and includes an initial diagnosis of competences, educational support tailored to the individual needs of the participant and validation of learning outcomes. As such, this measure contributes to the expansion of all 3 steps in Poland. In terms of outputs, 31 organisations are participating, with initial estimations showing 1.900 participants whose basic skills were increased in stage 1 of the project. A key aspect of the project is also to test and pilot innovative educational models

340 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-56_en

341 Eurydice

342 https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_PL.pdf

343 Government of the Republic of Poland (2013), *Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie [Lifelong learning perspective]*, https://kwalifikacje.gov.pl/download/Uczenie_sie_przez_cale_zycie/Perspektywa_uczenia_sie_przez_cale_zycie.pdf.

344 OECD (2019), *OECD Skills Strategy Poland: Assessment and Recommendations*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b377fbcc-en>.

345 <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/zintegrowana-strategia-umiejtnosci-2030-czesc-szczegolowa--dokument-przyjety-przez-rade-ministrow>

and see if they can be improved, with measurable quantitative results being slightly less emphasised within the project.

Table A3_37 PL - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[PL#1] LOWE (Local Knowledge and Education Centres) ³⁴⁶ Policy 2017-2023	The aim of the Local Knowledge and Education Centres is to activate adults and local communities for skills useful in navigating the labour market, for personal development and community development, using the potential of the school in its new role - an informal education centre.	✓	✓	✓	Adults from disadvantaged backgrounds	x	x
[PL#1] 'CHANCE - New opportunities for adults' pilot project ('Szanca') Policy 2018-2021	The main goal of the project is to support adults with low basic skills with mathematical reasoning, digital skills and social competences.	✓	✓	✓	Low-skilled adults	x	x

22. Portugal

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Portugal was 53.1 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was considered as being considerably low (15.4 %) as well.³⁴⁷ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly low (4.1 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was only moderately high (9.6 %).

Lifelong guidance (12.9 %) and skill assessment (4.7 %) were well developed in 2016.

The VET provision policy [PT#1] is a national policy that supports the implementation of all 3 steps of the Recommendation. The policy provides a system of provision to develop professional qualifications linked to the NQF. The offers are characterised by flexibility and modularisation, with some being tailor made. For example, some offers are suitable for adults looking for training paths with a more flexible workload (between 25 and 600 hours) and are tailored to their possibilities and needs.

Several strategies informed policy-making in Portugal before 2016, for example the “Portugal 2020 Partnership Agreement” from 2014-2020 or the “National Strategy for Industry to Promote Growth and Employment 2014-2020”.

Table A3_38 PT - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na

³⁴⁶ Lokalne Ośrodki Wiedzy i Edukacji

³⁴⁷ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/portugal_country_factsheet.pdf

[PT#1] VET provision provided by the Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional	VET offers directed at raising professional qualification levels of the Portuguese population according to the national catalogue of qualifications.	✓	✓	✓	Low skilled adults	x	x
Policy							

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified remained unchanged (4.1 %), while the overall participation rate slightly increased (by 3.3 percentage points to 12.9 %).

Actions supporting the Recommendation are addressed through the National Skills Strategy ‘Strengthening the Adult-Learning System’³⁴⁸ which aims to develop a coherent adult-learning strategy that encompasses existing and new measures and aligns with other key economic policies, in particular addressing:

- Awareness of the value of skills and motivation for adult learning;
- Access, quality and relevance.
- Governance and financing.

In Portugal, the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training delivers a number of initiatives that target adult education and the low skilled, including Adult education and training courses (28.124 participants 2015-19) that are linked to the qualification levels of the education system. Shorter term options are available through the Active life programme, aimed at the unemployed, or through Modular training (384,160 participants 2015-2019), both of which have a range of outputs, some of which are linked to the qualification’s framework.

The Qualifica programme³⁴⁹ (567,632 participants 2017-20) [PT#2], which combines recognition of prior learning with education designed to raise an individual’s qualification levels is delivered through specific centres and managed by the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training. The programme addresses all 3 steps of the Recommendation. As a significant national programme, the target of the Qualifica programme was to reach 600,000 adults between 2017-20 and achieve an adult participation rate in lifelong learning activities of 25% by 2025 through the expansion of Centres. Between 2017-2020, there were 537,000 enrolments in the Qualifca programme, with 84% having had their skills assessed. Adults were predominantly targeting ET pathways (tailored learning offers), and around 96% achieved a certification. In 2020, there were 310 Qualifica Centres established.

Table A3_39 PT - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			EU	Na
		As	TP	Va		

348 OECD (2018), Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Portugal: Strengthening the Adult-Learning System, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264298705-en>.

349 [PowerPoint Presentation \(eventcloud.com\)](#)

[PT#2] Qualifica programme (Programa Qualifica), 2016-ongoing	This programme aims to increase the qualification levels of the adult population to a minimum level of upper secondary education and in doing so improving the population's employability.	✓	✓	✓	Low skilled adults	x	x
Policy							
2016-							

23. Romania

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-54) in Romania was 23.3 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 29.6 %, which is considered as being substantial as well.³⁵⁰ The participation rate in Lifelong Learning (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was very low (1.2%).

Since 2002, the National Agency for Employment elaborates annually the National Vocational Training Plan [RO#1], which it submits to the approval of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Every year, the plan was updated taking into account occupations required on the labour market. Vocational training of the persons looking for a job is carried out by the employment agencies through the vocational training centres subordinated to them, as well as by other providers of professional training services, from the public or private sector, authorized under the law.

Apprenticeships, defined as forms of professional training made on the basis of a particular type of employment contract, have a long history in Romania. Based on legislation from 2005, Romania offers apprenticeships at work for adults [RO#2]. The minimum duration for the apprenticeships is 6 months for Level 1 qualification; 12 months for Level 2; 24 months for Level 3 and 36 months for Level 4.

The Ministry of National Education administers the Second-chance programme [RO#3], with the aim of supporting young people and adults who did not complete compulsory education. Graduates can continue their studies at a higher educational level or undertake a practical training with successful learners awarded a vocational level 3 qualification. The programme offers both assessment and validation and accreditation.

³⁵⁰ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/romania_country_factsheet.pdf

Table A3_40 RO - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[RO#1] National Vocational Training Plan of ANOFM Policy 2002-	The National Plan aims to: Increase the qualification level of human resources by improving the skills level of unemployed and inactive people fit for work and adapting skills to the requirements of the labour market, to facilitate their reintegration into the labour market; and encourage broad and inclusive participation for disadvantaged groups in the labour market in vocational training programs or in skills assessment processes	✓	✓	✓	young people under the age of 25; persons over the age of 45; the long-term unemployed; women; people with disabilities; Roma; people from rural areas	x	x
[RO#2] Apprenticeships at work Policy 2005-	It is a fixed-term contract, through which the apprentice undertakes to prepare himself professionally and to work for and under the authority of an employer, who undertakes to ensure the payment of his salary and all the conditions necessary for professional training. The apprenticeship is a form of professional training, made on the basis of a particular type of employment contract.	✓	✓	✓	Adult learners and young people over the age of 16	x	x
[RO#3] Second-chance programme Policy 2007-	The aim of the programme is to support young people and adults who have not completed compulsory education.	✓	✓	✓	Young people and adults with no compulsory education	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of low qualified adults was 1.1 % (no data available from 2016) and the overall participation has increased (by 3.7 percentage points to 4.9 %).

The classification of occupations in Romania was updated in 2018. A major group which was called 'unskilled workers' was modified into elementary occupations; all occupations in this group were analysed and the occupations for which a minimum qualification is needed were identified- Level 1. The Order of the Minister of Labour approved a list of elementary occupations (30 identified as requiring a minimum qualification); which were then included in the National Register of Qualifications. Occupational standards have begun to be created for them as well. Qualification programs on Level 1 [RO#4] are offered by the National Agency for Employment. They are aimed at unemployed adults without any qualifications and implement all three steps of the Council Recommendation.

Table A3_41 RO - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[RO#4] Level 1 qualification programmes Policy 2018-	The National Agency for Employment (ANOFM) through its regional centres organises, free of charge, initiation, qualification / requalification and improvement courses for the unemployed and at the request of the economic agents.	✓	✓	✓	Unemployed adults (16+ up to retirement age) without any qualifications	x	x

24. Slovakia

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Slovakia was 8.1 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 22.7 %, which is considered as being moderately high by comparison.³⁵¹ The overall participation rate in Lifelong Learning (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) across all levels of educational attainment was very low (2.9 %).

Lifelong guidance (9.9 %) and skill assessment (3.6 %) were well developed in 2016.

Slovakia has courses that are targeted either at the low skilled or at job seekers. Educational programmes for the low skilled lower secondary education programmes (ISCED level 2), which is linked to certificates of final examination and a vocational certificate and provides a pathway to vocational upper secondary studies. Follow up courses support graduates of upper secondary vocational programmes that did not complete to finish their examination. These programmes reached around 11,500 learners in 2018/19. Job seekers can access the REPAS (+) course, which covers requalification, and the KOMPAS + course that supports learners to develop their communication, personal, digital and language skills.

Following the mapping, 2 measures were identified for the baseline period. The REPAS [SK#1] measure addresses steps 1 and 2 of the Recommendation to some extent. Step 1 is covered by course providers (depending on their process) and the jobseeker is able to identify and choose a specific requalification course of their choice and apply, as part of the flexible and individual pathways of step 2. This measure trained 45,000 jobseekers in the period of 2015-17, with 51% of participants employed within 6 months in 2017.

The KOMPAS+ project [SK#2] is linked to [SK#1] and is also delivered through the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. As with [SK#1], this measure expands access to steps 1 and 2 to some extent, through allowing participants to apply for their own courses, this time with a focus on core competences. The project has trained 2,247 jobseekers since 2018 (at the time of mapping), considerably fewer than the REPAS project.

In the baseline period, Slovakia introduced a Lifelong Learning Strategy in 2011.

³⁵¹ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/slovakia_country_factsheet.pdf

Table A3_42 SK - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[SK#1] REPAS(+) (requalification courses) Policy 2014-	Programme aimed at registered jobseekers that includes requalification courses (excluding the development of communicational, digital, managerial, social and entrepreneurial skills and language competences).	✓	✓	○	Registered jobseekers	x	x
[SK#2] KOMPAS+ Policy Prior to 2015	The KOMPAS programme focuses on developing jobseekers' core competences, such as communication, computer, entrepreneurial, language, or basic literacy and numeracy skills.	✓	✓	○	Low-skilled jobseekers	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, the overall participation in education and training has slightly increased (by 1.9 percentage points to 4.8 %). No data is available for the low qualified.

The Slovak Republic National Skills Strategy³⁵² was published in 2020 and provides a basis for coordinating the implementation measures supporting the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. In particular, Priority 2 aims to reduce skills imbalances, Priority 3 aims to foster greater participation in adult learning and Priority 4 targets strengthening the use of skills in the workplace. A new act on lifelong learning is expected in the first half of 2022, which will include a mechanisms for the validation of prior learning.

The post-2016 measure identified is the EaSI-supported BLUESS project [SK#3], a strategic project that mapped low-qualified people in Slovakia and proposed methodologies. As such, this project only indirectly supports the implementation of the steps of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, but it provides strategic guidance in the areas of support in basic skills, including policies and tools needed, and support the staff capacities. The project was therefore intended as a starting point for further project outputs (basic skills development methodology and definition) and as an evidence base for policy makers³⁵³. The main output of the project was the report Methodology Development of the basic skills of low skilled adults.

Table A3_43 SK - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[SK#3] Project BLUESS - Blueprints for Basic Skills Development in Slovakia (VP-2018/008/0008) Project	EaSI funded project (2019-2021) to map the situation of low-qualified people in Slovakia and propose methodologies to deal with skills assessment and capacity training	✓	○	○	Low-skilled adults	x	

352 OECD (2020), OECD Skills Strategy Slovak Republic: Assessment and Recommendations, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bb688e68-en>.

353 [Development-of-basic-skills_Methodology_BLUESS.pdf \(zakladnezrucnosti.sk\)](#)

2019-2021

25. Slovenia

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Slovenia was 12.7 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 26.4 %, which is considered as being substantial by comparison.³⁵⁴ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (2.4 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was moderately high (11.6 %).

Lifelong guidance (7.5 %) and skill assessment (2.5 %) were not strongly developed and slightly below the EU-27 average in 2016.

Slovenia have a number of programmes coordinated via the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the most significant of which (Basic school for adults and Adult literacy programmes) had around 3.500 learners in 2019/20. The basic school programme leads to a qualification. Adults can also access the Matura examination course and vocational examination course, leading to final qualifications linked to the NQF and EQF.

The mapping identified 2 baseline measures of relevance for this study. The 'Recognition of professional qualifications for labour market needs under National Professional Qualifications Act' [SI#1] expanded the provision of step 3 (validation) of the Recommendation. This established a validation procedure which resulted in a publicly recognized document that is transferable to various working environments is obtained by individuals. The validation procedure is integrated in the Slovenian NQF from EQF levels 2 to 5. The validation procedure complemented the existing validation processes that had been in place in all education sub-systems in Slovenia since 2006. This provision works in two ways: i) Recognition of results a non-formal learning before proceeding to a certain education or training/study programme; ii) during the implementation of the education process. From 2003 to date, 94,868 people have obtained a national qualification certificate via this process.

Programmes for Acquisition of basic and professional competencies [SI#2] are a range of educational programmes covering a wide range of fields and implemented through a range of educational institutions. As such a flexible set of programmes, this measure supports the implementation of step 2 of the Recommendation. For the period 2016-2019 the project implemented 147 programmes, including 73 programmes for general non-formal adult education and 74 programmes in the field of computer literacy. A total of 2.042 participants were enrolled in the programmes, with 954 being over 45 years of age. 86.3% (768) participants successfully completed the programme in this period.

Up to 2016, Slovenia had introduced several strategic documents, for example the "Strategic Plan for Adult Education 2013-2020", the "Strategy for the Inclusion of Migrants in Adult Education" from 2013, and Guidelines for the Implementation of ALMP measures 2012-2015.

There is no demand-side funding for training leaves established. Employers and employees can agree on a paid or unpaid training leave.

³⁵⁴ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/slovenia_country_factsheet.pdf

Table A3_44 SI - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[SI#1] Recognitions of professional qualifications for labour market needs under National Professional Qualifications Act (national vocational qualification system) Policy	The objectives of the system of certification: gives public validity to non-formal and informal education, training and learning; substitutes for low adaptability in the formal system of education; enhances lifelong learning through the public recognition of knowledge; enables swifter response to the demands of the labour market for individuals who have acquired a certificate.	✓	○	✓	All adults	-	x
[SI#2] Programmes for Acquisition of basic and professional competencies Policy	A range of educational programs in the field of foreign language learning, financial, digital and computer literacy, communication and entrepreneurship, Slovene for foreigners, safety and health at work, combating stress provided by a number of education providers.	✓	✓	○	Less educated with an emphasis on those over 45 years of age.	-	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified has increased (by 1 percentage point to 3.4 %), as has as the overall participation rate (by 7.3 percentage points to 18.9 %).

In Slovenia, implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation is associated with broad strategies to upskill the workforce (European Commission, 2019, p.8). The Slovenian Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance³⁵⁵ was published in 2018, with a number of recommendations for reforms in governance and collaboration in delivering the national skills strategy. The strategy gives priority to adult learning and the specific needs of low-skilled adults.

One measure was identified in the mapping of high relevance for this study. The ‘Public service for the provision of counselling in the field of adult education’ [SI#3] measure supports the implementation of the Adult Education Act (2018), which recognised guidance and counselling as part of the PES and integrated these functions more systematically within the PES. The Advisory Council for Adult Education adopted Guidelines for performing consulting activities and the Rules on standards and norms in counselling were adopted in 2020. The Advisory activity will be carried out in three areas: (1.) counselling for integration and / or continuing education; (2.) counselling for identification and documentation and (3.) counselling for independent learning. The measure foresees continuation of the strategic Partnership with organizations in the local or regional environment. Previously this service was provided through the Network of adult education Centres, operating in 34 public organizations for adult education throughout Slovenia, funded through the public calls for proposals. This measure therefore expands step 2 implementation of the Recommendation in Slovenia, providing increased access to information and counselling and the development of individual training and skills plans.

355 OECD (2018), Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Slovenia: Improving the Governance of Adult Learning, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264308459-en>.

In 2019, Slovenia launched its “National Strategy for the Development of Reading Literacy”, which runs up to 2030.

Table A3_45 SI - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Key initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps				EU	Na
		As	TP	Va			
[SI#3] Public service for the provision of counselling in the field of adult education (since 2020) - previously carried out under the Network of Adult Education Centres F1 Lifelong Guidance	With adoption of the Adult Education Act (2018) an adult education guidance/counselling activity has been recognised as the public services, and thus more systematically placed within the system	✓	✓	○	Adults in education	-	x

26. Spain

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Spain was 41.7 %. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was considered as being considerably low (16.7 %).³⁵⁶ Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was rather low (3.4 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was only moderately high (9.4 %).

According to AES 2016, in a comparative view, Lifelong guidance (8.6 %) and skill assessment (3.8 %) were well developed.

PEAC [ES#2] is a significant contribution to step 3 of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, providing a set of actions to recognise, assess and officially accredit professional competences acquired through work experience or non-formal training. The project is implemented by region and is based on a three phase system (counselling, assessment and accreditation). Until 2020, the number of available accreditation was defined by sectors within each region, and from 2021 this has been unified. In 2021, Castilla y León published 8.000 open spots for 10 different professional sectors³⁵⁷. This scheme is financed jointly through national and EU funds.

The AULA Mentor project [ES#1] provides non-formal education courses. The measure targets all adults, with some specific groups identified (including prisoners and those without internet/computer access). Over 60% of people enrolled are women. In recent years the project was expanded, with 65 further Aulas Mentors added from 2015 to 2019 and more than 2.000 additional students enrolling. The country expert assessment found that this measure implements all 3 steps of the Recommendation to some extent, with a greater emphasis on steps 1 and 2.

Up to 2016, several strategic documents guided policy-making in Spain, including the Action Plan for Lifelong Learning (2011), the Spanish Employment Strategy 2012-2014, and the National Plan for the Implementation of the Youth Guarantee (2013).

³⁵⁶ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/spain_country_factsheet.pdf

³⁵⁷ <https://www.educa.jcyl.es/adultos/es/acreditacion-competencias-profesionales/convocatorias-procedimiento-acreditacion-competencias-profe/procedimiento-acreditacion-competencias-profesionales-2021>

Generous demand-side funding for training leaves exists, with employees continue receiving their wages during participation. Employers can deduct the costs related to employees' training leave from their contributions to social security system.

Table A3_46 ES - Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[ES#1] Aula Mentor Policy 1992-	Internet-based open education and training system that provides around 170 non-formal education courses. It involves more than 500 classrooms with computer equipment and internet connection and online platform.	✓	✓	✓	All persons over 18	x	x
[ES#2] PEAC Policy 2009-	It is a set of actions aimed at recognising, assessing and officially accrediting professional competences acquired through work experience or non-formal training, following criteria that guarantee the reliability, objectivity and technical rigour of the assessment. It is developed by each region.	✓	○	✓	All persons over 18	x	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training of the low qualified has slightly increased (by 1.8 percentage points to 5.2 %). The overall participation rate also increased by 5 percentage points to 14.4 %.

Spain has a very regionally distributed set of provision for adult education and training that are coordinated through the Autonomous Communities, making it a challenge to provide an overall view of the system. Most Autonomous Communities provide an initial provision of basic education for adults or initial training for adults that focusses on basic skills and secondary education for adults. Additional programmes may be delivered by Autonomous Communities, such as those programmes to help participants prepare for external examinations for certificates but these are not part of standardised national approaches. At national level, Spain is engaged with the OECD in a National Skills Strategy project³⁵⁸. The 2015 Diagnostic Report (OECD, 2015) identified a set of three pillars (Developing relevant skills; activating skills supply; using skills effectively) containing specific measures aligned to the Upskilling Pathways recommendation, as well as a number of governance and system actions.

The Initial Education policy [ES#3] establishes support at two levels according to current legislation³⁵⁹. Level I targets literacy and numeracy skills, with Level II focussed on consolidation of knowledge, facilitating access to secondary education for adults. The content is normally organised by subject area and can include knowledge of a foreign language. Through this measure, 219.935 adults completed secondary education in the academic years 2014-2020 through this measure, with 35.489 completing secondary education in the academic year 2019-2020. The measure is coordinated and financed through a range of national instruments (General State budgets, Autonomous Community

358 OECD (2015), 'OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report Spain 2015', <https://www.oecd.org/skills/nationalskillsstrategies/Diagnostic-report-Spain.pdf>

359 This measure was introduced in 2009 and reformed in 2017.

funds, vocational training contributions from enterprises) and the ESF. This measure addresses all 3 steps of the Recommendation.

In 2019, Spain launched its “First Strategic Plan for Vocational Training in the Education System”, running up to 2022.

Table A3_47 ES - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps					
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[ES#3] Initial Education Policy 2017-	Provision of Adult Basic Education (Level 1 targeting literary and numeracy skills, Level 2 preparation for access to secondary education)	✓	✓	✓	All persons over 18	x	x

27. Sweden

Support for Upskilling in Place in 2016 – Baseline

In 2016, the proportion of low qualified adults (25-64) in Sweden was 15.0 %. The potential for upskilling among 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was considered as considerably low (17.9 %) as well³⁶⁰. Participation of the low qualified in education and training (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was substantial (19.3 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was the highest across the EU (29.6 %).

AES 2016 data suggested that lifelong guidance (1.8 %) should be considered as underdeveloped, however, other sources point to a well-established approach to lifelong guidance³⁶¹. According to AES, skill assessment (6.4 %) was well developed and strongly above the EU-27 average. In terms of validation, this was included as an important part of [SE#1] and was available through specific measures, although not as a standalone measure.

In Sweden, a highly developed adult education and training system is structured through a municipal adult education structure that provides support at basic level (75,705 participants 2019³⁶²), general and vocational courses at upper secondary level (215,706 participants 2019), highlighted as key for Upskilling [SE#1]. The Swedish system also supports general courses through Folk high schools, which are an alternative to the municipal system (30,901 participants 2019). There is also a language course that aims to provide adult immigrants with basic knowledge of the Swedish language (153,003 participants 2019). The apprenticeship route for low-qualified adults represented a further key upskilling opportunity [SE#2]. Overall, the delivery of formal education to adults in Sweden the highest in the EU27 and matched in numbers only by Finland (equivalent of about three times a cohort of 15 year olds).

No recent strategic policy document focussing on lifelong learning or upskilling in particular was published between 2010-2016, however, area specific steering documents existed.

360 For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/sweden_country_factsheet.pdf

361 <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices-sweden#access-to-guidance>

362 Figures from Eurydice report

By 2016, Sweden offered a comprehensive financial support for adults returning to education, irrespective to the level of education (grant, expandable by a loan), with most adult education offered free of charge or at low fees. A right for an (unpaid) training leave existed, with the grant mentioned offering a contribution to the living costs.

Table A3_48 SE – Key policies endorsed by country representatives up to 2016

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target group	Funding	
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na
[SE#1] Upper secondary adult education – vocational courses (Komvux gymnasial nivå – yrkeskurser) Policy 1968-	Courses in municipal adult education at upper secondary level.	✓	✓	✓	Adults who have not finished primary or secondary school	-	x
[SE#2] Apprenticeship for adults (Läringsutbildning för vuxna (komvux)) Policy	The purpose of apprenticeship training for adults is to provide a basic vocational education, increased professional experience and an opportunity to gain knowledge in a vocational area.	✓	✓	✓	Adults who have not finished primary or secondary school	-	x

Development post 2016

In 2021, participation in education and training increased strongly, both of the low qualified (by 7.2 percentage points to 26.5 %) and for the overall adult population (by 5.1 percentage points to 34.7 %).

In 2018, Sweden launched the government’s long-term strategy for reducing and counteracting segregation, which runs up to 2028. According to country representatives, by 2016, the established system has met already the goals of the Recommendation, with recent policies mainly aiming at further finetuning the given approaches (see also European Commission 2019).

Various initiatives focus on supporting recent migrants, including refugees³⁶³, to acquire vocational qualifications, with ‘vocational packages’ [SE#3] offering. “Branch Schools” intends to open up a broad choice of vocational programmes irrespective of the place of living, as one can attend more general parts of programmes locally and only specialised modules in remote vocational institutions [SE#4]. Moreover, the number of study places available in HVET has been expanded [SE#5].

Table A3_49 SE - Policies initiated 2016 and following

Initiative / type / start date of implementation	Short description	Three Steps			Target group	Funding	
		As	TP	Va		EU	Na

363 Presentation by Andreas Fejes; [EAEA-14-april-2020.pdf](#);

STUDY SUPPORTING THE EVALUATION OF THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON UPSKILLING PATHWAYS:
NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

<p>[SE#3] Vocational packages (Komvux)</p> <p>Policy</p> <p>2017-</p>	<p>A programme supporting continuous vocational training through the combination of upper secondary markets that match the skills requirements of the labour market, introduced in 2017</p>	✓	✓	✓	<p>Adults who have not finished primary or secondary school</p>	-	x
<p>[SE#4] The Government Proposition on experimental work with branch schools</p> <p>Policy</p> <p>2018-2023</p>	<p>The Government Proposition on experimental work with branch schools (2016) gives the municipalities the possibility to make an agreement with a branch school, implying that the school can execute teaching in vocational subjects.</p>	✓	✓	na	<p>Young adults</p>	-	x
<p>[SE#5] Substantial increase in the number of study seats in HVET</p> <p>Policy</p> <p>2020-2021</p>	<p>The government proposed additional funding for higher education and adult education to meet emerging needs and respond to the pandemic.</p>	✓	☒	✓	<p>Adult learners</p>	-	x

Annex 4 – Case studies

Abbreviations of upskilling measures referred to in the case study reports

The following abbreviations are used in reference to upskilling measures in the case study reports. The upskilling measures are described in full in Annex 1: In-depth mapping of measures.

[AT#1] Educational leave (Bildungskarenz)

[AT#2] 'Competence with a system' (Kompetenz mit System)

[AT#3] Courses for the development of basic skills (Basisbildungskurse)

[AT#4] Lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (Vorbereitungskurse auf den Pflichtschulabschluss)

[BG#3] 'Training and Employment'

[BG#4] 'Vouchers for employed persons'/'Vouchers for employees'

[BG#5] 'New Chance for Success'

[BG#6] 'Training of adults who have completed literacy courses'

[DE#1] General agreement on the national decade for literacy and basic education. Reducing functional illiteracy and raising the level of basic skills in Germany

[DE#2] Bildungsprämie

[DE#3] Zukunftsstarter

[DE#4] Valikom

[DE#5] Qualifizierungschancengesetz

[EE#1] General upper secondary education for adults in the non-stationary form of study

[EE#2] Skills forecasting and analysis system OSKA

[EE#3] Adult career counselling

EE#4 Supporting low-skilled adults to return to formal education and participate in learning

[ES#1] Aula Mentor

[ES#2] PEAC

ES#3 Initial Education

[FR#1] Individual learning account (Compte personnel de formation (CPF))

[FR#2] CléA, the Knowledge and Occupational Competences Certificate

[FR#3] Plan for investment in skills (Plan d'investissement dans les compétences),

[FR#4] France Compétences

[HU#1] Training of low-skilled and those employed in public work schemes

[HU#2] Combating the Digital Gap

[IE#1] Youthreach programme

[IE#2] Skillnet Ireland

[IE#3] Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

[IE#4] Adult literacy

[SE#1] Upper secondary adult education – vocational courses (Komvux gymnasial nivå – yrkeskurser)

[SE#2] Apprenticeship for adults (Lärlingsutbildning för vuxna (komvux))

[SE#3] Vocational packages (Komvux)

[SE#4] The Government Proposition on experimental work with branch schools

[SE#5] Substantial increase in the number of study seats in HVET

1. Case study Austria

1.1. National operating context

Austria's national context for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways is characterized by a highly developed adult education and training system that is to a large extent within the competence of the nine Austrian federal states (Länder), with each having its own arrangements of supply and demand side funding for adult learning. However, the national level also plays a key role as the public employment service and its regional branches have evolved into the most important provider of funding for Continuous Vocational Education and Training (CVET) and adult learning for both the unemployed and the employed. Additionally, national-level programmes for formal adult learning exist, as well as a range of funding frameworks building on a cooperation between national and regional level actors.

Concerning outcomes, Austria had a **moderately high proportion of low qualified younger adults (25-34)** (11.4 %) in 2016. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64 year olds beyond the low qualified was 21.9 %, which is moderately high by comparison.³⁶⁴ Participation of the low qualified in lifelong learning (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (5.1 %) while the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment almost (14.9 %) reached the LLL-benchmark (15 %). According to figures from the adult education survey, by comparison, lifelong guidance (17.7 %) and skill assessment (7.2 %) were well developed in 2016. In particular due to the rising number of refugees, in 2016, high pressure on measures relevant for upskilling pathways were present (e.g. capacity of adult basic education, demand for validation) a situation that has since then relaxed.

In Austria, there are several initiatives supporting the acquisition of basic skills for adults, with a significant role being measures led by the Ministry of Education, Science and Research and structured through the Initiative for adult education (including courses for the development of basic skills AT#3, lower secondary school leaving certificate courses AT#4), with around 30.000 participants between 2015 and 2018. The Adult Basic Education framework combines a skill assessment with a tailored provision in small groups; AT#4 has also a validation component as it awards a formal qualification ('school leaving certificate'), however, it offers no validation of more specific or vocational skills. The Preparatory courses for the vocational matriculation exam support participants towards the vocational matriculation examination (about 23,000 participants in 2015). The Public Employment Service (AMS) oversees relevant apprenticeship courses and programmes (Apprenticeship-intensive courses, Competence with a system AT#2, one framework providing a three-steps-integration in Austria targeting low-qualified during (frequent) spells of unemployment, allowing for earning a full qualification), which reached around 19.000 participants in 2019. EU-funding (ESF in particular) is used for some key initiatives relevant for upskilling (e.g. AT#3, AT#4). By 2016, the Austrian LLL strategy of 2011 were still operational (*Günter Hefler, Luomi-Messerer, Steinheimer, Wulz, & 3s Unternehmensberatung, 2018, p. 8; Republik Österreich, 2011*), however, continuous policy coordination in the field of lifelong learning were still not established beyond the field of Active Labour Market Policy.

By comparison generous demand-side funding schemes for individual training costs exists (mainly on regional level). At national level, a rather generous educational leave exists, with individuals receiving a wage replacement payment from the PES equal to their unemployment benefits for up to 12 months [AT#1]. The leave has developed into one key forms of public support for adult learning.

³⁶⁴ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/austria_country_factsheet.pdf

1.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

By 2016, measures were already in place which were broadly fulfilling the goals set out in the UPR (*European Commission, 2019; Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Nagl, Bösch, & Jandl-Gartner, 2021; Nationalagentur Erasmus+ Bildung, 2018*). The Council Recommendation has been used as a means to further sustain and expand the respective programmes in question. The comprehensive measures are comprised of activities governed by the Ministry of Education (e.g. Schools for Adults, Adult Basic Education) and a broad set of training related measures implemented within the Austrian Active Labour Market Policy.

In Austria, there are approaches to implementing upskilling pathways at all three steps addressed in the Recommendation. Two strategy processes, some of which started several years before the UP Recommendation, have established important precedents. These were the National Strategy for LLL:2020 (2011) and the National Strategy for Validation (2017). The process of implementing the validation strategy slowed down recently due to shifts on the political agenda and then the Covid-19 crisis, yet, is still considered an important milestone by stakeholders. Below, the focus was placed on the one hand on particularly successful and broad initiatives, which demonstrate approaches taken for the steps skills assessment and the attempts to establish a system for provision of upskilling offers, and on the other hand, a concrete measure for the area of validation ("Competences with a system").

A variety of initiatives in line with the goals of the UP recommendation existed in Austria prior to the UPR recommendation. Introduced in 1998, the educational leave (*Bildungskarenz*) (AT#1) provides 3 to 12 months of wage replacement during participation in education (of a minimum of 20 hours per week or the equivalent in credits) for all employed adults, an equal amount as for the unemployment benefits. The Ministry for Labour is the responsible entity. Applications are run by PES. Employers have to agree for employees to be able to apply. After its introduction, several adaptations of the eligibility criteria have been implemented, and part-time education leave was introduced in 2013.

In Austria, extraordinary exams have a century long tradition as an alternative way to acquire a qualification in adult without the need of attending the related formal programme (in its form prevalent in initial education). They are regarded as a functional equivalent to formal procedures of validation of non-formal and informal learning. These exams can be taken by everyone older than 18 who can claim that he/she has acquired sufficient practical experience in the related occupational field, had been prepared within a related programme of occupational rehabilitation or have completed at least half the period of a regular apprenticeship. While formally not required, various preparation programmes are typically used for preparing for the exam; many of these programmes (running over several month or even longer) are either funded by the state (the PES in particular) or at least co-funded from public sources (via grants for individuals). For some qualifications, self-study materials are available as well³⁶⁵. In 2020, 17% of all vocational qualifications related to the apprenticeship system were awarded based on Second Chance routes leading up to sitting the exam. (For the role of other external exams see (*Günter Hefler, Steinheimer, & Wulz, 2017; Markowitsch, Hefler, Rammel, & Ringler, 2013*).

'Competence with a system' (*Kompetenz mit System*) (AT#2) is a modular programme for a variety of different apprenticeships. It enables adults with low levels of qualifications (particularly women) to improve their competences and progress towards a formally recognised vocational qualification via abovementioned extraordinary VET exams for second-chance education. The PES is key actor and on participation of individuals. Also other

³⁶⁵ <https://www.lap.at/index.pHN>

schemes exist that can lead to a formally recognised vocational qualification via extraordinary VET exams for second-chance education, for example so-called intensive training to qualify as skilled workers (*Fachkräfte-IntensivAusbildung*). It is offered by the PES for job-seekers over 19 that dropped out of an apprenticeship or have outdated skills and enables these individuals to complete their apprenticeship.

The Initiative for adult education (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung*) specifies different competence areas in basic education: (a) study competences (how to 'learn'), (b) German, (c) basic skills in a second language, (d) mathematics and (e) digital competences. Its key aim is to ensure equal access opportunities in the programme areas of basic skills training and attainment of a lower secondary education certificate. The key policy actor is the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, responsible for accrediting the educational providers that intend to apply for funding, for allocating funds to federal provinces, and for distributing ESF funds. Regional governments have responsibility for co-funding. For implementation a small agency (*Geschäftsstelle*) serves as a communication platform and supports all the partners involved (providers, regional governments, Federal Ministry for Education, monitoring group, accreditation group, and steering committee). The framework was launched in 2012. The first funding period (2012-14) was co-financed by the federal state and the regions. For the second (2015-2017) and third (2018-21) funding was increased, also by using ESF co-financing. Adaptations concerning the required qualifications for trainers and counsellors, the definition of target groups, and the curriculum for basic skills courses were made over the years.

The courses for the development of basic skills (*Basisbildungskurse*) [AT#3] were launched in 2012 and are part of the abovementioned Initiative for adult education which specifies different competence areas in basic education. Courses for the development of basic skills consists of a wide range of courses delivered by different organisations. In order to qualify for funding, courses must be accredited. This provision has been in place under several steering documents since 2012. Also [AT#4] Lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (*Vorbereitungskurse auf den Pflichtschulabschluss*) are part of the Initiative for adult education. They enable adults with low levels of qualifications to participate in courses to prepare for the attainment of a lower secondary school leaving certificate (ISCED 2) free of charge. The curriculum includes the four compulsory competence areas – German, English, mathematics and vocational guidance – and a choice of at least two elective modules.

In 2014, the skilled workers grant (*Facharbeiterstipendium*) was introduced, which provides a wage-replacement payment for workers without higher education qualifications for selected educational programmes for up to three years. Eligible programmes cover a broad range of secondary and post-secondary (mainly vocational) programmes. Other schemes from the PES can also provide support for fees. The scheme had been implemented as an alternative to the Paid Educational Leave scheme (AT#1), as the latter had been rarely used by adults starting from a low-skilled position/aiming at an intermediate level of qualification. Furthermore, starting in October 2020, all participants of upskilling measures provided by the PES (as in the skilled worker intensive training and the skilled workers grant), receive an additional "education bonus" of 180 EUR a month (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit, 2021; Bundesministerium für Arbeit et al., 2021*). Recently, the measure initially limited until the end of 2021 was prolonged for 2022.

Beyond these national-level initiatives, a variety of offers from the federal states exist in Austria that align with the Recommendation. Supporting individuals to escape low levels of education attainment is the content of regional strategic policies, for example for Vienna (*Waff, 2021*), which promote policy packages in line with the UPR (assessment, tailored provision, validation, lifelong guidance, outreach, information). A suitable example is the initiative

'*Wiener Wochen*' in Vienna that provides career guidance and information for adults and youth concerning second chance education, financial support, validation and other topics.

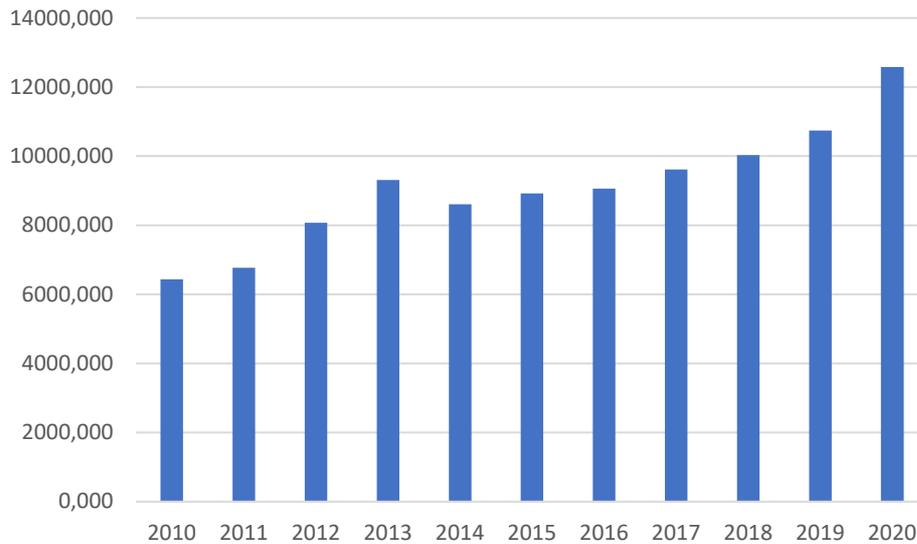
The UPR has so far not triggered the implementation of *new* initiatives, which is also the effect of various changes in the Austrian government since 2017. However, for sustaining and further expanding the full set of policies, developed mainly between 2005 and 2015, regarded important for upskilling (Nationalagentur Erasmus+ Bildung, 2018), the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION had been an important support. For example, in the year 2016 onwards, public investment in the training leave scheme had been further expanded (AT#1), variations of competence with a system (AT#2) had been implemented in the Austrian regions and measures of the Initiative for adult learning (AT#3 and AT#4) had been prolonged (2017-2021) without cuts and once more (2022 onwards) with a small reduction of the foreseen funding (see also (Günter Hefler & Steinheimer, 2020). High investments for training within Austria's Active Labour Market Policy has been further sustained between 2016 and 2019. Provision tailored to the learners needs for supporting them to acquiring higher levels of skills is a long-term policy priority, expressed e.g. in the National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, launched in 2011. While no renewed Lifelong learning strategy had been adopted, the outflow of previous investment cycles are still visible, with European Union initiatives providing support (for the latest monitoring (Günter Hefler et al., 2018)). There has also been progress concerning validation of prior learning (see for example AT#2), but it is still considered still a field with much potential for improvement. A National Strategy had been finally published in 2017 (*Bundesministerium für Bildung, 2017*), however, had not put into practice due to the change in government.

1.3. Effectiveness

Measures sustained or expanded in light of the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION have increased participation in adult learning and the participation of adults with a low level of educational attainment in particular. Up to 2019, participation in Lifelong Learning of the low qualified has somewhat increased (by 0.6 percentage points to 5.7 %), while the overall participation rate has decreased slightly (by 0.2 percentage points to 14.7 %), after having already surpassing the threshold in one year. More comprehensive data across all activities relevant for UPS are lacking, however, monitoring data on achieved participation cases are practically always available, with key initiatives captured below.

The [AT#1] Educational leave (*Bildungskarenz*) has expanded throughout time, with recipients of the respective wage replacement payment (further training allowance/*Weiterbildungsgeld*) rising from 8925 in 2015 to 12579 in 2020, as visible in the figure below.

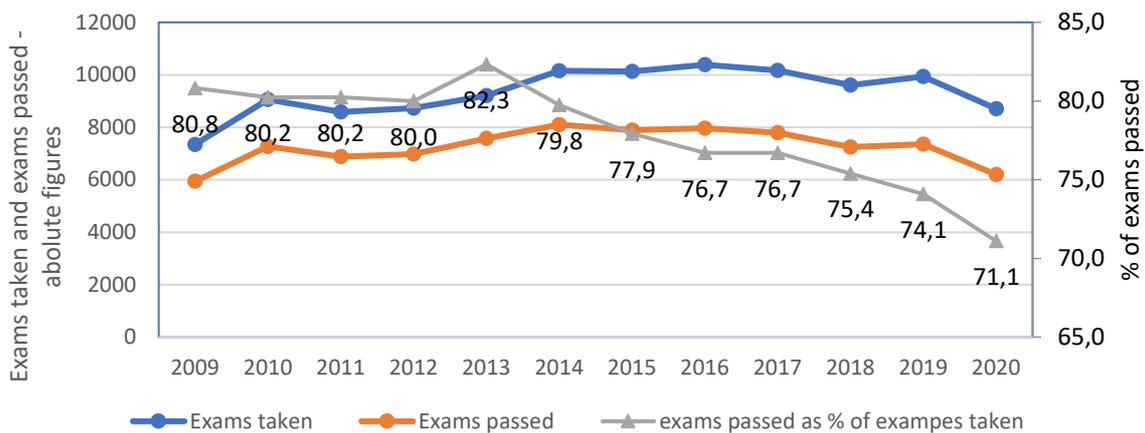
Figure A4_1 Claimants of the further training allowance (annual average stock), 2010-2020



Source: (Federal Ministry of Labour, 2021, p. 55)

The figure further below shows the numbers of completed extraordinary VET exams in second-chance education, which include for example participants from the programme 'Competence with a system' (AT#2), the intensive training to qualify as skilled workers (*Facharbeiterintensivausbildung*), the programme 'Du kannst was', and related programmes (Cedefop, 2019; Eichbauer, 2021 (not public)). In long-term perspective, the exams taken have increased in the past decade, albeit from 2016 to 2020, a small downward development is visible both concerning exams taken and exams passed.

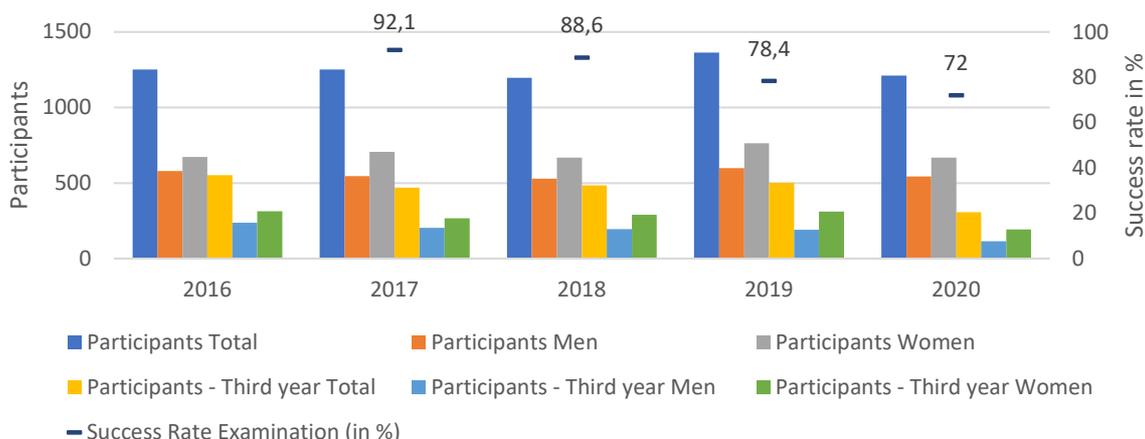
Figure A4_2 Extraordinary VET exams in second-chance adult education



Source: (Dornmayr & Nowak 2021)

More specifically, in 'Competence with a system' (Kompetenz mit System) [AT#2], the share of participants remained roughly stable since 2016, with a peak in 2019, as visible in the figure below.

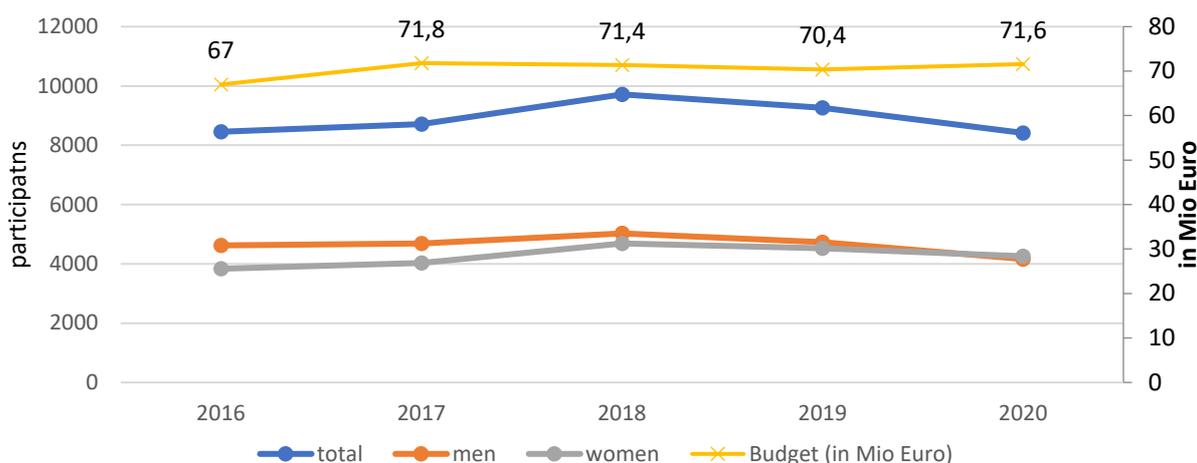
Figure A4_3 Participants of the programme ‘Competence with a system’, 2016-2020



Source: AMS – Geschäftsberichte 2016-2020

Also in the intensive training to qualify as skilled workers, the number of participants has remained stable in the past years, from 8459 in 2016 to 8416 in 2020.

Figure A4_4 Participants of the skilled worker intensive training, 2016-2020

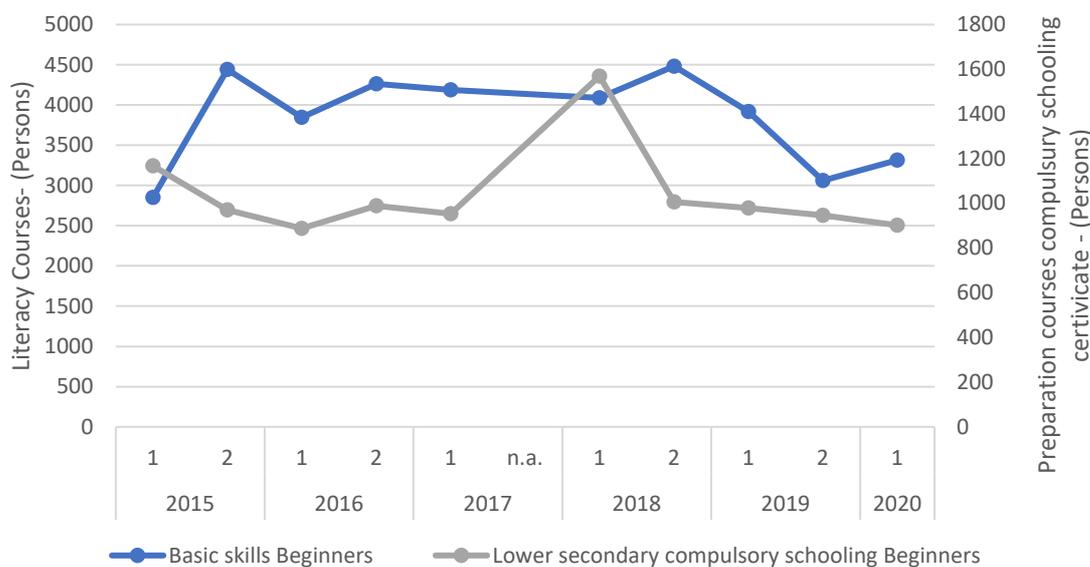


Source: (Federal Ministry of Labour, 2021, p. 90)

Recipients of the skilled workers grant have increased from 5301 in 2014 to 7244 in 2020, albeit with fluctuations in between (Federal Ministry of Labour, 2021, p. 96) (see also next section for graphical depiction).

Finally, new entries into the programmes part of the Initiative for adult education, more specifically the courses for the development of basic skills (*Basisbildungskurse*) [AT#3] and the lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (*Vorbereitungskurse auf den Pflichtschulabschluss*) [AT#4] are visible below. While new entries to courses for basic skills have increased from 2852 in the first half year of 2015 to 3316 in the first half year 2020, they have decreased slightly from 1168 to 902 for lower secondary school leaving certificate courses.

Figure 215 New entries and graduates from courses as part of the Initiative for adult education, 2015 to 2020



Source: (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung, 2020*)

In Austria, initiatives and projects relevant for the upskilling pathways recommendation have a variety of key target groups consistent with the recommendation. These include:

1. Low-skilled youth and adults in need of basic skills training in reading, writing, maths and IT
2. Low-skilled youth and adults aiming to gain a lower secondary school leaving certificate
3. Low-skilled adults seeking employment (recurring phases of unemployment)
4. Non-EU Migrants and refugees
5. People with disabilities
6. All employed adults aiming for education or training

According to an interviewee (AT_I_1), the priority target groups are reached well, which is visible in the monitoring reports on the Initiative for adult education (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung, 2020*). However, it has been emphasized that certain target groups for adult basic education are harder to reach, in particular considering individuals who went to school in Austria but are in need of basic skills training, who rarely seek such educational offers on their own initiative due to still existing stigmas (AT_I_1).

At the level of economic sectors, no priorities were set within the activities governed by the Ministry Education. Some measures supported within the field of Active Labour Market Policy support educational activities preparing for economic sectors with a shortage of skilled labour. Lists of sectors with shortages and related types of education activities supported are regularly updated, typically with consultation of the Austrian Social Partners.

In Austria, there are various activities combining the three steps approach of the council recommendation. Measures of the Initiative for adult education combine in particular skills assessment with tailored provision and validation. For example, the courses for basic skills [AT#3] offer a wide range of courses tailored to different skill levels, different types of skills (reading, writing, digital etc.), different specific target groups (young adults, level of German, woman with childcare obligations, etc.) and so on, and the lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (AT#4) offer a modularized course system tailored to individual's needs. Both schemes include initial skills assessment before the programme itself starts, and validation of competences enables individuals to transition into subsequent learning offers. Education is provided by (very) small groups of learners (six learners per teacher; one-to-one teaching as on key element) (see AT#3). Where possible, learners are placed into groups with similar key learning needs. Finally, assessment, validation and tailored provision is combined by 'Competence with a system' (*Kompetenz mit System*) (AT#2). The programme is based upon three consecutive modules, and due to the scheme's possibility for validation of prior learning, individuals might start already with the second or third of the consecutive modules.

Concerning cooperation of relevant stakeholders, there has been no overarching *continuous* coordination across all relevant policy fields as a result of the Council Recommendation. However, there exists an inter-ministerial working group responsible for EU initiatives that allocate main responsibilities for newly launched EU initiatives to one dedicated ministry (AT_I_4). In the case of the upskilling pathways recommendation, this responsibility was allocated to the Ministry of Education, which subsequently invited all other Ministries to contribute and complement its own initiatives. The development of the validation strategy was coordinated by a working group including all ministries concerned education and skills, and social partnership institutions and scientific experts were also involved, similar as in the development of the LLL-Strategy (2011) (AT_I_1). With the framework of the initiative of adult education (AT#3, AT#4), a substantial change in the field of adult education became possible by overcoming barriers situated in the competence distribution between the federal and regional governments. However, the agreement between the federal and regional governments must be renewed every three to four years which results in phases of insecurity in the negotiation and transition to the next agreement. A long-term solution is wanted by many stakeholders.

Measures relevant for the Recommendation are often accompanied by outreach and guidance services. Concerning the activities of the Initiative for adult education (AT#3 and AT#4), outreach and guidance is provided by the providing organisations and NGOs in related fields (youth, migrants, women). Furthermore, the PES provides guidance services for potential participants of the schemes relevant for the upskilling pathways recommendation.

In general, all measures relevant for the upskilling pathways recommendation are monitored with regards to the labour market success of participants. Evaluations are also partially available, for example concerning the measures of the initiative for adult education (Steiner, Egger-Steiner, & Baumegger, 2018; Steiner, Pessl, Kuschej, Egger-Steiner, & Metzler, 2017) (AT#3, AT#4) and the skilled workers grant (Auer & Ronnenberg, 2020). The educational leave (AT#1) has been evaluated in 2011 (Lassnigg, Gottwald, Hofer, Kuschej, & Zaussinger, 2011), while the competence with a system (AT#2) programme has not yet been evaluated.

Several of the initiatives relevant for the upskilling pathways recommendation can be considered good practice. The Initiative of Adult Education has been forming a sound base for promoting upskilling on ISCED levels 0-2 for 10 years and previous evaluations show good results. Furthermore, the competence with a system (AT#2) can be considered as best practice due to its flexibility and incorporation of the three steps approach. The modular system and the possibility to opt into a module in phases of unemployment or postpone parts of the

training in phases of employment allows individuals to make progress despite changing living conditions.

1.4. Efficiency

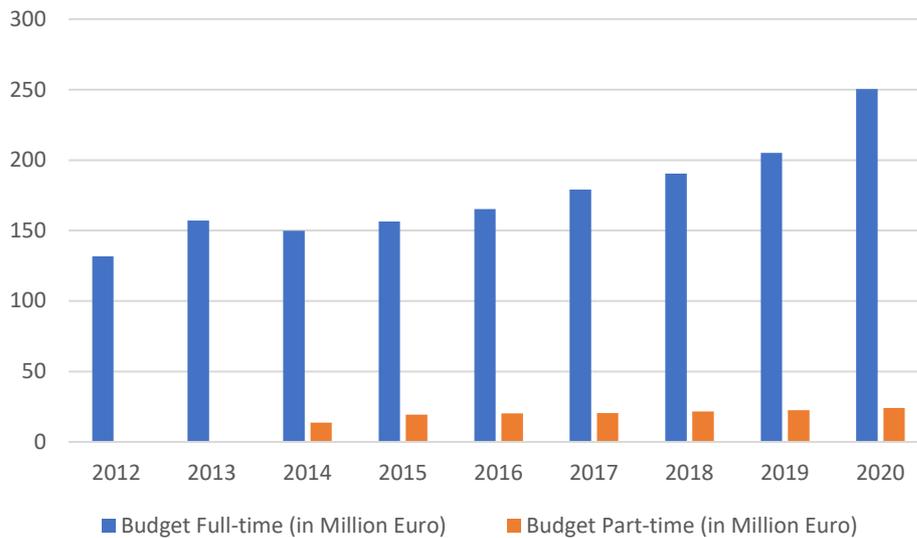
Due to the wide range of different approaches and measures in place, a general discussion of the efficiency of the measures associated with the council recommendation is hardly possible, in particular as the funding models between measures of the Ministry of Education (as the Initiative for adult education) and the Ministry of Labour differ regarding their funding sources. This has also been emphasized by stakeholders. However, an in-depth look at some measures can help to get an overview on efficiency-related questions.

In general, several of the measures provided are funded both by national, subnational and EU sources. The measures of the Initiative for adult education (with the Ministry of Education in lead) are financed through all of these funding sources. For example, the courses for basic skills (AT#3) were financed by 50% ESF (for 8 of 9 regions), 25% regional and 25% federal government funding between 2018-2021. The lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (AT#4) were financed by 20% ESF (for 8 of 9 regions), 40% regional and 40% federal government funds in the same time span. In total, in the Ministry of Education's budget for adult education, 8.8 percent of funding is covered by the ESF (Bisovsky, 2022). Measures within the Ministry of Labour's responsibility like competence with a system (AT#2) and the skilled workers grant are however financed solely out of national and/or subnational funds, as the ministry has withdrawn from ESF funding since 2015 (AT_I_4).

Several measures connected to the Recommendation used financial incentives for individuals. Demand-side funding schemes for the direct costs of training and wage replacement have been prolonged and partly expanded, visible for example in the Educational leave (*Bildungskarenz*) [AT#1] and its respective wage replacement payment (further training allowance/*Weiterbildungsgeld*). Employees who take educational leave or a leave of absence to participate in education or training programmes may apply for an allowance typically equal to the theoretical unemployment benefits (55 % of the latest net income). It is at least EUR 14.53 per day. The skilled workers grant provides up to 100% of eligible costs of training in selected programmes for those without HE qualifications. The scheme offers a lump-sum grant as a wage replacement of EUR 30,60 (2020) per day. Furthermore, starting in October 2020, all participants of upskilling measures provided by the PES (as in the skilled worker intensive training and the skilled workers grant), receive an additional "education bonus" of 180 EUR a month (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit, 2021; Bundesministerium für Arbeit et al., 2021*). Recently, the measure initially limited until the end of 2021 was prolonged for 2022. This has been seen as central for enabling participation in longer programmes and has been depicted as one of the most far-reaching changes concerning policies related to the upskilling pathways recommendation in recent years (AT_I_4).

While it is hard to assess the overall costs of the implementation of the council recommendation, some hints can be provided by individual projects connected to the recommendation. In total, the Austrian Initiative for adult education cost EUR 54.6 million between 2012-2014, EUR 75.8 million between 2015-2017, and 111 million between 2018-2021. The costs for the educational leave (AT#1) (full-time model) account for around 250 million EUR for 2020, as visible in the figure below. Part-time educational leave accounted for around 25 million EUR in 2020.

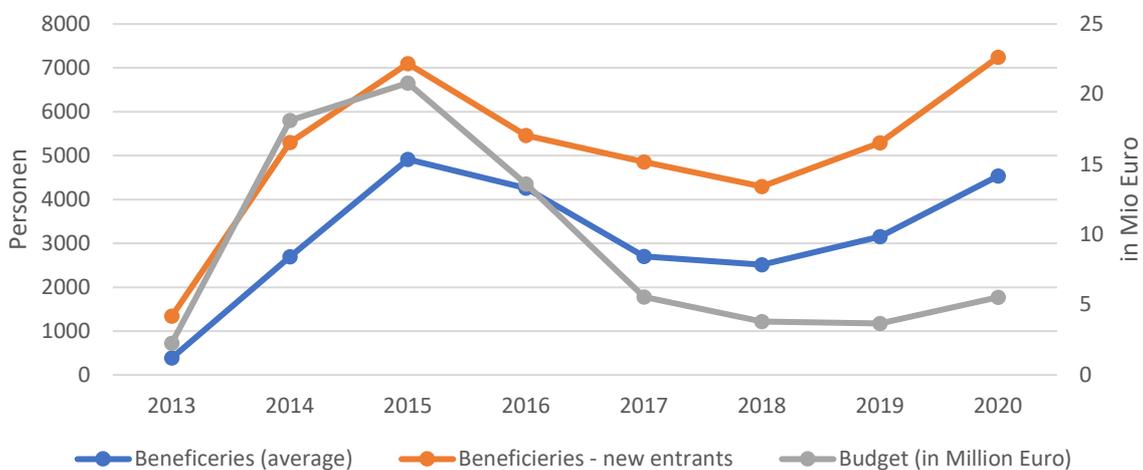
Figure A4_6 Costs for full-time and part-time educational leave in million (public contributions, further training allowance/Weiterbildungsgeld, including related contributions to social security system)



Source: (Bundesministerium für Arbeit et al., 2021)

For the skilled workers grant (*Facharbeiterstipendium*), budget has risen between 2018 and 2020 with increasing beneficiaries, accounting for more than 20 million euro in 2020.

Figure A4_7 Costs and beneficiaries of skilled workers grant, 2013-2020



Source: Bundesministerium für Arbeit et al., 2021)

In the intensive training to qualify as skilled workers, costs have slightly risen between 2016 (67 Mio Euro) and 2020 (71.6 Mio Euro) (*Federal Ministry of Labour, 2021, p. 90*) (see also graph in previous section).

1.5. Relevance

The continued overall relevance of the council recommendation is still visible in selected key indicators. Austria had a moderately high proportion of low qualified younger adults (25-34)

([A] 11.4 %) in 2016, which increased only moderately by 0.6 percentage points to 5.7% in 2019. In fact, overall participation in lifelong learning even decreased slightly (by 0.2 percentage points to 14.7%). The share of 25-34-year olds with low educational attainment has decreased from 11.4 to 10.6 percent. And the share of adults with low or no digital skills has decreased from 34 to 31 percent. Consequently, despite progress, the key objectives of the recommendation continue to be highly relevant.

In particular concerning the area of skill validation, the Council Recommendation is of continued relevance. According to an interview, the Covid-19 pandemic as well as an abrupt change in government have delayed progress in some policy processes on national level (e.g. the implementation of the Validation Strategy) (AT_I_1, AT_I_2). Stakeholders also emphasized that while the general objectives are still relevant, certain definitions of what constitutes a low qualified individual might need to be adjusted, as the skill levels needed to participate in the labour market and social life constantly change (AT_I_1). The interviewee for example argued that digital skills, but also financial basic skills and health basic skills have become more important.

Furthermore, stakeholders have also emphasized that certain target groups have decreased in relevance (AT_I_1). For example, the number of refugees has decreased compared to the situation when the council recommendation was released (e.g. full classrooms in adult basic education; growing demand for validation procedures) (AT_I_1). This is a particularly important target group for the Initiative of Adult Education, with 87.2 percent of participants in courses for basic skills [AT#3] and 82.4 percent in lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (AT#4) having a migration background in the first half year of 2020 (*Initiative Erwachsenenbildung, 2020*). However, relevance might change again due the current Ukraine crisis, which could not be expected at the time of the interviews (albeit skill profiles of Ukrainian refugees might substantially differ from previous cohorts of refugees). Furthermore, also other target groups that are harder to reach are still relevant, especially individuals who went to school in Austria but need basic skills training (AT_I_1).

1.6. Coherence

The policies promoted by the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION are fully coherent with national level policies in Austria. Prior to the Recommendation, various policies were in place that can be regarded as broadly fulfilling the Council Recommendation, which have been reinforced and expanded also with reference to the Recommendation.

Several implemented initiatives in Austria are coherent with the objectives, target groups and measures of the Recommendation. The target groups in a variety of observed national measures connected to upskilling pathways reflect the prioritization of adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and competences in the recommendation very well, or have been partially adjusted to better reflect the national context. Measures of the Initiative for Adult Education, namely the courses for basic skills [AT#3] and the lower secondary school leaving certificate courses (AT#4) clearly target those with low levels of skills and aim to increase literacy and basic skills. This also holds for competence with a system (AT#2), which clearly targets adults with low levels of qualifications (particularly women), as well as the intensive training to qualify as skilled workers (*Fachkräfte-Intensivausbildung*), which targets VET dropouts and individuals with outdated skills. While individuals with higher skills are the larger group of participants in the educational leave (AT#1), also low-skilled individuals are among the participants (AT_I_2). Nonetheless, with the skilled workers grant (*Facharbeiterstipendium*), a specific scheme was introduced as an alternative to the educational leave in order to particularly reach adults starting from a low-skilled position and aim at achieving intermediate levels of qualifications.

In sum, all the objectives of the Recommendation can be found in Austria. Programmes for example aim to improve stakeholder coordination (Initiative for Adult education), provide assessment, validation, tailored training (competence with a system, AT#2), and provide (financial) support to learners (AT#1). However, not all the objectives are equally prioritized. As emphasized by the interviewees, additional measures concerning validation were not fully implemented in Austria yet (e.g. the implementation of the National Validation Strategy) (AT_I_1, AT_I_2).

Implementing the goals of the upskilling pathways recommendation was not without challenges. For example, the preparatory process for the National Validation Strategy has been depicted as particularly challenging, as involved stakeholders feared a break in the logic of the existing VET system, and the recommendation facilitated a compromise in this regard (AT_I_1). Furthermore, the frequent recent changes in government as well as the Covid-19 pandemic were identified as main obstacles for implementation of the recommendation (AT_I_1, AT_I_2). For example, stakeholders have emphasized that progress concerning the implementation of the National Validation Strategy has slowed down as a consequence (AT_I_1, AT_I_2). Currently, while its implementation is still foreseen in the new government programme, no significant steps towards its implementation were conducted so far (AT_I_2).

Austria also partially used EU funds for the measures connected to the implementation of the upskilling pathways recommendation, which signals at least some degree of coherence of the implementation with relevant EU funding mechanisms. However, an interviewee has highlighted that in contrast to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour has withdrawn from ESF funding since 2015 due to the ESF's complexity and high administrative demands (AT_I_4) – a lack of coherence was not mentioned as a reason.

1.7. EU added value

The Recommendation can be seen as important for further expanding and sustaining a variety of measures and key instruments that have already been introduced before 2016. As emphasized by interviewees, the EU, and consequently also the upskilling pathways recommendation, can substantially legitimize already taken actions (AT_I_4, AT_I_1, AT_I_3). The EU's added value can consequently be summarized at paving the way for an expansion of instruments targeted at low-skilled, or at least as preventing a cutback concerning such measures.

This added value of the Recommendation is also visible in the specific measures discussed in this case study. According to an interviewee, for example the Initiative for adult education and its connected measures (AT#3, AT#4) profited heavily from the Recommendation, even though the initiative already existed before (AT_I_3). More specifically, the interviewee emphasized that the Recommendation specifically helped to prolong the initiative as it could be used in political discourse to justify the measures (AT_I_3). Furthermore, also additional ESF co-funding for the Initiative for Adult Education in 2015 made it possible to expand the initiative considerably (AT_I_1). This also reflects the long-standing importance of ESF-funding for adult learning policy and in particular measures targeting basic skills in Austria more generally (*Bisovsky, 2022*).

Additional EU policies besides the upskilling pathways have influenced Austrian policymaking. An interviewed stakeholder mentioned that the National Validation Strategy and its broad preparatory process involving ministries, social partnership institutions and scientific experts were significantly facilitated by the Council Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal learning (AT_I_1). This preparatory process for the Strategy has been depicted as particularly challenging, as involved stakeholders feared a break in the logic of the existing VET system, and the recommendation facilitated a compromise in this regard – even though

the implementation of the strategy slowed down afterwards due to a change in government and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, the recent introduction of the “education bonus” of 180 EUR a month for participants of all upskilling measures provided by the PES has been accredited directly to the European Union’s funding through the Recovery and Resilience Facility RFF by one of our interview partners (AT_I_4). This has been seen as central for enabling participation in longer programmes and has been depicted as one of the most far-reaching changes in recent years (AT_I_4). In sum, the EU’s role was seen as very positive by interviewed stakeholders, emphasising that actions on EU level could further strengthen the Austrian approach and build some necessary political pressure to continue on the taken path (AT_I_1).

1.8. Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE)

For all policies, the implementation is monitored and for many policies, an ex-post evaluation has been conducted or is foreseen. Evaluations were conducted for the measures of the initiative for adult education (Steiner et al., 2018; Steiner et al., 2017) (AT#3, AT#4), the skilled workers grant (Auer & Ronnenberg, 2020), and educational leave (AT#1) (Lassnigg et al., 2011). The competence with a system (AT#2) programme has not yet been evaluated.

However, for no measure reported a counterfactual impact evaluation is available. In Austria, available counterfactual impact evaluations focussed on the long-term outcomes of support for upskilling, the acquisition of a qualification of a formal qualification in particular. A study of Holl, Kernbeiß, Städtner, and Wagner-Pinter (2013) is of particular importance in this regard. Overall, there is evidence that the long-term effects of upskilling (defined as achieving on step up on the education ladder) on employment and wages are positive, and the public return on investments are positive too. It is understood that many measures contribute building blocks (e.g. Adult Basic Education) to the acquisition of qualification, meaning that their positive outcomes remain underestimated when they are studied either in isolation or within a short-time framework only.

1.9. Overall assessment

In sum, measures in line with the goals of the upskilling pathways recommendation were already in place before 2016, but the Recommendation itself has substantially reinforced and expanded Austria’s ambitions. Stakeholders consulted during the evaluation have repeatedly emphasized that the council recommendation have substantially legitimized already taken actions and paved the way for an expansion of instruments targeted at low-skilled, or at least as preventing a cutback concerning such measures.

The Recommendation was broadly in line with pre-existing policies in Austria, thereby mitigating potential challenges in its implementation. However, frequent recent changes in government as well as the Covid-19 pandemic were identified as main obstacles. And in particular with regard to goals concerning validation, implementation has been challenging as involved stakeholders feared a break in the logic of the existing VET system. However, an external impetus like the council recommendation can contribute to the increase motivations of policymakers and stakeholders in the face of these challenges, and facilitate a compromise.

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1.11. ANNEX II: List of interviewed stakeholders

- Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research
- Chamber of Labour
- Federal Ministry of Labour

1.12. ANNEX III: Further supporting statistics

Du kannst was [IBE Bericht \(esf.at\)](#)

<https://www.isw-linz.at/index.pHN?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=90&token=8facf931fe50f6bdbcb35b53419443c60ab0f932>

<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/247333/1/AMS-report-146.pdf>

2. Case study Bulgaria

2.1. National operating context

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the Period 2014-2020³⁶⁶ and the annual plans for its implementation were well developed policy documents that have had a positive influence on the development and adoption of the lifelong learning perspective as a guiding principle for reforms at all levels of education. However, the envisaged measures in relation to participation in lifelong learning turned out to be not sufficiently effective.

Bulgaria is ahead of the upskilling initiative legislatively, and subsequently in the implementation of the legislation. The country has introduced measures that fit very well with the Recommendation. For example, in 2013, a project for validation of informally acquired knowledge, skills and competencies started and the possibility for validation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through independent and non-formal learning has been regulated by law since July 2014. In 2014, the Law on Preschool and School Education introduced the dual form of education. It later became the Dual System. In 2015, the measure was included in the Employment Promotion Act, through which the country began to subsidize adult education.

The Bulgarian context is characterised by the following main features:

- In recent years Bulgaria has faced an ageing population, a decrease of the working-age population as a result of birth rate trends, and a rise in emigration (population ages 65 and above as a percentage of the total population is 21.5% in 2020 while it was 18.8% in 2012). The share of the working-age population as part of the total population has also decreased significantly in the past two decades. From a peak of 69.3% in 2005, this share in the last decade declined to 63.8% in 2020³⁶⁷.
- Adults (aged 25-64) with educational attainment levels below upper secondary education (ISCED 3) represent 17.5% of Bulgarian adult population and this marks a positive trend of reduction³⁶⁸.
- Labour and skills shortages are a central concern for firms in Bulgaria³⁶⁹ and an inadequately trained workforce is one of the largest business environment constraints in the country³⁷⁰.
- During the period 2014-2020 the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 has increased steadily from 65.1% in 2014 to 75% in 2019. The employment rate in the age group 55-64 years is characterised by trend of high growth – it increased from 50% in 2014 to 64.2% in 2020³⁷¹.

³⁶⁶ Ministry of education and Science (2014). *National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the Period 2014-2020*. Available: <https://www.mon.bg/bg/143>

³⁶⁷ World Bank: Population Statistics

³⁶⁸ Adult education and training in Europe. Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications - Eurydice report, 2019 EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) data

³⁶⁹ World Bank. 2020. *Bulgaria Country Needs and STI Policy Mix Assessment*. Decisions Review Draft, July.

³⁷⁰ World Bank, 2020, *ibid*.

³⁷¹ MLSP, *Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of measures to support employed persons under Priority Axis 1 of the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020*

- Bulgaria not only remains among the countries with the lowest participation in lifelong learning in the EU, but its participation rate is decreasing³⁷². In 2018 participation rate of people aged 25-64 in Bulgaria reached 2.5% and then decreased to 2.0% in 2019 and 1.6% in 2020³⁷³. Although there is a decrease in the participation rates in almost all countries in 2020 in comparison to 2019, the participation rate in 2020 in Bulgaria falls 8.6 pp below the EU-27 average for 2020 (9.2%) and behind all European countries (excluding Romania)³⁷⁴.
- Bulgaria is significantly below the EU average in participation in education and training measured for the 12 months period. In 2016, 43.7% of adults (aged 25-64) in the EU-27 took part in education and training at least once³⁷⁵ – for Bulgaria this indicator was 24.6%.
- In terms of digital competences, Bulgaria remains in last place in the EU according to the European Commission's Index of Digital Entry into the Economy and Society (DESI), despite positive developments in several areas since 2015. The overall level of basic digital skills in Bulgaria is the lowest in the EU. According to DESI 2020, by 2019 only 29% of the population aged 16-74 has at least basic digital skills (compared to an EU average of 56%).

The EU funding complimented by the National Employment Action Plans has played an important role in creating adult learning opportunities and has had a significant impact on the development of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Working with low-skilled target groups is a particular challenge. Identifying and motivating the target groups to get involved in various forms of training and initiatives is difficult. Low skilled adults are likely to be inactive and may be disinterested in returning to education, and thus in need of specific approaches, for which structures and employees are not fully prepared. Experience in practice shows that special training is also needed for trainers who work with adults. One of the challenges in the last three years has been legislative issues that have emerged in terms of e-learning for adults. There is also a lack and shortage of digital skills in the workforce, especially for people with primary and lower education.

The normative gap that still exists refers to opportunities for people with lower education to be enrolled in courses for manual professions (e.g. landscaping). The legislative framework still lacks flexibility. A new challenge is ahead for the green and digital transition and these are also part of the activities to be brought into legislation and implementation.

2.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

The actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation are mainly related to access to upskilling pathways, validation and recognition (as adopted changes in legislation), coordination and partnership (at national policy level and also at regional level), outreach, guidance and support measures (part of labour office services), but still skills assessment is lagging behind. Bulgaria does not participate in international adults' skills surveys, such as PIRLS, OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

³⁷² According to the EU Labour force survey (LFS), in 2019, 10.8 % of adults (aged 25-64) in the EU-27 participated in education and training in the four weeks prior to the survey

³⁷³ To monitor and steer adults' participation in education and training, the Council adopted a benchmark in 2009, according to which, by 2020, at least 15 % of adults (aged 25-64) in the EU should have participated in education and training in the four weeks prior to the survey

³⁷⁴ Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by type, sex and age., Eurostat code trng_lfse_01, last update: 18/10/2021.

³⁷⁵ Adult Education Survey (AES)

or implemented by the World Bank Skills Towards Employability Programme (STEP) and no survey of this kind is carried out at the national level. Bulgaria is in the process of preparation of a Skills Strategy in cooperation with the OECD where such skills assessment could take place. Currently skills assessment is part of labour market services provided by PES but is mainly limited to the identification of the predisposition of each individual, estimation of their interests and talents and is used as a base for the better assessment of suitable qualification and orientation to a relevant potential job. Systems and methodologies for skills assessment are still missing in the local context. This is one of the recommendations provided in the World Bank Situation Analysis regarding lifelong learning policies³⁷⁶. The well-elaborated system for validation is set up but the number of people who use it after the pilot projects (financed by EU funds, 2013-2015) is small: in 2016, 105 people acquired a certificate for VET qualification through validation and in 2017 - 161 people. The latter represents only 1% of all VET certificates (15 035) issued in 2017³⁷⁷.

The Council Recommendation did not provoke significant changes as the main process for development of measures had already started in 2011-2012 with the preparation for the programming period 2014-2020 when the main interventions on the labour market have been fine-tuned and enhanced based on the lessons learnt from the projects and programmes identified during the previous programming period (2007-2013). At policy level the Council Recommendation is popular among small group of experts who are responsible for policy development (lifelong learning and labour market policies and measures) but representatives of many key units involved in the policy implementation and financing of the measures are not aware of the Recommendation.

The main actions taken through the reviewed initiatives can be summarized in four main directions:

1. Providing opportunities for employment in combination with training.

Actions from this category include different opportunities for employment for a certain time, during which time the representatives from the target groups can acquire some valuable real work experience and enhance their skills and qualifications. Examples for this are the procedures BG05M9OP001-1.003 "New workplace 2015", where unemployed and / or inactive people are hired for a period of up to 12 months and procedure BG05M9OP001-1.010 "Training and employment" which provided opportunity for subsidized employment and training.

2. Providing opportunities for training.

This group of actions consists of various types of training aimed at enhancing the qualification of the target groups. For example, under the procedure BG05M9OP001-1.003 "New workplace 2015" representatives of the target group that are already employed under the project can take part in vocational training for acquiring the first or second qualification degree and training in part of the profession for the first, second or third qualification degree. Another possibility for them is to participate in trainings in key competencies according to the European Qualifications Framework namely: Key Competence 2 "Communication in foreign languages", Key Competence 4 "Digital Competence". Procedures BG05M9OP001-1.010 "Training and employment" and BG05M9OP001-1.016 "Vouchers for employed persons" provided vouchers to the target groups for participation in trainings for foreign languages or digital competence.

³⁷⁶ World Bank 2021 [Bulgaria. Vocational Education and Lifelong Learning](http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pagelid=451), <http://sf.mon.bg/?go=page&pagelid=451>

³⁷⁷ Cedefop, Dzhengozova, M. (2019). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Bulgaria http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/european_inventory_validation_2018_Bulgaria.pdf

Personal vouchers for inclusion in training for acquiring the first degree of professional qualification or for part of a profession in the first qualification degree are also provided under the procedure BG05M9OP001-1.018 "Training of adults who have completed literacy courses". The activities in the project are related to organizing and conducting courses for literacy and courses for acquiring competencies from the junior high school stage, as well as by providing opportunities for obtaining professional qualification.

3. Development of individual plans and counselling

When talking about individual work with representatives of the target groups the procedure BG05M9OP001-1.018 "Training of adults who have completed literacy courses" provides several examples. One of the actions is development of an individual plan and profile of the unemployed and targeting the people to literacy courses intended for study in the lower secondary stage of primary education.

The procedure also provides the opportunity for updating the individual profile of persons who have successfully completed literacy courses or courses for learning content intended for study in classes of the lower secondary stage of primary education, in order to support the start of work and / or inclusion in vocational training.

Other activities include professional information and counselling and psychological support, labour fairs/labour exchanges, guidance and assistance for starting work and other activities according to individual needs.

4. Development of system for validation and recognition of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge, skills, and competences

The aim of the project BG051PO001-4.3.03-0001 "New opportunities for my future" under procedure BG051PO001-4.3.03 "Establishment of a system for identification and recognition of informally acquired knowledge, skills and competences" is to increase the opportunities for acquiring professional qualification for increasing the suitability for employment and social integration by creating a sustainable and flexible system for identification and recognition of informally acquired knowledge, skills and competencies. By participating in the initiative, the representatives of the target groups can obtain a document for informally acquired knowledge, skills and competencies. This in turn has multiple effects such as increasing the motivation of the workforce to maintain and improve skills, can facilitate labour mobility and improve the whole process of selection of staff.

In general, the actions taken after Council Recommendations are mainly to fine-tune the measures, to elaborate more tailor-made approach for each target group and subgroup depending on their specific needs and situation and also in the context of rapidly changing labour market needs and high demand of digital and transversal skills. In the context of shortage of labour force, upskilling has become an important part of skills formation and also important policy response to the employers' needs regarding usage of specialized technologies, software and equipment.

2.3. Effectiveness

Even before the adoption of the Council Recommendation, Bulgaria had introduced the full range of training opportunities, including apprenticeships, which were specifically aimed at people with low education level and without qualification. The Recommendation simply strengthened all the measures that Bulgaria had already provided. An innovation in the Council Recommendation for Bulgaria has been the approach in how to access these target groups and it is in this direction that the measures developed in Bulgaria have been

implemented with a focus on subgroups and improvement of labour market services toward them. The various stakeholders have been involved in the process, some of the activities have been aimed directly at the target groups (through vouchers), others have been implemented through employment offices, and others through employers. This has led to the increased involvement of different target groups and subgroups in appropriate forms of training and education as well as in their activation and outreach.

Priority target groups

The priority groups targeted by the interventions are unemployed, low-skilled, inactive adults. Based on the specifics of each intervention different key criteria are used for the identification of the specific target groups. For all projects key target groups are unemployed and inactive people. However, priority is given to unemployed persons with low level of education (under ISCED 3) (with primary and lower education, as well as without education); illiterate people; long-term unemployed and inactive people; unemployed or inactive people with disabilities; unemployed persons over 54 years of age; unemployed young people up to 29 years.

Priority economic sectors

The implementation of the labour market measures is not targeted at specific economic sectors but follows a broad approach defining the target groups of people that can be covered under different measures. Thus, all economic sectors and all enterprises are eligible to take part as long as they provide opportunities for training and employment for the priority target groups. The reviewed initiatives do not target specific priority economic sectors. The focus is put on reaching and engaging the above mentioned specific groups of the population.

Main barriers and success factors

Some of the barriers in reaching different priority target groups are related to the characteristics of these groups. The main barrier is the difficulties in reaching such people (especially the inactive ones) and their lack of motivation to be included in different activities. The low level or lack of education can also hinder the process of including representatives of the target groups in different trainings.

One of the barriers in front of the participation of the described target groups is the lack of more flexible opportunities for enrolment in different learning forms. This is connected to different factors such as time, money, family status, responsibilities for children, etc. The regular forms of education and training usually do not provide the opportunity for combining work and study and take a long period of time.

Moreover, there are no systematic efforts in providing information on what forms of training are offered to adults. Information and orientation activities are provided only by employment offices but still the information is not sufficient. The project cycle also has impact on offering and when the project is in preparation phase the offering is not available. This problem in recent years has been tackled by longer projects (3-4 years) which in fact have increased availability of offering but still between programming periods a gap remains.

The issue with the quality and methods of teaching used is also important, as adult learners are significantly different and need different approach, different teaching methods and techniques that are suitable for their age and characteristics, this includes both the learning content and the way it is presented.

Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic in the last 2 years should also be taken into account as due to it many group activities (incl. trainings and other services) were cancelled. This

situation requires a certain amount of flexibility and adaptation, which is not always possible for the presented target groups (for example participation in online training is not possible because of their low digital skills and lack of devices). This in turn, is another obstacle in front of the process of reaching and working with these groups. The other obstacle was the fact that in the legislation it was defined that the training for professional qualification should be conducted in the training institutions and employers³⁷⁸, meaning distance learning was not an option that could be covered by the EU funded projects.

One of the success factors identified during the interviews is the involvement of employers. The active participation and encouragement from some employers motivates their employees to take part in different trainings and enhance their qualification.

Another success factor refers to the position of mediators who work with Roma people. Due to their knowledge of the specifics of the group, due to more trust of the group towards them (usually they are part of the community), they have been successful in reaching the target groups.

Application of the three-step approach in designing upskilling pathways

Of the three steps approach, two steps are not fully implemented in Bulgaria. The skills assessment is included in labour market services provided by PES (employment offices) as informal process but is not developed fully as system and instruments, while validation and recognition of skills acquired exist as opportunities and mechanisms, but the interest of potential target groups and stakeholders (beyond the pilot project) is limited. The validation process is expensive and time-consuming and does not reduce the efforts compared to obtaining qualification with a training course. In fact, trainees prefer to attend course for full profession or part of profession instead of going through validation process. People who are interested in validation are mainly from a few regulated sectors of the economy and in fact with secondary or higher education (real estate brokers, assistant teacher in children's care, specialists in tourism sector).

From the three steps, providing the quality learning offers is the most developed in Bulgaria. The Recommendation itself gives impetus and shows that at European level and in other countries, the problem is mainly with this target group. It is the group with the most difficulties to find a job, the least chance of employment, it is even difficult for them to get involved in all forms of education. According to the experts the most suitable approach for the target groups is learning that takes place in the workplace, not in a classroom. For some subgroups apprenticeship is a convenient and appropriate form to learn by working with a mentor. These forms of offers are well developed in Bulgaria. Still improvement is needed regarding flexibility of offers and quality of learning and teaching (in both professional qualification and literacy courses).

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders

The formats for cooperation with relevant stakeholders have already existed before the development of the Council Recommendation. These formats are part of mechanisms and consultations processes for policy development as well as for defining the priorities for financing of the policy with national and European funds.

The National Council for the Promotion of Employment (NCEP) under the Minister of Labour and Social Policy is a permanent body for cooperation and consultation in the development of employment policy. The NCEP operates with an equal number of representatives of the state,

³⁷⁸ Art. 62, para. 1 of Employment Promotion Act and Art. 9, para. 1, items 1 and 2 of the Vocational Education and Training Act

the national representative organizations of employers and the national representative organizations of employees.

The NCEP discusses and gives opinions on the development and implementation of the employment policy, the training for acquiring professional qualifications of adults and the National Action Plan for Employment.

Another form of implementation of the partnership principle is the participation of all stakeholders in the thematic working groups for preparation of the ESF OP and in the monitoring committee of the programme. In this way they participate in defining the priorities of the programme, in defining the scope and eligibility of the target groups and activities of the operations and subsequently in discussing the results, annual reports and, where available, in discussing the evaluations.

At regional level the partnership approach is ensured through regional Employment Committees. They are defined as structures part of Regional Development Councils. The Employment Committees include representatives of the regional administration and the municipalities on the territory of the region, the territorial divisions of the Employment Agency, representatives of ministries and other state institutions, regional structures of the representative organizations of employers and representative organizations of employees, branch organizations, non-profit legal entities in the region, whose activity is related to employment and adult education, regional directorates of social assistance.

Provision of outreach and guidance services

In recent years the employment offices are trained and prepared to provide motivation and outreach measures that include events for raising awareness on the benefits of upskilling, making available information on existing guidance, support measures, upskilling opportunities, etc. Still the fine-tuning and improvement of the results of these activities is needed. According to labour office experts the psychological support is missing in the portfolio of the services (because of lack of expertise in the staff but also because such is not included in the package of services). Very often beside motivation of the unemployed additional support is needed for overcoming social exclusion and tackling their health and social problems which means more integrated approach and coordination between different institutions and public services. Improvement of this integrated approach is still needed.

In Bulgaria the process is also ensured by the provision of appropriate people to serve as a link between the target groups and the institutions. The target groups are predominantly either inactive, or long-term unemployed (majority of which of Roma origin). Thus special role in their activation and work with them play the mediators and case managers who are prepared how to work with these groups (see good practices below).

Monitoring and evaluation measures

There are no monitoring and evaluation activities carried out specifically as part of the implementation of the Council Recommendation. The main monitoring and evaluation activities are carried under the EU regulations regarding ESF programmes implementation. The available evaluations cover some of the aspects of the Council Recommendation but are not specifically aimed at the document and all elements of its approach.

The monitoring indicators include the number of representatives of the target groups that have been included in the activities, whereas the indicators for results include the number of participants who have gained qualification, started work/have a job, etc. when leaving the

operation. Additional breakdown of indicators by age and/or education level is part of the monitoring measures.

Monitoring and evaluation activities include also the conducted evaluations of the measures under HRD OP. The first one is the Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and the impact of measures to support the unemployed and inactive persons under priority axis 1 of OP HRD 2014 -2020. The target groups of the evaluation are unemployed and inactive persons over the age of 29. The second evaluation is the Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and the impact of measures to support employees under Priority axis 1 of the OP HRD 2014 – 2020 with target groups employed persons. The net impact assessment for 2017 is available for national programmes.

Examples of good practises

An example of good practices in working with these target groups are Roma mediators. This good practice of Bulgaria has been shared with other countries and with the European Commission. Educated people have been selected and have been prepared to be employment intermediaries, i.e. to work with the group of people with Roma origin, due to their knowledge of the characteristics of the group, due to more trust of the group to them, which gave a good effect on reaching their group. Roma mediators have been involved in activation, motivation and outreach measures and helped generally in the communication and work with the target groups.

Another good example is the figure of case manager. The benefits of case managers for job seekers are significant. They help the long-term unemployed and people with disabilities who need additional, individualized help when looking for a job. They provide support such as employment consultations and needs assessments. They help people to build self-confidence and to motivate themselves/ strengthen their motivation; to develop their strengths, skills and abilities; they advise unemployed on access to job search resources and employment support services; for access to financial support (where eligible) to support participation in one or another programme; to raise its awareness and support its navigation in administrative matters (i.e. filling in applications, identifying funding and training opportunities and confirming eligibility for support).

2.4. Efficiency

EU funding plays an important role in creating adult learning opportunities and helped to ensure the financing of adult education and training. There are four sources of funding for adult education and training in Bulgaria: the state budget, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), employers, and the learners themselves. In addition, a number of training programmes targeted to vulnerable groups are financed with international cooperation funds.

Public investment in LLL-related interventions consists of European funds, mainly of ESIF, and national funds. Money allocated for LLL-related interventions has increased from BGN 1 049,3 million in the 2007–2013 programming period to BGN 1 272.3 million in the 2014–2020 period³⁷⁹. The increase is proportional for these two main sources of funding and in both periods the share of European funding remains around three quarters of total disposable amount. The increase in ESIF in the second programming period reflects increased funds for adult literacy.

³⁷⁹ World Bank Group, *Vocational Education and Lifelong Learning in Bulgaria: Situation Analysis and Policy Direction Recommendations*

European funds have accounted for a significant portion of the funds allocated for LLL-related interventions in Bulgaria for the past 13 years. Moreover, their weight has increased in the 2014-2020 programming period when compared to the previous one. Complementarities with national funds are crucial for the measures to cover a larger share of the target groups defined in ESIF-funded projects and to give financing for small projects related to specific needs. National financing from National Employment Plans is around 12% of total funds available for training of adults. This demonstrates the importance of EU financing but also the importance of EU coordination on policies for adults' education.

The analysis of the efficiency criterion justifies the evaluation of the measures as efficient, based on the chosen approach for their implementation. Compared to similar interventions, the cost per participant seems reasonable and justifiable. It also reflects the market prices for training and education.

The combination of training and employment does not always allow calculating the cost per participant for each activity/measure but it is clear that the cost is comparable to other similar measures (from the previous programming period or other programmes). The reason for that is the fact that there are certain limits which are covered by the programme and these limits are the same for all measures. There is additional financing from employers or from participants that cannot be easily estimated. This is a disadvantage of the monitoring system of OP HRD as it does not allow a good estimation of efficiency and also cannot analyse the complementarity of private financing to the EU and national funds.

In some projects/schemes the administrative cost (including communication and publicity activities) exceeds 30%. This is mainly because the model of implementation is through 751 small projects. Nevertheless, optimisation of administrative costs needs to be improved in the future.

2.5. Relevance

The measures and approach proposed in the Recommendation are fully relevant to local specifics and the local needs. They are appropriate for the socio-economic context and the specific needs of the target groups. Although many of the activities in Bulgaria have started before the Council Recommendation, in practice it provides a systematic, consistent, structured and comprehensive approach, which outlines the framework for action and implementation of different measures.

Several recent studies indicate that labour and skills shortages are a central concern for firms in Bulgaria³⁸⁰. A 2018 Eurostat firm survey³⁸¹ shows that 45 percent of Bulgarian businesses believe that labour shortages limit their production, and the 2019 World Bank Enterprise Survey of Bulgaria finds that inadequately trained workforce is one of the largest business environment constraints in the country, with 22 percent of responding firms reporting challenges finding skilled workers, higher than the Europe and Central Asia average of 13 percent³⁸². A study by the Bulgarian MLSP, conducted in early 2020³⁸³, indicates that more than half of employers' experience difficulties in finding staff. They declared that they have difficulties in finding staff who have the necessary skills and qualifications when they seek to cover vacancies either always (27.3 percent) or half of the times (22.7 percent).

³⁸⁰World Bank. 2020. *Bulgaria Country Needs and STI Policy Mix Assessment*. Decisions Review Draft, July.

³⁸¹World Bank, 2020, *ibid*.

³⁸²World Bank, 2020, *ibid*.

³⁸³MLSP (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy) 2020. *Study on the Possibilities for Increasing the Income from Work and Promoting the Employment of the Long-term Unemployed and Inactive Persons - survey provided by Global Metrics Ltd., March 2020*.

The Council Recommendation objectives and measures fully correspond to the skills shortages described above and to the needs of the low-skilled workers who are most vulnerable on the labour market. At the same time the other missing elements of the approach: skills assessment is mainly related to the specifics of the labour market and employers (predominantly SMEs (99.8%)) which still cannot fully prioritise the skills assessment in reality where skills shortage is main concern. It is also very resources demanding and that is why it is not included in the priorities of OP HRD programme for the period 2014-2020. This measure of the Council Recommendation is the most unpopular among policy makers and needs more capacity building to be fully understood and policymakers to be ready to start its introduction and implementation in Bulgaria.

Skills assessment is very relevant dimension for Bulgaria. This is one of the most important priority areas, which is not sufficiently developed. There is also a need for digital distance learning. The validation process also faces challenges. It has started on a project basis, there has been great interest during the project, good results have been reported, but after the project has been completed, the validation process has stopped. Here again, there is a room for work to make validation attractive to the various stakeholders.

The priority target groups defined in the Council Recommendation are relevant to the needs of the target groups and economic sectors in Bulgaria. The problem with inactive people is getting deeper. Central to these people is the motivation and attractiveness of what is offered to them as a solution and as an opportunity. Therefore, the focus in Bulgaria is on the dual form of education on removing restrictions on enrolment in vocational courses for people with low education (in terms of enrolment requirements). With regard to the elderly, they are a very important target group, especially those who are inactive, because the population is declining and the willingness of the elderly to participate in the labour market must increase, as there are regions where there is a shortage of labour force in various economic sectors. Inactive adults are an important resource for the labour market. They need to be motivated and reoriented, and activated for employment through various measures, as in the medium term employers will experience acute labour shortages with a variety of profiles.

The Recommendation proposes a flexible approach that Member States can take in the national context. The dynamics in the needs of the target groups is different and the formation of the target groups is also dynamic. A priority step for Bulgaria is to coordinate the activities of stakeholders in the adult learning sector. These activities have started and for Bulgaria this can be defined as the most successful step.

Regarding validation and recognition of previous leaning and skills acquired, the low interest of employees is related to the timely and costly procedures. There is a lack of interest among employers regarding certification formal qualification, who rather put stress on skills proven in work environment.

2.6. Coherence

In the programming period 2014-2020, the key elements of the Council Recommendation were aligned with the key priorities of national strategic framework (Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014-2020, Updated employment strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2013-2020 and National Strategy for Promoting and Raising Literacy (2014-2020). The key element of these strategies is development of skill for labour market and raising human capital.

The existing strategic framework is fully aligned with the Council Recommendation. In the framework adopted for the next programming period, the basic, identified needs and those defined in the Council Recommendation are included in both the Bulgarian National Education Strategic Framework 2021-2026 (objective 8.1. Expanding opportunities for lifelong learning

and objective 8.2. Providing conditions to promote lifelong learning) and the Employment Strategy (2021-2031) as well as in the priority 1 of National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 (Education and skills, sub-priority 1.4 Lifelong learning). The skills formation element is well developed as priority in Programme for Human Resources Development 2021-2027.

Coherence with policies at the regional level is also good, in practice in recent years, both with the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of developing the strategic framework and good integration with European policies, the strategic framework of Bulgaria is improving and the quality of the process of policy making is rising.

The example of these are regional councils for employment³⁸⁴ and regional councils for lifelong learning³⁸⁵ which include representatives of all stakeholders.

Good complementarity is observed also with national programmes financed under National Employment Plan (NEP). Some examples of national programmes under NEP are: Beautiful Bulgaria Project, targeted at unemployed persons registered in the labour offices and providing training and employment, national programme "Activation of Inactive People", targeted at inactive and discouraged persons. The goal of the programme is to support the transition from unemployment to work and retirement, training, and employment programme for the long-term unemployed. Other examples of programmes that occur in response to the needs of the digital and green society and changes after the COVID-19 pandemic are: the project "Alternative for You", aimed at people unemployed for more than 6 months, the project "Speeds", aimed at training to develop digital competencies, learning skills, public and civic competencies and entrepreneurship, project "New Skills and Competencies - for a Green and Ecological Bulgaria", aimed at people unemployed for more than six months in order to quickly transition from unemployment to employment in new and restructured jobs, "Adaptation to the New Conditions" Project – providing training of learning to learn skills, digital competences and professional qualification.

2.7. EU added value

The added value of the Council Recommendation is in coordinating policies for offering upskilling pathways to low-skilled / unqualified adults in the Member States. As part of this process, Member States learn more about the challenges they face, but also about the similarities in the needs of the target groups, the difficulties institutions face in reaching them, and the exchange of good practices and approaches. The systematic approach of the Council Recommendation and the outlined three step approach help Member States to further develop their policies and services and to ensure that all necessary measures and operations are in place in the country. In this manner, each country sees its own weaknesses or unaddressed needs, as well as the missing approaches and interventions in national legislation or in employment services that could be further developed. The work of the national coordinators in the implementation of the "European Adult Learning Programme" has provided real results in terms of joint efforts for the development of the sector, but this process is at a very early stage. These joint efforts are still focused on policymaking at the national level, but as result of the work of many members, especially regional coordinators and contacts with responsible policy makers, the solid investment at regional level is prepared, which is an outcome of the work of this common platform called the Association for Adult Learning in Bulgaria. In this way the coordination of policy at EU level goes down to local level, raising capacity, improving the understanding of approaches and measures, sharing good practices and the implementation provides concrete results for the target groups.

³⁸⁴ Example of regional employment council is presented in the link: <https://bit.ly/3uT8tuN>

³⁸⁵ <https://bit.ly/3KY9ua8> and <https://bit.ly/3ruNrAl>

2.8. Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE)

Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of measures to support unemployed and inactive persons under Priority Axis 1 of the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020³⁸⁶ shows that, as a whole, the targeted measures to unemployed persons lead to improving their situation on the labour market and increase the probability for their inclusion in employment. The highest efficiency has been achieved for people with low education, those with disabilities, as well as for the unemployed over 54 years.

The effect from participation in the measures is high for all considered age groups of unemployed. The effect from participation in the evaluated measures at the unemployed people up to 29 years is measured by 21 percentage points higher probability to be employed 6 months after participation in measures compared to the unemployed at the same age that did not participate in such measures. With the unemployed persons of age between 30 and 54 years this effect shows 23 percentage points higher probability of employment 6 months after participation in measures against the same age group that did not take part in such measures. With the unemployed persons of age over 54 years relative higher effect from participation in measures is observed and the probability to be employed 6 months after participation in the measures is 30 percentage points higher than this probability for the unemployed over 54 years that did not participate in the measures under OP HRD 2014-2020 or other similar measures. The effect of the evaluated measures for long time unemployed people is also relatively high and the probability of employment 6 months after termination of participation in measures exceeds with 25 percentage points the probability of employment of long time unemployed people who did not participate in the measures. This is evidence about the positive influence on participants' labour activity and habits. This also gives support for expanding the possible types of activities that can be performed for inclusion of these target groups. In general, the effect from the measures is especially significant for the most vulnerable groups unemployed - people with low education and those with disabilities.

The probability unemployed people with low education to be employed 6 months after the participation in the measures is 37 percentage points higher than the likelihood of employment for people from the same group who were not included in the measures. The biggest effect from evaluated measures is reported for the group of the unemployed persons with disabilities. For them the probability of employment 6 months after termination of participation is higher by 57 percentage points compare to the probability for the unemployed persons with disabilities who were not included in the evaluated measures.

There is no statistically significant difference between the participation of inactive persons in the considered measures and their realization on the labour market.

Table A4_134 Net effect

Evaluation of the effects on employment for different categories target groups, 6 months after leaving the measures Target group	Net effect
Unemployed by age up to 29 years	0.214 **
Unemployed between the ages of 30 and 54	0.230 ***
Unemployed by age over 54 years	0.304 ***

³⁸⁶ MLSP, *Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of measures to support unemployed and inactive persons under Priority Axis 1 of the Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2014-2020 Final report* <https://esf.bg/otsenka/>

For a long time unemployed	0.256 ***
Unemployed with low education	0.370 ***
Unemployed with disabilities	0.570 ***
Inactive people	0.0234

Indications of levels of significance: *** for 0.001, ** for 0.01, * for 0.05 and '0' for 0.1.

The measures lead to increase in the employment of the unemployed persons and this effect is highest for the unemployed people over 54, those with low education and unemployed persons with disabilities. There is no statistically significant effect from the measures on labour market integration for the inactive people.

Table A4_235 Participants in employment in time

Persons in employment according to type activities in which are involved, relative share Type activity	At going out from the measure	After 6 months	After 12 months
Employment without training	71.9%	83.8%	78.9%
Employment and training	60.0%	82.4%	79.2%

Table A4_336 Unemployed and inactive persons in employment who _ are participated in training measures

Unemployed and inactive persons in employment who _ are participated in training measures , relative _ share Type group	At going out from the measure	After 6 months	After 12 months
Unemployed	48.7%	61.1%	59.4%
Inactive	47.5%	56.7%	52.5%

2.9. Overall assessment

The Council Recommendation is an important tool for policy coordination that supports EU Member States in their efforts to provide relevant services for upskilling and reskilling. It gives direction and specifics in the approach that should be implemented in the work with the target groups and helps national authorities to fine-tune their policies, measures and services. It gives specific focus to the national measures for upskilling and reskilling in Bulgaria included in the OP HRD, National Employment Action Plans and the strategic documents. It supports policymaking process bringing and stimulating exchange of good practices and also helping national authorities in the Member states to better identify the specific needs and to provide relevant tools and measures for support of the target groups.

The measures and approach proposed in the recommendation are fully relevant to local specifics and the local needs. They are appropriate for the socio-economic context and the specific needs of the target groups. Although many of the activities in Bulgaria started before the Council Recommendation, in practice the Recommendation provides a systematic, consistent, structured and comprehensive approach, which outlines the framework for action and implementation of different measures.

The Council Recommendation was aligned with the key priorities of national strategic framework for both programming periods (2014-2020 and 2021-2027). The skills formation element is well defined as a priority emphasizing that skills mismatch and skills shortage are main concerns in the country as they slow down the economic growth being an obstacle for many sectors.

The Council Recommendation did not provoke significant changes in the measures as the main process for their development had already started with the preparation of programming period 2014-2020 based on the lessons learnt from previous programming period (2007-2013). The Council Recommendations is popular among small group of experts who are directly involved in the policy making and development. The fact that broad expert community is not aware of it is a disadvantage in the planning and implementation process.

The actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation have been mainly related to access to upskilling pathways, validation and recognition, coordination and partnership, outreach, guidance, and support measures. However, skills assessment remains still weak, almost not present. The well elaborated system for validation has been set up but the number of people who have used it after the pilot projects (financed by EU funds) has remained small.

The full range of training opportunities, including apprenticeships, which were specifically aimed at people with low education level and without qualification were introduced in Bulgaria before the adoption of the Council Recommendation. The Recommendation simply strengthened and gave more focus on all the measures that Bulgaria had already developed. An innovation in the Council Recommendation for Bulgaria is the outreach and motivation approach and such measures have been more actively implemented since 2016.

The employment offices are trained and prepared to provide motivation and outreach measures that include events for raising awareness on the benefits of upskilling, making available information on existing guidance, support measures, upskilling opportunities, etc. The fine-tuning of the work and methods and improvement of the results of these activities is still needed. The mediators and case managers are successful model for Bulgaria and need further support (investment in human resources and financing).

The analysis of the efficiency criterion justifies the evaluation of the measures as efficient, based on the chosen approach for their implementation. In comparison to similar interventions, the cost per participant seems reasonable and justifiable. It also reflects the market prices for training and education. Counterfactual impact assessments show proven added value of the measures and positive effects for the target groups.

The implementation of the Council Recommendation in Bulgaria should continue with enhancement of the services of labour offices for better support of the target groups, increase in flexibility of offers and development of skills assessment system in the country. There is a need to improve the efficiency and functionality of the system for validation and recognition of prior knowledge. In this regard, additional incentives for the validation and analysis of the barriers in front of the target groups for validation of skills and competences will help to accelerate the application of the mechanism.

2.10. ANNEX I: Bibliography

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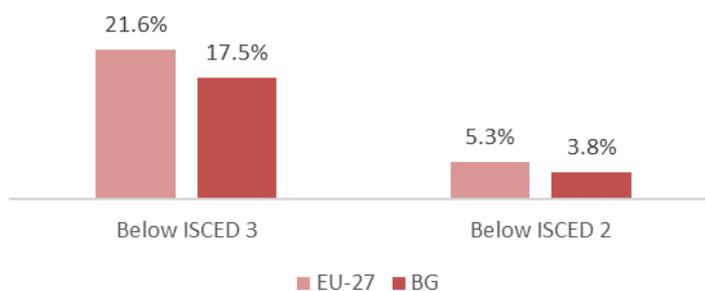
2.11. ANNEX II: List of interviewed stakeholders

- Monitoring, Coordination and Implementation Department, Directorate General for European Funds and International Projects (for project BG05M9OP001- 1.016 "Employee Vouchers")
- Department of Monitoring, Coordination and Implementation, Directorate General for European Funds and International Projects (for project BG05M9OP001-1.010 "Training and Employment")
- Department of Monitoring, Coordination and Implementation, Directorate General "European Funds and International Projects" (for project BG05M9OP001- 1.018 "Training of adults who have completed literacy courses")
- Verification Department (for project BG05M9OP001-1.003 "New workplace")
- Verification Department (for project BG05M9OP001-1.003 "New workplace")
- Programming and Negotiation Department (for project BG05M9OP001-1.003 "New workplace")
- Directorate "Content of preschool and school education", project coordinator (for project BG05M2OP001-3.004 -0001 "New chance for success")

2.12. ANNEX III Relevant data

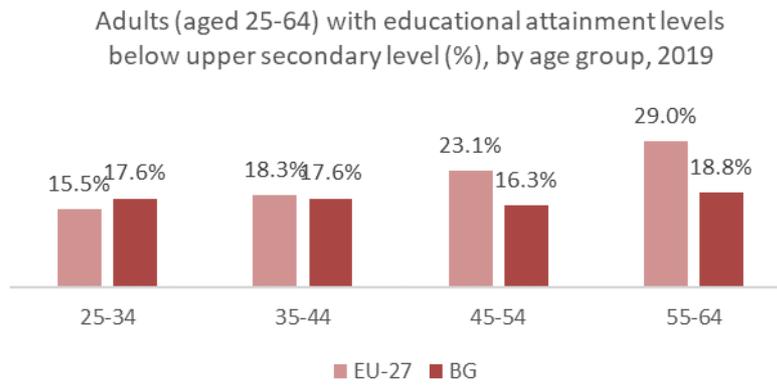
Figure A4_8 Educational attainment

Adults (aged 25-64) with educational attainment levels below upper and lower secondary levels (%), 2019



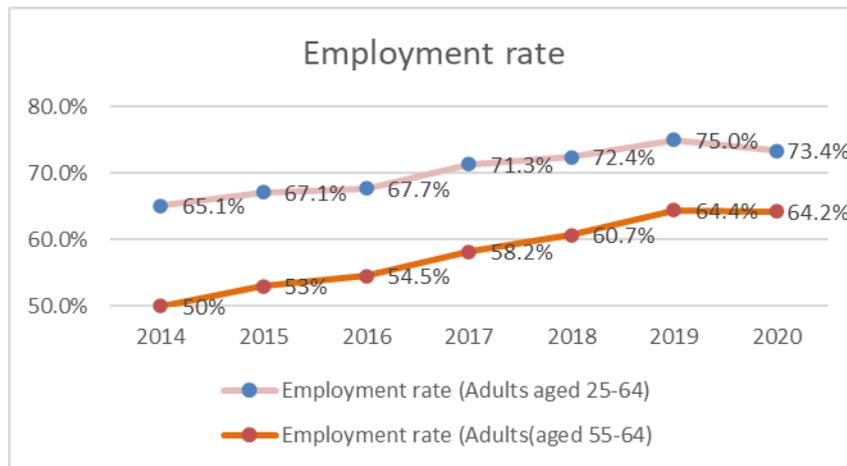
Source: *Adult education and training in Europe report*, data extracted by Eurostat

Figure A4_9 Educational attainment levels below upper secondary level (%), by age group



Source: Adult education and training in Europe report, data extracted by Eurostat

Figure A4_10 Employment rate



Source: MLSP (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy)

Table A4_437 Cost per participants for different activities under the implemented procedures

Procedure	Cost for the specific activity	Result	Total actual amounts paid	Cost per person
BG05M9OP001-1.010 TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT	1 525 264,56 BGN	Number of conducted trainings for professional qualification and / or key competence 4 "Digital competence" and key competence 2 "Communication in foreign languages": 367 with 1545 trained participants from the target groups	212 800 000.00 BGN	985 BGN
	181 089 743,81 BGN	19 994 unemployed included in subsidized employment, of which 9654 - people with disabilities		9057 BGN
BG05M9OP001-1.016 Vouchers for employees	18 944 223,75 BGN	Number of conducted trainings for professional qualification and / or key competence 4 "Digital competence" and key competence 2 "Communication in foreign languages": 2911 with 19 671 trained participants from the target groups	26 459 718.72 BGN	963 BGN
BG05M9OP001-1.018 "Education of adults, who passed literacy courses"	655 245,00 BGN	Number of trainings conducted: 50 with 646 trained participants from the target groups	837 899.00 BGN	1014 BGN
BG05M9OP001-1.003 „New workplace 2015“		Number of persons covered by the procedure - 12 330 – unemployed and inactive participants. Number of people participated in trainings for professional qualification – 2509. The cost for the specific activity includes costs for: trainings for acquiring professional degree (2 185 823,48 BGN), trainings in key competences (985 400,14 BGN) and remuneration costs for each person employed by an employer (67 065 453,38 BGN)	108 853 138,1 BGN	5 696 BGN total per participant 871 BGN for professional training per participant that obtained qualification 5 439 BGN per participant in subsidized employment There is no data for number of participants

Procedure	Cost for the specific activity	Result	Total actual amounts paid	Cost per person
				that took part in trainings in key competences
BG05M2OP001-3.004 "New chance for success"	14 015 779,67 BGN	Number of people covered by the procedure: 8467 people over 16 years of age, of which 79.82% completed their training successfully	11 981 366,40 BGN	1655 BGN

Results per procedure

Procedure BG05M9OP001-1.016 Vouchers for employees

Beneficiary National Employment Agency

Total Project cost - 30 000 000.00 BGN, Total actual amounts paid 26 459 718.72 BGN³⁸⁷

Indicator	Target amount	Reached amount
1. Employed participants above 54 gaining a qualification upon leaving	8 520.00	56.00
2. Employed participants including self-employed in priority sectors of the economy	54 600.00	22 671.00
3. Employed participants with secondary or lower level of education (below ISCED 4) gaining a qualification upon leaving	48 480.00	19 615.00
4. Employed, including self-employed above 54	9 600.00	59.00

Source - <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

The results in the “Final report on the evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of measures to support employed persons under Priority Axis 1 of the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014-2020”³⁸⁸ shows that despite the good implementation of the measure “Vouchers for employees” at the end of 2018, its implementation at the end of 2021 (the end of the period of action of the measure) is far from the set indicators. The performance and result indicators for those with secondary and lower education are met only at about 40-42%. There are mainly two reasons for the delay in achieving the indicators:

- The spread of COVID-19 from the beginning of 2020, which in fact hindered the on-site implementation of educational courses, which is the main form of their implementation under this measure;
- The increase in the co-financing of the trainings by the participants sharply reduced their interest in the measure and there is a significant decrease in the demand for vouchers after the change.

Procedure BG05M9OP001-1.010 Training and employment

Beneficiary National Employment Agency

Funding ESF - Human Resources Development

³⁸⁷ Data extracted from <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

³⁸⁸ MLSP, *Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of measures to support employed persons under Priority Axis 1 of the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2014-2020 Final report*
<https://esf.bg/otsenka/>

Total Project cost 224 000 000.00 BGN, Total actual amounts paid 212 800 000.00 BGN³⁸⁹

(procedure is still ongoing)

Indicator	Target amount	Reached amount
1. Unemployed and inactive participants who have a job when leaving the operation	5 550.00	2 161.00
2. Inactive and unemployed persons over 29 years of age	7 400.00	18 028.00
3. Unemployed and inactive participants who gain qualifications when leaving the operation	4 440.00	1 302.00
4. Unemployed and inactive participants with permanent disabilities who have a job when leaving the operation	2 601.00	317.00
5. Inactive and unemployed persons with permanent disabilities over 29 years of age	8 670.00	9 351.00
6. Unemployed and inactive participants with permanent disabilities who, upon leaving the operation, acquire a qualification	2 160.00	291.00

Source - <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

Procedure BG05M9OP001-1.018 "Education of adults, who passed literacy courses"

Beneficiary National Employment Agency

Funding ESF ==> Human Resources Development

Total Project cost 1 000 000.00 BGN, total actual amounts paid 837 899.00 BGN³⁹⁰

Indicator	Base Value	Reached amount
1. Unemployed participants with a low level of education (under - ISCED 3)	500.00	646.00
2. Unemployed participants with a low level of education (under - ISCED 3) who acquire a qualification when leaving the operation	350.00	606.00

Source - <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

³⁸⁹ Data extracted from <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

³⁹⁰ Data extracted from <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

As stated in the performance analysis report³⁹¹ this procedure has a relatively high contribution to two of the programme-specific outcome indicators - "Participants aged 30 to 54 inclusive, with low education (below ISCED 3), who qualified on leaving the operation" and "Unemployed" participants under the age of 29 inclusive, with a basic or lower educational degree, who receive a qualification upon leaving the operation".

Procedure BG05M9OP001-1.003 "New workplace 2015"

Beneficiaries - small, medium and large enterprises

Total count of contracts (grants)	751
Total amount of grant allocated	123 629 984.36 BGN
Total amount spent	125 796 616.38 BGN
Total count of beneficiaries	751

Source - <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

The analysis of the efficiency for the above procedures³⁹² is presented in a report with the contracting authority MLSP³⁹³. It justifies the evaluation of the measures as efficient, based on the chosen approach for their implementation, despite the numerous changes in the indicators, both result indicators and the budget for some operations. On the one hand, this is a proof of the flexibility in response to the changing environment in which the operations take place. On the other hand, however, this is also an indication of lack of precise preliminary analysis and exploration of the resources that would be optimal and necessary to achieve the objectives of operations.

Procedure BG05M2OP001-3.004 "Adult literacy - Phase 1"

Beneficiary Ministry of Education and Science

Funding ESF ==> Science and Education for Smart Growth

Total Project cost 19 070 732.00 BGN, total actual amounts paid 11 981 366.40 BGN³⁹⁴

Indicator	Measure Unit	Target amount	Reached amount
1. Persons over 16 (including Roma) involved in literacy courses or courses for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education	count	10 000.00	10 723.00
2. Share of persons (including Roma), who have received certificates for successfully completed literacy courses or courses	%	80.00	73.47

³⁹¹ MLSP, *Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of measures that support unemployed and inactive persons under Priority Axis 1 of Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2014 – 2020, Final Report*
<https://esf.bg/otsenka/>

³⁹² BG05M9OP001-1.010; BG05M9OP001-1.018; BG05M9OP001-1.003

³⁹³ MLSP, *Evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of measures that support unemployed and inactive persons under Priority Axis 1 of Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2014 – 2020, Final Report*
<https://esf.bg/otsenka/>

³⁹⁴ Data extracted from <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

for mastering the learning content intended for the lower secondary stage of basic education			
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Source - <https://umis2020.government.bg/>

Regarding validation procedures, the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) has developed procedures under which any Vocational Training Centre (VTC), which has an active license and has provided training in the professions and specialties listed in it, could propose and conduct procedures for validation on them. Validation is possible both for the recognition of a qualification in part of a profession and for a degree of professional qualification.

The main benefits associated with the implementation of the Council Recommendation in the considered procedures are the positive changes mainly related to the provision of employment (for unemployed youth and inactive persons at the beginning of the period during which the measures were implemented), to supporting the improvement of qualifications and skills (for the unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the unemployed with low education and the unemployed with disabilities), as well as to preserving work habits (for the long-term unemployed, the unemployed with low and without education, as well as for the unemployed over the age of 54).

3. Case study Germany

3.1. National operating context

Germany's national context for the implementation of the CR recommendation is characterized by an advanced and at the same time very complex, decentralized adult education system. Most adult education programmes and initiatives in this system are delivered through the 16 federal states ("Länder") as well as the social partners (and their respective associations on the national, regional and sectoral level), as the system is highly decentralized. This means that the availability of programmes vary a lot across the 16 States with currently no fully comprehensive overview study available (*Käpplinger & Reuter, 2020*). Furthermore, the national level plays a key role in delivering active labour market policy through the public employment service and its regional branches.

Concerning outcomes, Germany had a moderately high proportion of low qualified younger adults (25-34) ([A] 13.0 %) in 2016. The potential for upskilling among the 25-64-year olds beyond the low qualified was 26.4 %, which is considered as substantial by comparison.³⁹⁵ Participation of the low qualified in Lifelong Learning (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was rather low (IV: 3.7%) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment reached only a moderately high level (8.5 %), strongly below the LLL-benchmark (15 %). Recent migrants, including refugee, were a particularly important target group for upskilling (proportion of foreign born 25-29 year-olds more than 15%). According to AES 2016, by comparison, lifelong guidance (7.0 %) and skill assessment (2.8 %) were not strongly developed with figures for the two areas slightly below the EU-27 average.

One main challenge in Germany's national context connected to upskilling pathways is that its strong initial vocational education system has remained mainly youth-centred, which has also been particularly challenging in the face of the increase of refugees in the mid-2010s (*Bergseng, Degler, & Lüthi, 2019; Maier et al., 2021*). At the national level there are a number of smaller initiatives in general education that are coordinated through the states, including Evening classes leading to a school leaving certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss; ISECD2*), Evening classes leading to the acquisition of the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss*, and the Evening classes for the acquisition of a higher education entrance qualification. However, VET mainly caters for young (16 and older) people on the one hand, and comparatively high-skilled young adults entering after completing academic upper secondary education and HE entrance qualifications (*Abitur*) (typically achieved by 18/19 – 20). Beyond incentivising employers to consider adults as apprentices, in Germany, alternative access routes for adults to qualifications awarded by the apprenticeship system are scarce. Furthermore, in the face of the increase of refugees in the last decade, frameworks for validation of prior non-formal and informal learning were established³⁹⁶, however, with limited systemic impact.

However, Active Labour Market Policy played an increasingly relevant role in providing upskilling opportunities for the unemployed and, by dedicated programmes, the employed also (see DE#3 for the most prominent framework relevant for upskilling of the employed), bringing more adults (aged 25 to 35) into regular apprenticeships. For vocational qualifications, a project framework aiming at extending the involvement of the relevant stakeholders in validation were piloted (see DE#4 for the continuation of the pilot).

³⁹⁵ For details and breakdowns according to socio-economic groups see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/germany_country_factsheet.pdf

³⁹⁶ https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2016/2016_validate_DE.pdf

3.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

By 2016, various policies supporting upskilling were in place, which were regarded as broadly fulfilling the goals of the recommendation. The COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION has been taken as one reference point for sustaining and refining policies. Relevant post-2016 policies reflected national priorities, however, coincided partly with the goals the upskilling pathways. Key areas of renewed or novel policy commitment include the strengthening of Adult Basic Education, the increase of funding/co-funding for CVET for the low qualified, and the further development of validation of non-formal and non-formal learning.

Initiatives in line with the goals of the UP Recommendation are not only numerous in Germany and have roots long before 2016 but are also closely interwoven with many other areas of education and labour market policy. For example, a range of demand-side funding schemes contributing to individual training costs existed, both on national and federal level, including some generous ones, however targeted at the acquisition of VET qualification on higher levels (ISECD11 5-6). Provision for short paid training leave (typically 5 days per year) to be paid by the employers existed in most states, regulated by regional laws, but uptake were typically very low (1-3% of the entitled). (Heidemann, 2021). In recent years, decisive impulses at the national level have come from the process of the National Skills Strategy and related legislative projects, which has been launched in 2019, and overlap with the goals of the upskilling pathways recommendation (DE-I-4). While the levels Skills Assessment and Validation can be considered partly implemented with important milestones reached under complex circumstances (federal system, dual VET system), the system of provision has made even more progress.

Germany launched various programmes tackling the assessment and tailored provision aspects of the council recommendation. First, assessment and tailored provision as well as the enabling framework (concerning stakeholder coordination) were tackled in the field of Adult Basic Education and with the consequent goal enhance basic skills for low-qualified adults. Germany introduced a “Joint National Strategy for Literacy and Adult Basic skills” already in 2012, guiding policymaking until 2016. Shortly before the upskilling pathways recommendation, this strategy was subsequently renewed with the “General agreement on the national decade for literacy and basic education” (Alphadecade, DE#1), a strategic framework ranging from 2016-2026. The aim is to reduce functional illiteracy and raise the level of basic skills in Germany, including subnational initiatives attracting participants for literacy and basic education programmes and strengthen supply structures, develop teacher training and qualifications for teaching staff, and promote common learning opportunities for first and second language learners. In 2020 1155 of such Alphadecade projects were funded (*Koordinierungsstelle der AlphaDekade, 2022*).

Similarly, also tackling “assessment” and “tailored provision” as well as the “enabling framework”, the *Bildungsprämie* programme (DE#2) was launched in 2008 and enables vulnerable groups to receive state funding to cover part of their education and training costs. It is a demand-side co-funding scheme. Skills assessment is part of the application process, with applicants self-assessing their capacity and explaining need / requirement for a further educational course. A consultation (free of charge) is also available for applicants to discuss options with an advisor. Individuals are able to select which course, module is suitable for them. This must be part of a pre-approved list and fulfil a number of criteria but in principle is flexible, can be modularised and is tailored towards an individual. The initiative is not focussed on validation or accreditation, participants must take part in a selected course.

In addition, the *Zukunftsstarter* (DE#3) programme tackles mostly the tailored provision as well as the enabling framework aspects. It is run by the Employment Agencies and the Jobcenter and supports young adults aged 25 to 35 in completing a vocational qualification. Part-time or full-time qualifications leading to a recognised professional qualification are

supported. Funding is provided for measures to acquire basic competences. The federal employment agency will cover the costs of the course, examination, travel as well as accommodation, childcare and support for retraining, such as tutoring.

The *Qualifizierungschancengesetz* (Qualifications Opportunities Act DE#5) came into force on January 1 2019 as part of the Federal Government's "Qualification Offensive" and tackles mostly the enabling framework (co-funding and guidance). The state funding for further training is being expanded and the previous target group is being expanded. With this measure, the Federal Government would like to specifically strengthen the further training of those already employed in order to make them fit for the new demands on the labour market. It provides a co-funding incentive to employers for further education of employees. Wage replacement (at least partially) is also provided.

For the period up to 2016, initiatives relevant to the upskilling pathways recommendation mostly tackled the steps of assessment and tailored provision. However, after 2016, also the validation aspect is increasingly reflected in German policymaking. Tackling the overall weak development of validation of prior learning in the German VET sector (Ball, 2018; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2015), the pilot-project *Valikom* (2015-2018) and its successor project *Valikom-Transfer* (2018-2021) aims to support low-skilled adults in the validation of non-formal and informal learning and make their learning outcomes visible (DE#4). While there exists a legal entitlement for the validation of foreign formal qualifications since 2012 – although implementation practice is often contested (Sommer, 2015)– no similar law previously existed for skills acquired via non-formal learning. It was first developed to improve the assessment and recognition of professional and vocational education and training qualifications of foreign workers. There is an initial self-assessment which is then validated through an observed exercise by a certified representative of the relevant Chamber who can issue a partial or full qualification certificate to the applicant. In order not to create a parallel system to the national examination system, a professional qualification is not awarded after the end of the validation procedure as after a final examination, but a judgement is made on the degree of comparability of the professional competences assessed with the reference qualification. The validation costs are not borne by the applicant.

In sum, the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION has been taken as one reference point for sustaining and refining policies. The period after the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION has seen a high number of policy activities, with major previous policies renewed and expanded (see e.g. [DE#1], shortly predating the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION as the continuation of a major attempt to build up a strong Basic Literacy provision). A reform of the laws governing the Public Employment Service provided the opportunity to agree on a new strategy for further education (*Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie - 2019*³⁹⁷) with the main goal of upskilling low qualified (including recent refugees) while minimising the gap in provision of skilled workers (Rahner, 2018). The Public Employment Service received more scope in supporting further education, both by providing individual support (DE#3) and via instruments targeting employers (see DE#5). While it is hard to assess the specific impact of the recommendation, manifold actions taken were coherent with the recommendation (DE-I.1). It is visible that after 2016, in particular Germany's ambition with regard to validation has increased, and interviewees agreed that the recommendation was an important impulse for that (DE-I-2; DE-I-4). The pilot project on involving the relevant stakeholders into the provision of validation procedures has been continued and expanded (DE#4).

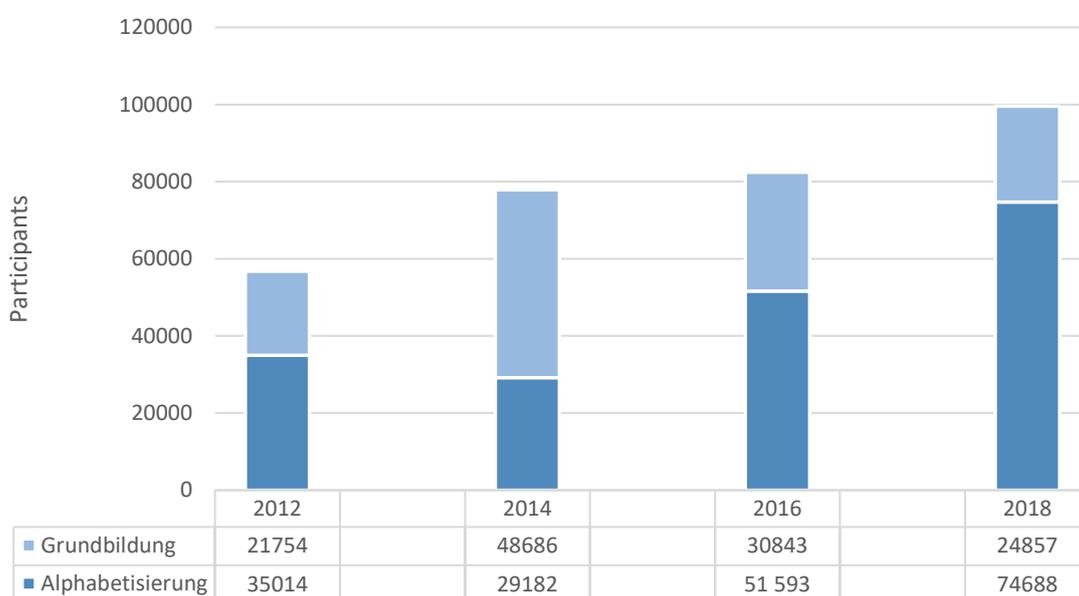
³⁹⁷ https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/de/bildung/weiterbildung/nationale-weiterbildungsstrategie/nationale-weiterbildungsstrategie_node.html

3.3. Effectiveness

The measures implemented in line with the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION had increased the participation in relevant learning activities. No comprehensive data on participation are available, however, available monitoring data for key initiatives are presented below.

In 2020, within the *Alphadecade* [DE#1], 1 155 projects were funded, 15 837 participants were reached, including 3 574 learners with low basic skills, and 8 439 educators in adult basic education (NB, the majority of study places for participants are funded outside the framework by the Länder/Municipalities)(*Koordinierungsstelle der AlphaDekade*, 2022). The figure below shows the number of participants of literacy courses in general in Germany, as reported by surveyed educational providers.

Figure A4_10 Number of participants of literacy courses as indicated by surveyed educational providers, Germany, 2012-2018

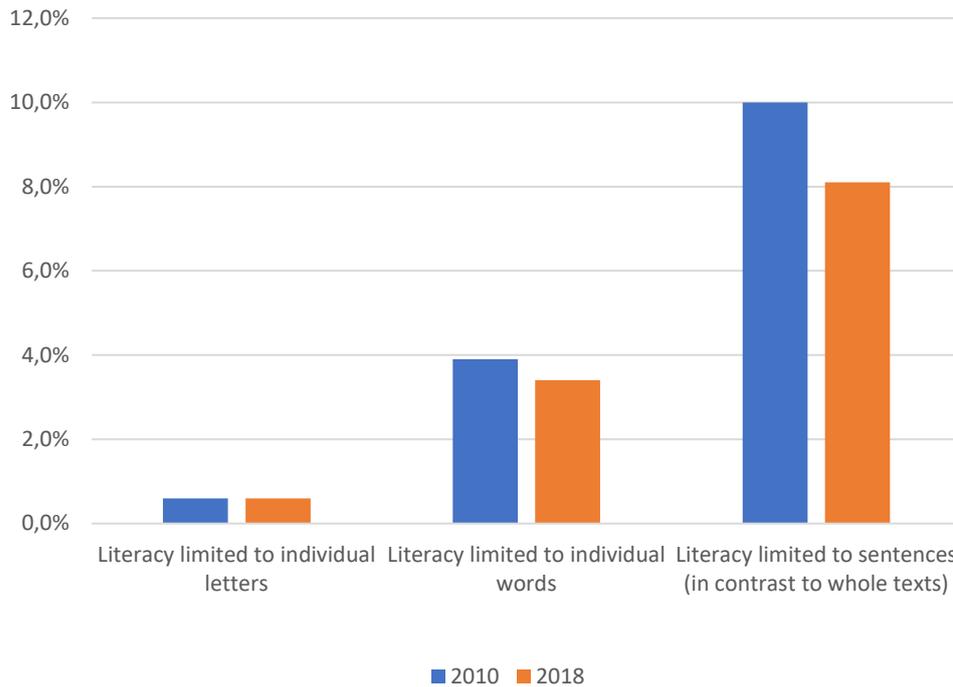


Note: the development of participants over time is hard to infer from this data, as the number of educational providers that report participants varies over time

Source: (Ambos & Horn, 2019)

In general, available data shows that the percentage of the population with limited literacy declined between 2010 and 2018, as visible in the figure below.

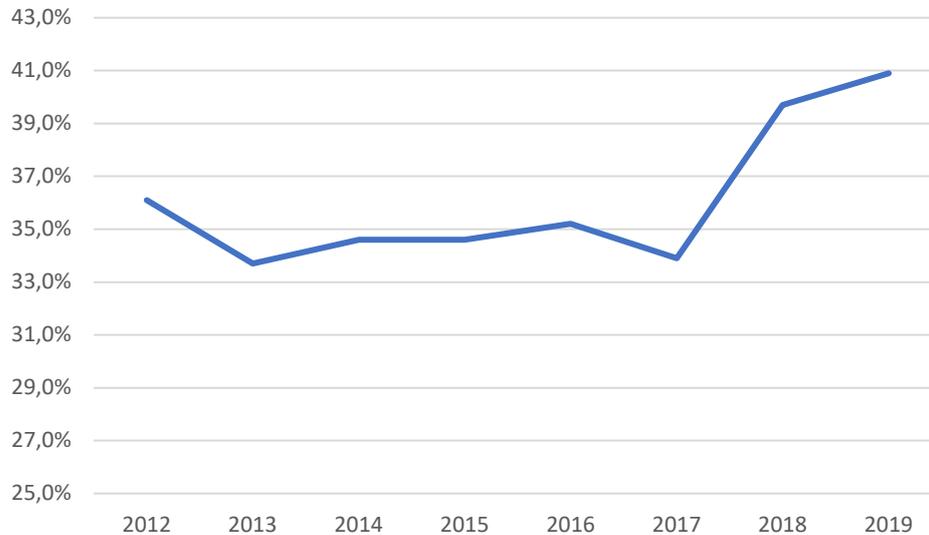
Figure A4_11 Percent of the population with limited literacy in 2010 and 2018



Source: (Universität Hamburg, 2018)

With regard to the *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2), in 2014, 95 424 beneficiaries were funded by the scheme. In 2013, 63 340 training vouchers were distributed. In the *Zukunftsstarter* (DE#3) initiative, there were almost 150,000 entries in training and further education by July 2020, of which just under 30,000 were trapped in unsupported vocational training. Concerning the *Qualifizierungschancengesetz* (DE#4), around 34,600 employees were admitted to funded continuing training courses in 2019. Around two-thirds of the Entries were made to obtain a professional qualification. Foreigners accounted for 22.7 percent of all entries. Of these, 18.3 percent had a refugee background. The figure below shows the share of individuals without completed VET degree that access subsidized further education and training of the PES (SGBII, SGBIII). This share increased over time, while the overall number of participants stayed quite constant.

Figure A4_12 Share of individuals without completed VET degree that access subsidized further education and training of the PES (SGBII, SGB III), 2012-2019



Source: (BIBB, 2021)

Concerning *Valikom* (DE#5), validation of around 30 occupations was provided to individuals with non-formal qualifications (Maier et al., 2021). In 2019, a total of 44700 validation procedures were documented. Furthermore, according to an interviewee, a legal anchoring is possible in the next legislative period. All relevant stakeholders involved share the opinion that this should be the next logical step. (DE-I-2).

In Germany, initiatives and projects relevant for the upskilling pathways recommendation have a variety of key target groups consistent with the recommendation. These include:

- Young adults not in education, employment, or training (NEET),
- Unemployed people with low levels of qualification
- Employed (in general for acquiring digital skills)
- Employed with low level of educational attainment
- Adults with gaps in adult basic skills (in particular low level of literacy)
- Employed in SMEs
- Older Workers (50+)
- People with disabilities

According to an interviewed stakeholder, in particular the integration of refugees and of (previously) unsuccessful apprenticeship seekers was high at the agenda at the time of the council recommendation (DE-I-1), both of which might be overrepresented in some of the key target groups mentioned above. How these groups are specified varies according to project, often with criteria/indicators including age, income and educational attainment. For example, the *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2) is targeted at “vulnerable groups” specified as persons 25 years or older, employed 15 hours or more per week, and an income of a maximum of EUR 20 000 per year (individual). *Valikom* (DE#4) is eligible for those individuals who have

acquired vocational skills in Germany and/or abroad without formal proof in the form of a vocational certificate, which are often migrants/refugees.

One main barrier for reaching the target groups identified in the interviews has been to involve all relevant stakeholders considering the highly decentralized adult learning system of Germany (DE-I-1). Another challenge for creating programmes for these target groups was to keep new initiatives aligned with the existing dual training system of Germany (DE-I-1). For example in the *Valikom* project, there was a fear that increased validation of non-formal competences would devalue the standard dual model, which was solved by highlighting that the certificate of the *Valikom* procedure is not to be equated with a vocational qualification (as with the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad), but is placed below it (DE-I-2).

Priority sectors were not identified.

In general, the three steps are provided within separate frameworks and projects, albeit there are projects combining multiple steps. For example, both assessment and tailored provision were tackled with the *Alphadecade* (DE#1) and the *Bildungsprämie* programme (DE#2). In general, Germany has long laid focus on these two steps, while validation has come increasingly into play with the *Valikom* project (DE#4) that tackles validation. However, at the moment, it only works at a project level, and is not a permanent part of the overall system (DE-I-4). As pointed out by an interview, in particular the recent National Skills Strategy launched in 2019 aims to bring together all three steps (DE-I-1).

In general, the German skill formation system is based upon cooperation by social partners, which has been described as vastly beneficial for socio-economic outcomes (*Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012*). However, cooperation between the multiple stakeholders has been described as challenging (DE-I-1), also considering the highly decentralized nature of the German system with its different responsibilities according to levels of government. Various initiatives aim at facilitating stakeholder cooperation (across policy fields and levels of policy making, and between social partners). This includes the National Skills Strategy of 2019 (as highlighted by DE-I-1) or the *Alphadecade* (DE#1), the latter of which aims to facilitate coordination at the sub-national level by strengthening specialist and coordination units, the exchange of examples of good practice and the implementation of joint public relations. For the *Valikom* project (DE#4) the Association of German Chambers of Crafts and the Association of German Chambers of Commerce cooperate. Currently validation is provided by 30 chambers (11 chambers of skilled crafts, 17 chambers of trade and industry and 2 chambers of agriculture).

Germany often accompanies its measures relevant for the upskilling pathway recommendation with outreach and guidance services. In the *Bildungsprämie* programme (DE#2), the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, and in the and the *Valikom* (DE#4) project, the participating chambers of Trade and Commerce were respectively responsible for information & outreach. Furthermore, career guidance in Germany is a legal entitlement for both employed and unemployed and young people as well as adults, offered by the Federal Employment Agency and partially by the Länder (Cedefop, 2020) - albeit in practice, this is not reflected in the statistics (in AES 2016, 7.0 %). Specific guidance services are also offered within projects. The *Bildungsprämie* programme (DE#2) for example includes consultation with an advisor to discuss the courses available. *Valikom* (DE#4) provides guidance through the relevant Chambers.

Various individual projects connected to the upskilling pathways recommendation have been evaluated. For example, all projects of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research are evaluated, including measures of the *Alphadecade* (DE#1). The *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2) has been subject to interim and final evaluations. A good practice example of an action connected to the upskilling pathways recommendation is the

Zukunftsstarter initiative (DE#3). The initiative's target of attracting at least 120,000 young adults by the end of 2020 has been surpassed by far, accounting for 150,000 entries in training and further education by July 2020. This was also due to the significant increase in admissions since January 2019. The funding areas with a focus on care for the elderly, vehicle management, offices and transport and logistics meet the needs of the labour market quite well. However, there is still potential for development in the main occupational group of IT and other ICT occupations.

3.4. Efficiency

Due to the wide range of different approaches and measures in place, a general discussion of the efficiency of the measures associated with the council recommendation is hardly possible. This has also been emphasized by stakeholders (DE-I-1). However, an in-depth look at some measures can help to get an overview on efficiency-related questions.

Concerning measures connected to the upskilling pathways funding sources, Germany's "funding mix", as highlighted by an interviewee (DE-I-5), consists of national, subnational and partly EU funding. Some projects make use of multiple funding sources, while others are limited to certain funding sources, reflecting the different responsibilities of the multiple levels of government in Germany's decentralized system. For example, the *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2) is financed by 50 percent of national-level and 50 percent of ESF funding. Many projects are financed solely out of national-level or Länder funding. *Zukunftsstarter* (DE#3) as well as the *Qualifizierungschancesgesetz* (DE#5) are for example financed out of the federal PES budget. In contrast, projects in the area of literacy and basic education are generally in the responsibility of the Länder and should be financed by them (DE-I-5). However, according to an interview, the Länder often lack the capacity to finance such measures completely alone, therefore in practice often necessitating some sort of national co-funding (DE-I-5) (e.g. for example in the *Alphadecade* DE#1 initiative).

Several measures connected to the upskilling pathways recommendation used financial incentives covering direct as well as indirect training costs. For example, the *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2) provides up to 50% of funding costs for individuals. In the *Zukunftsstarter* (DE#3) programme, costs for further training courses and examination are covered by the PES, including travel as well as accommodation, childcare and support for retraining, such as tutoring. And the *Qualifizierungschancesgesetz* (DE#5) provides co-funding incentive for employers concerning further education as well as a (at least partial) wage replacement. For companies with fewer than ten employees, the employment agency covers 100 percent of the training costs, and for 10 to 249 employees up to a maximum of 50 percent. Larger companies are supported with up to 25 percent of the training costs. Further training for employees over 45 years of age or severely disabled who work in a company with up to 249 employees can be subsidised with up to 100 percent.

While it is hard to assess the overall costs of the implementation of the council recommendation, some hints can be provided by individual projects connected to the recommendation. On the national/institutional level, costs of the *Zukunftsstarter* (DE#3) programme accounted for 1.3 billion EUR in 2018. Of course, individuals finance several of the abovementioned projects indirectly through taxes or unemployment insurance contributions (for PES measures). Direct costs for individuals also arise in all programmes with individual co-funding like the *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2), however, in many programmes like *Valikom* and *Zukunftsstarter*, all direct costs of individuals are covered (DE#3, DE#5). Indirect costs of individuals (e.g. travel, childcare) are hard to assess, but are covered by specific programmes in some cases (*Zukunftsstarter* DE#3).

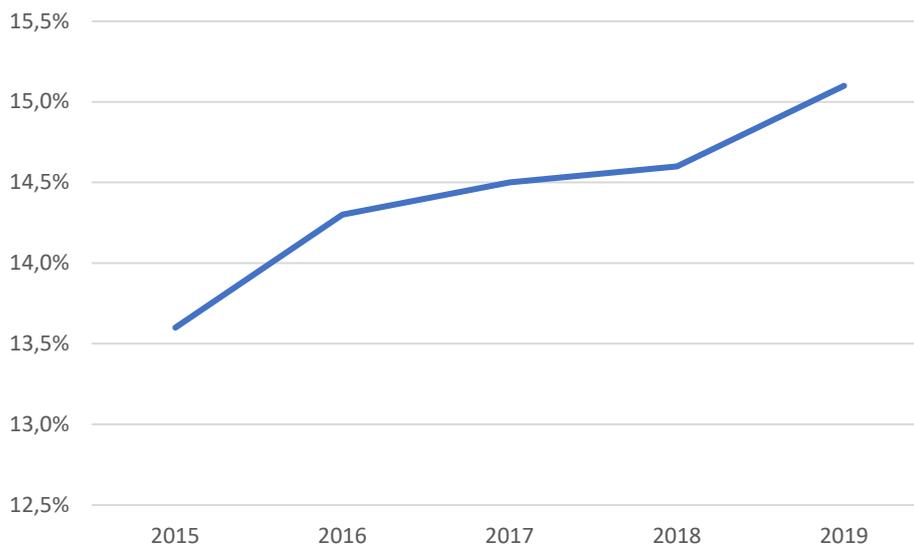
Key benefits associated with the implementation of programmes connected to the council recommendation are increased opportunities for learning and increased opportunities for

validation of prior non-formal learning. Formal qualifications have high importance on the German labour market, making programmes that facilitate the acquiring of such competences especially beneficial (Maier et al., 2021). This holds not only for education and training programmes themselves (e.g. *Zukunftsstarter DE#3*), but also any measure supporting the validation of prior learning (e.g. *Valikom, DE#4*).

3.5. Relevance

Despite partial progress, the evaluation of certain key indicators in Germany to a large extent confirms the continued overall relevance of the council recommendation. For example, from 2016 up to 2019, participation in Lifelong Learning of the low qualified has only slightly increased (by 0.4 percentage points to 4.1 %), while the overall participation rate has even decreased slightly (by 0.3 percentage points to 8.2 %). The share of 25-34 year olds with low educational attainment has increased from 13 to 13.2 percent. And the share of adults with low or no digital skills has decreased from 29 to 26 percent. The figure below shows the share of adults between 25-34 years without VET or HE degree, which in fact increased between 2015 and 2019. Consequently, the key objectives of the recommendation continue to be highly relevant.

Figure 1 A4_13 Share of 25-34 year olds without VET or HE degree (*Ungelerntenquote*), 2015-2019



Source: (BIBB, 2021)

This continued relevance also holds for the three measures/areas defined in the recommendation, namely skills assessment, tailored provision, and validation. Measures implemented by Germany tackle at least one of the “three steps”. Most stakeholder interviews have confirmed this continued relevance of the council recommendation and its goals and measures (DE-I-1, DE-I-2, DE-I-3, DE-I-5). Stakeholders emphasized increased challenges through always faster technological change (in particular with regard to green and digital skills) and the Covid-19 pandemic (DE-I-1, DE-I-4), which makes the goals of the council recommendation even more important as these challenges particularly affect vulnerable groups targeted by the council recommendation. This is for example addressed by the *Qualifizierungschancengesetz* (DE#5) targeting individuals in occupations particularly affected by technological change, the *Alphadecade* (DE#1) that aims to increase basic skills, or the *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2) that aims at giving low wage earners chances for further education.

However, stakeholders have also perceived that certain target groups have decreased in relevance (DE-I-1). For example, the number of new refugees has decreased compared to the situation when the council recommendation was released (DE-I-1), a key target group of the *Valikom* project (DE#4). However, relevance might change again due to the current Ukraine crisis, which could not be expected at the time of the interviews. The number of individuals without regular training opportunities after lower secondary level schooling has decreased (BIBB, 2021, pp. 21, 22), which might in turn decrease demand for the *Zukunftsstarter* programme (DE#3) in the long term. However, the importance of reskilling of individuals into new, sought-after occupations was highlighted (DE-I-5), which is also a goal of the *Zukunftsstarter* programme (DE#3). In sum, even though target groups partially change in importance over time, the measures connected to the recommendation consequently remain of high relevance. However, in the face of abovementioned structural challenges, stakeholders have emphasized the increasing importance of training above initial VET and EQF level 4, which does not target the low-skilled. In this regard, specifically higher vocational education and training (*Aufstiegsfortbildung*), which goes beyond the specific goals of the council recommendation (DE-I-1, DE-I-4), was deemed as essential.

3.6. Coherence

The COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION is broadly coherent with national existing and novel policies in Germany and with established and reformed funding mechanisms. Already before the council recommendation, various policies were in place that can be regarded as broadly fulfilling the council recommendation, which have been sustained and further refined also with reference to the upskilling pathways recommendation. While policies after the release of the council recommendation also reflected national priorities, they still aligned with the recommendation.

Several specific implemented initiatives in Germany are at least partially coherent with the objectives, target groups and measures of the council recommendation. The target groups in a variety of observed national measures connected to upskilling pathways either reflect the prioritization of adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and competences in the recommendation very well, or have been partially adjusted to better reflect the national context. Concerning the latter, *Valikom* (DE#4) for example aims at individuals with low levels of *formally* recognized skills, namely those individuals who have acquired vocational skills in Germany and/or abroad without formal proof in the form of a vocational certificate, which are often migrants/refugees. However, also measures exist that clearly target those with low levels of skills, for example the *Alphadecade* (DE#1) aiming at increasing literacy and basic skills for the low-skilled, or the *Zukunftsstarter* (DE#3) that targets those without any vocational qualifications. Similarly, while the *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2) or the *Qualifizierungschancengesetz* (DE#5) does not directly target those with “low levels of skills, knowledge and competences”, it targets in particular those individuals that might be considered as such in the face of rapid technological change.

In sum, all of the objectives of the council recommendation can be found in abovementioned programmes, as programmes for example aim to improve stakeholder coordination (*Alphadecade*), match skills (*Qualifizierungschancengesetz*), provide assessment, lifelong guidance and tailored training (*Bildungsprämie*), improve validation (*Valikom*). Also all of the three steps of the council recommendation (assessment, tailored training offer, validation) are tackled in Germany, albeit not all of them are necessarily combined in the same programmes. Furthermore, stakeholders also emphasized the coherence of measures like *Valikom* with the recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (DE-I-2).

Achieving coherence between supporting individuals with low levels of skills (as highlighted by the upskilling pathways recommendation) and the national skill formation system was

not without challenges, however. According an interviewee, measures aimed at the low-skilled often bring with them the challenge of not creating a separate, parallel systems of education and training, while also not accidentally devaluating and “undermining” the core of the German VET system in reputation and prestige, which is particularly important for central actors responsible for the governance of the German system including unions and employer associations (DE-I-1, DE-I-2) (Durazzi & Geyer, 2019).

Germany also partially used EU funds for the measures connected to the implementation of the upskilling pathways recommendation, which signals at least some degree of coherence of the implementation with relevant EU funding mechanisms. An interviewee has highlighted that funds like the ESF are often avoided due to their complexity (DE-I-4) – a lack of coherence was not mentioned as a reason.

3.7. EU added value

The upskilling pathways recommendation has been an important element in a chain of multiple of key policy instruments that shape policy-making in the field of Adult Learning in Germany. Initiatives in line with the goals of the UP Recommendation are not only numerous in Germany and have roots long before 2016 but are also closely interwoven with many other areas of education and labour market policy. Any assessment of EU added value must also consider such other key initiatives that interact with the upskilling pathways recommendation. While it is hard to establish direct causal links, interviews with stakeholders have provided some illustrative insights on the extent of the added value of the EU’s upskilling pathways recommendation.

In recent years, decisive impulses at the national level have for example also come from newer processes of the National Skills Strategy and related legislative projects, for which specific new measures were initiated (as highlighted by DE-I-4, DE-I-5). The upskilling pathways recommendation predated the National Skills Strategy and its objectives which are largely in line with the upskilling pathways, even though this link has not been made clear in the respective documents (DE-I-4). Furthermore, also additional EU policies besides the upskilling pathways have influenced German policymaking. An interviewed stakeholder mentioned for example the 2012 council recommendation on validation that itself facilitated pre-existing projects and structures like an interdepartmental working group with the social partners and the Länder to work on various aspects of validation (DE-I-1).

As highlighted by the representatives of federal ministries, EU recommendations can increase pressure on and motivation of policymakers (DE-I-1, DE-I-5). An interviewee for example argued that the upskilling pathways recommendation corresponded to already pre-existing commitments of policymakers, “although it was still clear that there was a need for optimization at the edges of this system” (DE-I-1). More specifically, a representative from the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training argued that the recommendation on upskilling pathways had a major impact in the area of basic education and literacy (DE-I-4). This has also been supported by a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, who argued that the EU’s added value is to give “impulses to take action in areas where less has happened so far” (DE-I-5).

3.8. Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE)

The *Bildungsprämie* (DE#2) allows specific, vulnerable groups to receive State funding to cover part of their education and training costs. A person needs to be 25 years or older, employed 15 hours or more per week, have an income of a maximum of EUR 20 000 per year (individual) or EUR 40 000 per year (household income) to be eligible to apply for the grant. The public co-funding is 50% of education and training costs.

A counterfactual impact evaluation was carried out by Kantar, Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb) GmbH, and Institut für Angewandte Wirtschaftsforschung (2019)³⁹⁸. Methodologically, it is based on qualitative assessment via case studies as well as a controlled experimental design with comparable target and control groups present, with pre-and post-comparisons being made and experimental–control comparisons on specific variable/s. It assessed the uptake of the scheme, the resources spent, the effects on participation, as well as a mobilisation effect on further subsequent training activities.

The evaluation found that uptake of the key target groups is lower than expected. The evaluation shows that the measure reaches people generally interested in LLL but did not reach people outside of this group. Not many individuals know the *Bildungsprämie*. In total, 93 percent of individuals that would be eligible did ultimately not apply for a grant, not having heard of the grant before. In general, the grant reaches mostly well qualified individuals, and not necessarily the low-qualified as emphasized by the council recommendation. According to the study, this might be the case because the financial incentive provided is not sufficient for low-qualified, as they also face other obstacles or are less interested in LLL in general. Consequently, the goal of reaching the people hardest-to-reach (people not interested in LLL) was not achieved by the measure. The evaluation suggests the introduction of accompanying measures focusing on removing such obstacles.

The effects of the scheme on participation in learning was clearly identified as positive by the evaluation. One third of the participants re-applied for the grant in the following year. A mobilisation effect concerning further subsequent training activities of the participants was identified. Those participants that were reached by the grant often cited financial reasons for not participating in LLL before. For those, the grant was key for removing barriers for LLL. However, as mentioned above, the grant has a clear participation bias, not sufficiently reaching the low-qualified.

The resources spent for the projects were broadly in line with expectations. However, recently decreasing popularity of the grant might lead to an underuse of resources provided. By restricting eligibility to low-wage earners, windfall effects have been successfully limited; operations are considered to be high in relation to the achieved number of participants (for each Euro distributed for cofounding training costs, 1,06 Euro operational costs incurred, up from 0,50 in 2013).

The evaluation shows that the measure reaches people generally interested in LLL. However, it did not reach people outside of this group. The evaluation suggests the introduction of accompanying measures focusing attracting this target group is essential, which may include an increase in guidance and outreach activities specifically targeted to individuals with low skills.

3.9. Overall assessment

In sum, policymaking in line with the goals of the UP Recommendation has roots long before 2016, and related initiatives were already numerous in Germany and were closely interwoven with many other areas of education and labour market policy. Nonetheless, the upskilling pathways recommendation has been an important element in a chain of multiple of key policy instruments that shape German LLL policy. While direct causal links are hard to identify, stakeholders consulted during the evaluation of the council recommendation have emphasized that the recommendation has certainly given impulses to policymaking particularly in areas where less development has happened so far, for example with regard to basic education and literacy.

³⁹⁸ [BiP Evaluation Endbericht final.pdf \(bibb.de\)](#)

The council recommendation was broadly in line with pre-existing policy-priorities in Germany, which mitigated potential challenges in its implementation. However, implementing measures for specific target groups of the low-skilled nonetheless faces challenges in Germany's skill formation system. Cooperation between the multiple stakeholders of Germany's decentralized LLL system has been challenging, with different responsibilities according to levels of government. Furthermore, central actors in the German system have incentives to prevent an accidental devaluation of the core of the German VET system in reputation and prestige by expanding target groups towards the low-skilled, which in turn ignites the danger of creating a parallel system solely dedicated to low-skilled individuals. An external impetus like the council recommendation can therefore contribute to the increase motivations of policymakers and stakeholders in the face of these challenges.

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3.11. ANNEX II: List of interviewed stakeholders

- Federal Ministry of Education and Research
- BIBB - Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

4. Case study Estonia

4.1. National operating context

National and regional legislation relevant to upskilling pathways. Since 2016, upskilling pathways and lifelong learning has been guided by the two national education strategies: The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (2014-2020) and the Education Strategy 2035 (2021-2035). One of the key reforms since 2016 includes creating the OSKA programme – designed to analyse labour force and skills needs in different economic sectors.

The Digital Focus programme (*Digipõrde programm*) was launched in 2015 as part of the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015). Goals of the programme included smart and effective use of digital technology in learning and teaching; improving digital skills of the population; and ensuring access to modern digital infrastructure. Target indicators of the programme relevant to lifelong learning included the share of learners in different educational levels who use personal digital devices in their studies. Moreover, the programme was aimed to contribute to the more general goals of the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, the target indicator relevant to upskilling pathways being the share of 16-74-year-olds with digital competences (Ministry of Education and Research, 2018).

There have been no other significant reforms in policy since 2016 – the period is characterised rather by the success and further development of the OSKA programme and implementation of the two wider educational strategies.

Overview of the target population. Approximately 32.9% of adult population is estimated to have potential for upskilling and reskilling, which is slightly lower than in other countries in the Baltic region and lower than the EU average (35.3%). In Estonia, 11.1% of adult population are considered low qualified (ISCED 0-2) and 4.4% not low qualified but in elementary occupations (Cedefop, 2020). 7.2% of adult population in Estonia are not low qualified nor in elementary occupations, but only characterised by low IT skills.

Regarding the skill levels of adult population in Estonia, approximately 14.9% have low numeracy and 14.2% low literacy skills, and 38% have low or no digital skills, the EU average being 44% (Cedefop, 2020; Eurostat, 2022).

Share of young people (aged 25–34) with low educational attainment (ISCED 0-2) slightly decreased between 2016 (12.3%) and 2019 (11.4%), but still remains higher than in neighbouring countries in the Baltics and Finland. However, the rate is well below EU average of 15.5%. The differences are not as significant as in some other countries, but in Estonia, people with low educational attainment are more likely to belong to younger age groups (aged 20-34) and have born in Estonia (Eurostat, 2021).

The rate of young people (aged 15-34) in formal and non-formal education increased between 2016 and 2019 from 41.9% to 47.2%, but due to the COVID-19 crisis the rate dropped to 44.6% in 2020. Accordingly, NEET youth rate dropped from 14.9% in 2016 to 11.6% in 2019 but then increased to 13.2% in 2020 (Eurostat 2021b, Eurostat, 2021c).

Challenges relating to upskilling pathways. The most prevalent challenge relating to upskilling pathways is the number of adults with low educational attainment (no secondary or professional education). Furthermore, among adults with higher qualifications, there is a considerable share of adults who are not updating their skills through further education and training: e.g., the share of adults who had not participated in adult education in the past year

was 14.6%, higher shares being observed among men and in the North-Eastern and Western regions (Statistics Estonia, 2016).

Adults' low digital skills and age and regional gaps in digital skills constitute another issue related to upskilling pathways. The share of adults' digital skills increased from 76% in 2014 to 89.1% in 2020, but the 95% target for 2020 was not achieved. This issue is especially pressing, considering the effects of COVID-19 crisis (Ministry of Education and Research, 2021).

Regional issues in Estonia concern the industrial North-Eastern part of the country where a large share of the population is employed in the oil shale industry. Green transition is amplifying the need for upskilling and reskilling in this region, but also in other industries like food technology, wood processing, chemical manufacturing, and others. OSKA (2021) experts have emphasised the need for combining technical skills understanding sustainable and green processes.

Other issues in the past 8-10 years include youth not continuing in professional education, gender gap in education pathways and low flexibility of learning pathways for low-skilled adults.

4.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

It is important to note that most actions designed to facilitate **upskilling pathways were in place already before 2016**, so they should not be considered as taken directly in response to the Council Recommendation. Interviewed stakeholders noted that the national approach has rather been guided by national needs-assessment and in the framework of different national strategies - mainly education strategies. There is no separate upskilling strategy. However, the main measures facilitating upskilling pathways include (1) expanding training opportunities through the Unemployment Insurance Fund to people in employment; (2) supporting upper secondary education for adults in non-stationary study form, (3) OSKA labour market and skills needs forecasting and (4) Supporting low-skilled adults to return to formal education and participate in learning.

The measures were reported to be designed in cooperation of state institutions, trade unions and employers. The general approach has moved towards reaching out to people on the local level – through the local library, community centres, reaching out to parents through kindergartens. COVID-19 crisis has also significantly shaped the national approach: increased focus on ICT skills, increased online training offer.

The national approach to upskilling pathways has **prioritised adults in employment but with potentially outdated skills** (no VET, HE qualifications or 15+ years since obtaining) to prevent potential unemployment. Additional priority groups include low earners, adults with low Estonian language skills, people over 50 years of age and people employed in the oil shale industry in North-Eastern Estonia. In terms of priority economic areas, the OSKA labour force and skills forecasting has guided the decisions – e.g., serious labour shortages in the health care sector.

Despite the **lack of a unified upskilling strategy, all three steps of the upskilling pathways approach are implemented to some extent** in Estonia: Unemployment Insurance Fund offers skills assessment and training for both employed and unemployed people. According to the interviewed stakeholders, the skills assessment is rather informal and for the assessment of more specific professional skills, the counsellors at the Unemployment Insurance Fund do not have the appropriate tools or training. Therefore, access to skills assessment is good, but the relevance and quality of skills assessment

might need improvement. The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the development of recognition and validation processes.

Regarding specific actions, the adult career counselling provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund was expanded in 2017 to include employed people. A new measure, known as the **Work and Study programme** was launched, which consists of a training voucher (up to 2500 euros per person); a study allowance for obtaining vocational, professional higher education or Bachelor's degree; and training support for employers. This was implemented by the Unemployment Insurance fund from 2017 and targeted at employed population to prevent unemployment and facilitate upskilling. The general career counselling at the Unemployment Insurance Funds includes a brief skills assessment which is related to the Council Recommendation. Moreover, it facilitates a flexible learning offer and also involves extensive outreach: information about the measure is spread at events, workshops, podcasts, news items and websites. The measure is financed through national and ESF funds.

General upper secondary education for adults in the non-stationary form of study is another action related to the Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways. This study form is designed for learners who are above 17 years of age and have completed basic education (grade 9). It is often offered at adult gymnasiums or vocational education and training institutions. Interviewees emphasised the effects of COVID-19 crisis on adult upper secondary education offer – digital opportunities are now much more widely available. The adult upper secondary education differs from general upper secondary education mainly in less elective courses being and increased opportunities for independent work. The action is related to the Council Recommendation on tailored and flexible learning offer and is financed from national funds.

The third action to facilitate upskilling pathways is the **OSKA programme** already mentioned above. OSKA broadly monitors different economic sectors and reacts to current issues, e.g., the COVID-19 crisis, providing an in-depth analysis and forecast of possible labour force and skills mismatch between the education/training sector and the labour market needs. The results of the programme guide adult education training provision by both the Ministry of Education and Research and the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The programme is implemented by The Estonian Qualifications Authority (SA Kutsekoda). The scope of OSKA analysis and forecasting is broad but focus areas differ yearly. The action relates to the Council Recommendation, as adult education training offer by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Unemployment Insurance Fund is informed by its results. There are no particular targets groups – the analysis considers the whole population. Multiple stakeholders are involved in the action: OSKA Panel of Advisers includes e.g. university representatives, professional associations and adult education providers. OSKA is financed from national and ESF funds.

As stated above, the actions relate to the Council Recommendations and cover the three steps to some extent, but the actions described above were designed earlier. Interviewed stakeholders reported some changes to focus areas, delivery mechanism and targets groups, e.g., in response to the COVID-19 crisis, but these concern actions that relate to the Council Recommendation but are not implemented in response to it. Therefore, it would not be accurate to attribute their impact to the Council Recommendation.

4.3. Effectiveness

In general, the key elements of the Council Recommendation are effectively implemented in Estonia. However, further development of skills assessment and a more systemic approach in targeting vulnerable groups need some attention.

Skills assessment is provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund through adult counselling, learning offer is also facilitated by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (but also through adult non-full-time secondary education offer); and the validation and recognition processes are carried out by the Ministry of Education and Research.

Priority groups targeted by the actions that relate to upskilling pathways include people in employment in need of reskilling due to medical conditions, adults inactive in education and training – potentially outdated skills, adults employed in the industries in Northeastern Estonia where green transition amplified the need for reskilling. Interviewed stakeholders also emphasised people with low Estonian language skills as a priority group. Regarding especially vulnerable groups, there is little evidence of systematic effective targeting of groups like Roma, refugees or newly-arrived migrants. Moreover, interviewed stakeholders reported no specific criteria to identify target groups – they are generally determined in cooperation with partner organisations, e.g., social advocacy organisations. It seems like there is no particular approach to reach priority target groups – stakeholders reported large-scale information campaigns as the key success factor. However, local-level approaches like outreach through municipalities, local libraries or the food bank were mentioned as effective ways for reaching groups otherwise difficult to reach.

The most significant obstacle of reaching out to vulnerable groups with upskilling measures are geographic barriers: most training opportunities are available in the two largest cities Tallinn and Tartu. Underprivileged people cannot necessarily afford the transport or accommodation costs, as these are not reimbursed in any upskilling measures. Nevertheless, according to the interviewees, large-scale information campaigns have been efficient for outreach. As there is no national upskilling strategy and most actions that relate to upskilling (see above) have a broad cross-sectoral approach, there are no particular key economic sectors targeted in Estonia.

As explained above, the three-step approach can be matched to the measures implemented in Estonia to some extent, but it would be inaccurate to treat the match between actions and the three steps as a result of the 2016 Council Recommendation – the relevant measures were in place earlier. Skills assessment is provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund through adult counselling, learning offer is also facilitated by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (but also through adult non-full-time secondary education offer); and the validation and recognition processes are carried out by the Ministry of Education and Research.

Even though interviewed experts did not report any particular formal stakeholder cooperation other than the tripartite council of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, which includes The Ministry of Social Affairs, employers and trade unions, there seem to be sufficient formal cooperation platforms. In 2020, The Ministry of Education and Research established the Adult Education Council which is aimed at closer cooperation between different stakeholders in the field.

Relevant stakeholders are also involved in upskilling pathways through each measure. Non-stationary secondary education offer for adults is coordinated locally and each institution might involve their adult learners' employers as needed. The labour market and skill needs analysis and forecasting programme OSKA involves a broad range of stakeholders through its Sectoral Expert Panel and Panel of Advisers. The Unemployment Insurance Fund, responsible for the implementation of adult career counselling is cooperating with private providers in the field of personal career development, marketing agencies, etc.

There is no information on systematic employer outreach and guidance besides general mass-media campaigns. Employers are expected to reach out to the Unemployment Insurance Fund to apply for employee training grants, employees' career counselling, Estonian language or digital skills training. Interviewees reported perceived hesitation from

employers to use the services as it might be widely believed that more confident and skilled employees might look for employment elsewhere.

There is no monitoring and evaluation carried out specifically for the implementation of the Council Recommendation, but some of the specific measures are monitored regularly and adapted accordingly. Monitoring has been carried out for work-related training courses in the frame of the mid-term evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Strategy (Haaristo et al., 2019). Measures provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund in the period from May 2017 to April 2019 have also been evaluated (Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, 2020). Implementation of the OSKA programme was evaluated in 2018 (Melesk et al., 2018). However, much of the monitoring and evaluation seems to be less formal, e.g., in the form of collecting feedback from participants of particular activities.

As a good practice from the measures implemented in relation to upskilling pathways, the OSKA programme does not only develop specific proposals on the needed changes in VET and HE offer but also regularly monitors implementations of their proposals. The Unemployment Insurance Fund offers services both face to face and over the internet which significantly increases its accessibility. Moreover, information and counselling are available in Estonian, Russian and English languages.

4.4. Efficiency

Assessing the overall efficiency of the implementation of the Council Recommendation is not applicable in the Estonian context, as all measures described above were implemented independently of the Recommendation. Measures related to the Council Recommendation have been financed mainly from national budget.

Direct financial incentives have not been provided in Estonia, but several free services provided in the frame of the measures are seen as incentivising for learners, e.g., the Unemployment Insurance Fund's free work-related training voucher measure allows participation in training costing up to EUR 2,500.

The measures related to the Council Recommendation are perceived as costly and generous for adult learners but unavoidable by the interviewed stakeholders. Non-stationary general education for adults; information from the OSKA labour market prognosis; and counselling and training provided through the Unemployment Insurance Fund are free for adult learners. However, like already mentioned above, there are costs associated with transport and accommodation for learners from rural areas as a large part of the training offer, except non-stationary general education for adults which is available in most county centres, is only available in the two bigger cities of Tallinn and Tartu. Interviewees also emphasised that the delivery of the measures is rather costly in Estonia, because the country is sparsely populated – this has required outreach cooperation with local stakeholders in different regions.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (2020) reported that in the first two years of the implementation of the Work and Study programme, the measures were more popular than expected – used by 6400 individuals altogether. Work-related training using the training voucher has been the most used measure: in the first two years, learners started over 4500 training courses. Very high employment rates (90%) six months after the training also show the success of the measure. The study (Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, 2020) also indicated a 14.5% average income increase six months after participating in the training measure. The participants of the study allowance measure demonstrated lower employment rates – this might be due to the target group including discontinuing students and unemployed adults.

The key factors guaranteeing the efficiency of the measures might have been monitoring and evaluation, followed by design adaptations, e.g., increasing online learning opportunities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the measures are perceived to be in great synergy with each other because they were developed in the same strategic framework of the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020.

4.5. Relevance

In general, the objectives and target groups identified in the Council Recommendation were considered highly and still relevant in the Estonian context. Developing skills assessment is still considered the most relevant objective in Estonia as this is also identified as the weakness of the current practice where adult career counselling provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund does include skills assessment, but often not specialised enough to cover specialist skills in different fields. In the future, digital solutions and focus on self-assessment are planned for skills assessment. Adult digital learning portfolio has been mentioned as one of the specific solutions.

The priority target groups set in the recommendation were considered relevant in the Estonian context – especially so the focus on adults without upper secondary education. The target groups are still considered relevant. No particular target groups or economic sectors no longer relevant were identified by the interviewees. Importantly, the economic sectors in focus have been guided by one of the measures itself – the OSKA study. E.g., the ICT skills training offer was increased in response to OSKA findings. Like OSKA, the other two measures – non-stationary secondary education and adult career counselling - are usually considered cross-sectoral in their approach.

4.6. Coherence

Considering that Estonian measures were planned before the issue of the Council Recommendation but can be seen as following similar objectives and targeting similar target groups, the Council Recommendation should be considered highly coherent with Estonian education and training, employment and social policies at national level.

For example, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014) included offering people with other mother tongues than Estonian opportunities for Estonian language learning as one of the activities to be implemented through better cooperation between the state and local municipalities in order to increase low-skilled adults' participation in learning. This is coherent with area of the Council Recommendation that specifies the need to include language learning opportunities and preparation for training for migrants from third countries.

The Council Recommendation referred to considering local, regional and national labour market needs when establishing an offer for upskilling pathways. This is highly coherent with the relevant areas of Eesti 2035 (The Government of Estonia, 2022), which is a development strategy that sets out strategic goals for the state and people of Estonia for the next 15 years: e.g., in the strategy, reforming the adult education system (including developing quality criteria, inclusion of cultural institutions) and further developing the OSKA programme to match labour market and skills are identified as important goals.

The recommendation regarding implementing motivation and outreach measures that include raising awareness on the benefits of upskilling and providing incentives to those least motivated to take advantage of these is coherent with the national outreach programme “Back to school!” – a campaign designed to raise awareness about the benefits of returning to school to attain secondary education (<https://jallekooli.ee/>).

At the same time, some specific measure set in the Council Recommendations have not been met by national or regional policies in Estonia: e.g. validation arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. A reform on better integration of formal and non-formal learning is currently ongoing, however, it focuses on general education and not adults with low skills (Ministry of Education and Research, 2022).

Both OSKA and the adult career counselling by the Unemployment Insurance Fund are financed from national and ESF measures and interviewees reported satisfaction with the coherence between ESF funding and Estonian national needs regarding upskilling pathways.

4.7. EU added value

The added value of the Council Recommendation in Estonia is considered low because the measures implemented in the area of upskilling were guided by national needs and policies and designed before the introduction of the Recommendation. The measures were also funded from the national budget and ESF, the latter providing up to 85% of the total funding for OSKA, which indicates an important role of EU funding in implementing the Council Recommendation in Estonia.

4.8. Overall assessment

In Estonia, measures for upskilling were designed and implemented in the frame of national needs and policies before the introduction of the Council Recommendation: general upper secondary education offer for adults in the non-stationary form of study started well prior to 2015, skills forecasting and analysis system OSKA in 2015 and adult career counselling by the Unemployment Insurance Fund in 2015.

Nevertheless, the activities have been in line with the focus areas and target groups identified in the Recommendation. This shows high coherence between the Estonian education and training, employment and social policies at national level and the Council Recommendation. The recommendations target group of adults without secondary education is seen highly relevant in Estonian context – measures have been designed for these adults, the non-stationary adult secondary education in particular. Implementation of the measures related to the Council Recommendation have generally not focused on specific economic sectors, but one of the key activities, the skills forecasting and analysis system OSKA is aimed at identifying sectors characterised by lack of workforce or inadequate skills and adult training offer by the Unemployment Insurance fund and The Ministry of Education and Research has been further guided by OSKA results, e.g., recent focus on the healthcare sector and ICT skills in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing adequate skills assessment has been and is still considered the main challenge regarding upskilling pathways – the current skills assessment offer is not considered specialised enough.

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5. Case study Spain

5.1. National operating context

Main national measures:

At the national level, a wide range of policies and frameworks regarding lifelong learning are in place. The initiatives that have demonstrated through the years a higher effectiveness and relevance are *Aula Mentor* and Competence Assessment and Accreditation Procedures (PEAC). *Aula Mentor* offers non-formal online courses as well as the possibility of pursuing a course in one of the over 500 local classrooms available across Spain. The other initiative, PEAC, is the main national tool to validate and accredit adult competences with almost 77,000 participants between 2015 and 2017.

Moreover, new initiatives in the adult education field have been developed in the past few years. In 2019 the I Strategic Plan for Vocational Training in the Education System 2019-2022 was launched with the aim of improving employability and meeting the needs of the labour market. In 2020, a draft for a new Organic Law in Education (approved in 2021) was submitted that included as a key action modernising Vocational Training and improving its enrolment and qualification rates. The draft Law on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training that establishes a unique, modular and flexible provision of Vocational Training. Moreover, under the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan key developments such as the National Digital Skills Plan were included.

Overview of the target population:

Regarding education attainment, despite positive trends, Spain is the European country with the highest share of the 25-34 age range with low educational attainment as it can be seen in Figure 2 (Annex III). Numeracy and literacy skills level in Spain are below the European average. While in 2019, 27% of Spanish adults had low literacy skills, the European average stood at 20%. Similarly, in 2019, the Spanish rate of low numeracy skills among adults reached 31% while the European average stayed at 24%.³⁹⁹ Moreover, 57% of Spaniards have at least basic digital skills, just above the EU average, but in 2019 36% of the Spanish labour force still did not have basic digital skills which are among the key competences demanded in the labour market.⁴⁰⁰ As a consequence, around 57% of Spanish adult population has potential for upskilling and reskilling (Figure 2 in Annex III). Although the low skills' level is one of the main challenges in Spanish education, positive trends have emerged in the past years.

The adult population in Spain has increased its participation in lifelong education over the years, reaching a rate of 11% in 2020, which is higher than the EU average (9%).⁴⁰¹ Moreover, a progressive decline in early leavers from education and training has been taking place in Spain, with the largest drop in 2021 (2.7%), reaching a 13.3% rate. The Spanish population is closing the gap with the EU average on population aged 20-24 years who have attained at least upper secondary education and even surpassing it for the case of population in the 25-34 age group have attained tertiary education.

Existing challenges:

However, important challenges remain. The transition from the school to the labour market, due to the skills' imbalance between citizens' qualifications and industry demands, is a

³⁹⁹ <https://publiclibraries2030.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Spain-2019.pdf>

⁴⁰⁰ https://digital-agenda-data.eu/charts/analyse-one-indicator-and-compare-countries#chart={%22indicator-group%22:%22ict-skills%22,%22indicator%22:%22i_dsk_l%22,%22breakdown%22:%22ind_total%22,%22unit-measure%22:%22pc_ind%22,%22ref-area%22:%22EU%22,%22ES%22}

⁴⁰¹ <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:98edb864-c713-4d48-a842-f87464dc8aee/seie-2021.pdf>

major problem. The 2021 vacancy rate is the highest in the past years; 31.8% of firms in the construction industry report that this is a factor limiting their activity due to the lack of labour force with the required skills, 12pp more than at the end of 2020. Moreover, the European Skills Index shows the low performance of Spain in skills matching, ranking last with a score of 11 out 100.⁴⁰² ⁴⁰³ Another important challenge Spain faces are the regional disparities. Even in magnitudes such as tertiary attainment, which has followed a positive trend, there are big disparities across different regions, from a rate of 26% in Ceuta to 53% in the Basque Country, one of the highest regional spreads across OECD countries with available data. In Spain, the difference in the share of 18–24 year-old NEETs between regions with the highest and lowest value is 19 percentage points, compared to 11 percentage points on average across OECD countries. This is due to a variety of factors, but the decentralisation of education as a policy competence plays an important role.⁴⁰⁴ Another main challenge linked to the decentralised nature of the Spanish educational system is the disparity in the services provided, particular due to teachers' qualification. As implementation is done at the regional and local level, it relies on the particular professionals at the adult education centre or institution. Therefore, a focus on competences rather than on curriculum depends on teachers. As a consequence, specific training for teachers is a crucial challenge.

5.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

Overall assessment:

Spain follows the path underlined by the Recommendation. However, this path was already in place before 2016. Therefore, although policies have been developed since 2016, they are not a direct response to the Recommendation but rather a continuation of already existing policies. The main impact of the Recommendation lies on the legitimisation of the measures adopted; it endorses them increasing their validity and perhaps also their access to financing opportunities. The Recommendation offers authorities and social actors a higher support and validation to deliver projects and develop initiatives in this field. It also serves as a powerful instrument to establish and promote collaboration between stakeholders.

National approach:

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation highlights three key stages which were already in place in Spain, although with different degrees of implementation. Therefore, the main response developed to address the Council Recommendation was to further strengthen the actions which were already in place. As a consequence, rather than a single policy/document focusing on the Recommendation guidelines, the Spanish approach entails reinforcing the existing path while emphasising the key areas highlighted by the Recommendation. A comprehensive skills' assessment was already part of several initiatives such as *Aula Mentor* but has been included in more actions following the Recommendation in 2016, such as the Annual Employment Policy Plan 2021. Regarding the second step, actions in place before the recommendation, particularly in employment policies, already included this dimension but has been further developed in the past years. For instance, the area of basic skills and competencies for adults who don't have the essential skills was developed further thanks to the Recommendation. Finally, the accreditation and validation of competences is, among the three areas identified, the most developed one under the Spanish educational and labour system through the PEAC. This

⁴⁰² The ESI Index is Cedefop's composite indicator measuring the performance of EU skills systems. The ESI measures countries' "distance to the ideal" performance which is scaled to be 100 and the scores of all countries are then computed and compared to that. A score of 100 corresponds to achieving the 'frontier', that is an aspirational target performance for that indicator. A score of 0 corresponds to a lowest-case performance.

⁴⁰³ CEDEFOP. ESI Index Spain (2022): <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-skills-index/country/spain?y=2022>

⁴⁰⁴ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/c45dc11e->

<en.pdf?expires=1648035474&id=id&accname=quest&checksum=1CFE426559D84376DC843BFE7C3A6C12>

system has undergone major improvements in the past years, as explained later in this section.

Overall, potential beneficiaries include all adults, but concrete target groups are identified, particularly those with low skills as underlined by the Recommendation. According to the CEDEFOP report on *Adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling*, low skills are particularly high among people in the older age groups and among unemployed and inactive people.⁴⁰⁵ The highest share of low skills in the areas evaluated corresponds to adults who are out of the labour force and unemployed, aged 55-64 and aged 35-54. Therefore, these groups are the ones most in need of upskilling and tailored training. Other groups addressed involve early leavers from education, immigrants and adults with special needs. The Spanish approach involves both general measures such as *Aula Mentor*, as well as specific programmes and policies focusing on concrete target groups such as Spanish language courses for immigrants.

Examples of upskilling actions:

The national government included as a key action in the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan from 2021, the reskilling and upskilling of the labour force linked to vocational skills.⁴⁰⁶ This action entails not only the promotion of already existing measures such as *Aula Mentor* or PEAC accreditation, but also modular training for the reskilling and upskilling of employed and unemployed people focusing on training in emerging and rapidly evolving skills with a view to generating employment. It also provides training in those sectors which, as a result of the foreseeable evolution of economic and social conditions, will generate jobs in the future.

The PEAC system not only contributes to validation of competences, but it also incorporates an initial skills' assessment. Moreover, the modification of PEAC calls, included in the Vocational Training Modernisation Plan, from specific tailored calls towards a continuous one, accelerates the accreditation process and increases the ability to reach more beneficiaries.⁴⁰⁷ This generates a great impact, particularly in the Spanish context regarding competences, where nearly half of the Spanish population (48%) between 16 and 65 years of age lacks formal accreditation of their professional competences. Another important adjustment has been the expansion of its catalogue to address new market needs.

Additionally, *Aula Mentor*, that started in 2009 but has been further developed in the past years, includes the provision of infrastructure for the delivery of non-formal distance learning courses for adults. It is an internet-based open education and training system that provides around 200 non-formal education courses. It includes two main types of infrastructure: more than 500 physical classrooms with computer equipment and an internet connection, and an online platform. Providing both is crucial, as online training offers great flexibility to students, and the network of classrooms across Spain provides people without internet access or access to ICT tools with the possibility to take up learning opportunities, increasing the outreach to beneficiaries from diverse backgrounds, especially those in rural areas. Moreover, *Aula Mentor* incorporates a team of 500 coordinators and tutors that support students in all the phases of the course, thereby adapting the learning process to the determining factors of the personal and working personal and working life of adults, which is of great importance to ensure adult participation in these types of courses.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ CEDEFOP. Adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. Spain (2020): https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/spain_country_factsheet.pdf

⁴⁰⁶ Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan. (2021): https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/temas/fondos-recuperacion/Documents/160621-Plan_Recuperacion_Transformacion_Resiliencia.pdf

⁴⁰⁷ Plan de Modernización de la Formación Profesional (2020): <https://www.todofp.es/dam/jcr:5d43ab06-7cdf-4db6-a95c-b97b4a0e1b74/220720-plan-modernizacion-fp.pdf>

⁴⁰⁸ Memoria Aula Mentor (2020): http://www.aulamentor.es/images/2021/aula_mentor_memoria_digital.pdf

Guidance is also present in other educational measures developed in the past few years. The new Organic Law on the Organisation and Integration of Vocational Training provides a professional guidance and support service that allows the design of individual and collective training itineraries. In addition, the Action Plan for youth employment (2019-2021) incorporates the hiring of 3 000 professional counsellors by the regional PES to provide guidance services.⁴⁰⁹

All in all, the Spanish approach entails a wide range of measures and policies that have been further promoted and strengthened in the past years. A key change witnessed is the prioritisation of digital skills, due to their rising importance. The Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan includes a National Digital Skills Plan. The latter includes a specific focus on digitalisation in all education levels, as well as on promoting lifelong training to foster digital skills. Moreover, the Digital Spain Agenda 2025 aims to boost the country's digital transformation process. Among the key lines of actions, it includes strengthening the digital skills of workers and citizens as a whole, with a special emphasis on matching the needs of the labour market and on closing the digital divide in education. In addition, the I Strategic Plan for Vocational Training also puts an emphasis on digital skills. A crucial measure is the expansion of the catalogue of VET qualifications, incorporating training on emerging sectors, which are essentially related to digitalisation, including Big Data, artificial intelligence, sustainable development, smart industry or robots.

5.3. Effectiveness

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Recommendation, a proper definition of its main goals and objectives has to be defined. On one side, it calls for member states to offer adults with low levels of competences access to skills-enhancing pathways that provide them with the opportunity to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and/or to acquire a broader range of skills relevant for the labour market and active participation in society. On the other side, it establishes the design of such skills' enhancement pathways on three stages: assessment of skills, provision of personalised, flexible and quality learning, and validation and recognition of acquired skills. These stages could be implemented through guidance and support measures and by making the best use of the potential of digital technologies where appropriate.⁴¹⁰

Overall assessment:

Spain has witnessed a downward trend in the early leavers' rate from 19% in 2016 to 13.3% in 2021. A similar decrease has taken place in the proportion of 15-29 years adult population who is "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEET) of 4 percentage points since 2016. However, this rate suffered an increase of 2.4 pp as a consequence of the negative impact of the Covid-19 crisis. Moreover, data shows an increasing participation of Spanish adult population (25-64 years) in lifelong education of 5pp since 2016, with a major increase in the past two years corresponding to the Covid-19 pandemic, showing in this case, a positive impact, even surpassing the EU average. As a consequence, the rate of Spanish population 20-24 years with secondary school level has increased since 2016 almost 8pp, closing the gap with the European Union average. Similarly, the percentage of adult population (25-34 years) with upper secondary school has been rising.⁴¹¹ At the skills' level, Spain has been increasing digital skills among its population, surpassing EU at the human capital level according to DESI 2021 Index. This translates into an increase of individuals both with at least basic digital skills and above basic digital skills.⁴¹² Therefore, evidence shows relevant positive trends over the past few years. However, these major

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⁴¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en>

⁴¹¹ <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:4c9b24fd-b53c-4bba-a019-a4de9ef8815c/notaresu-2022.pdf>

⁴¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/80500>

improvements are a consequence of the key measures and policies developed recently rather than a direct response to the Recommendation.

An additional dimension that has to be mentioned regarding effectiveness is the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. As previously mentioned, there are both positive and negative impacts associated to it. On the one hand, it has fostered digitalisation in education, a key challenge in Spain. The critical situation induced major and immediate changes transforming the traditional education system towards a more telematic one. On the other hand, it also entailed important negative impacts. The socioeconomic background disparities arose and evidenced the lack of resources and/or skills of many families to follow up education in a virtual manner under the pandemic circumstances. Inequality in this aspect has increased and become more evident.

Key target groups and sectors' assessment:

The Recommendation advocates member states to identify key target groups as well as sectors taking into consideration the national circumstances. In this regard, in Spain the Autonomous Regions are the ones competent for the implementation of education policies. This provides a significant advantage in identifying regional and local demands. This is the case for some PEAC calls that were offered based on the industry demands, reducing the labour market mismatch. Regarding the main groups targeted, some measures are designed for the whole adult population, while others are focused on certain vulnerable groups. For the identification of these groups, criteria including migration background, age, skills level or unemployment level were used. As a consequence, concrete policies were implemented for long-term unemployed, migrants, +55 adults, adults with low-educational level, adults lacking digital skills or basic ones as well as some concrete vulnerable groups such as Roma population or prisoners.

The identification of market demands, and population competencies not only derives from regional and local authorities, but also from cooperation with key stakeholders. As a consequence, organisations and entities from the third sector as well as enterprises are involved. The third sector entities assist the key groups already mentioned, but also other concrete vulnerable people. Women are a particular vulnerable group concretely addressed by social organizations, particular those that are victims of gender-based violence. Moreover, each region has its particular challenges and context which produces different target groups. For example, the Canary Islands have witnessed an immigration crisis which has led organizations such as Radio ECCA to focus their education actions and activities on immigrants.

However, the design process is regulated and is a competence of education authorities, therefore, their main role involves informing authorities about the needs they identify. Additionally, the implication of the private sector firms becomes crucial in vocational training, particularly in dual vocational training, which includes in-company training.

Three step approach and monitoring implementation:

The Recommendation entailed the provision of three stages to provide low-skilled adults with a tailored training offer as well as guidance. The three-step approach implementation varies by measure. Therefore, some programmes, for instance PEAC, incorporate to a great extent the three steps, while in others some dimensions are not fully introduced or developed. More precisely, analysing the three stages implementation indicates that the least enforced stage is the first one, related to skills' assessment. Guidance is present along the education system offering tailored training for the achievement of validation and/or accreditation, which is considerably developed. However, there have not been improvements in the area as a consequence of the Recommendation. Moreover, it has to be mentioned that the implementation of the 3-step approach differs between institutions. As such, it is further developed in formal institutions that include the skills assessment,

tailored offer and accreditation through CEPAs and PEAC, while most organizations (NGOs) tend to focus on offering training. Therefore, the first and last steps are more institutionalised.

Lastly, Spain lacks in the provision of monitoring and evaluating activities. Few projects or initiatives at the national level include an impact evaluation dimension. As a consequence, there is a lack of powerful data that could help both to improve further policy design and to share good practices among institutions and stakeholders. Moreover, a key dimension of the Recommendation for the specific case of Spain is ensuring effective coordination among the relevant education and training authorities to build a comprehensive integrated adult education system.

Good practices and areas for improvement:

The implementation assessment of the Recommendation showcases key good practices as well as some areas for improvement. PEAC and *Aula Mentor* initiatives, that began prior to the Recommendation, have shown both great effectiveness and relevance. The PEAC procedure not only integrates the three stages highlighted in the Recommendation, but it also addresses specific demands for the industry. Moreover, the recent modification towards a permanent call increases the procedure's flexibility which induces a greater ability to reach more beneficiaries. This is particularly relevant in a context in which flexibility is very limited. Moreover, *Aula Mentor* is able -through both physical classrooms and the online platform - to reach key vulnerable groups such as those lacking digital skills or digital resources and adults with working and/or family responsibilities.

However, some initiatives have not produced the desired impact. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training developed the *Informate* portal, a tool that guides the applicant in the choice of the training itinerary best suited to his or her profile and indicates the most appropriate training possibilities to his or her needs and context. However, the tool requires a wide extent of technic concepts that not the whole adult population may possess, decreasing its effectiveness.

5.4. Efficiency

Overall assessment

With the information currently available no rigorous conclusion can be drawn regarding the efficiency with which actions have been implemented. The main benefits of the Recommendation have been to provide a common framework and understanding for all the key actors and stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of adult education measures, a greater legitimisation and visibilisation of the need for specific adult learning measures, and to promote the shift in the adult learning curricula from teaching content to developing capacities in learners. The main cost therefore has been the time devoted to encouraging teachers to adapt the curricula.

Main EU Funds used to support the implementation of the Recommendation in Spain

Public funds for the financing of adult education and training in Spain are mainly provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, Employment and the regional administrations, both educational and labour. The educational administrations finance:

- regulated education aimed at adults, oriented towards obtaining the official qualifications of the education system;
- a small part of occupational vocational training, which is provided to unemployed people with the aim of promoting their professional reintegration through the qualification or updating of their professional skills;

- training leading to the awarding of certificates of professionalism.

In 2019, 379.2 million euros were invested in adult education and 858 million euros in occupational training. Since 2020, education authorities are responsible for vocational training for employment. In the 2022 general state budget, it is the second most funded programme of MEFP, with 1 151 million euros.

Labour administrations currently finance a part of vocational training for employment for the employed and unemployed. In 2019, 2,414 million euros were earmarked for their training, both at state and regional level.

Vocational training for employed persons is managed by the State Public Employment Service (SEPE), the Autonomous Communities, the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP), and the State Foundation for Employment Training (FUNDAE). Vocational training for the unemployed is largely provided by the SEPE and managed by the regional labour administrations. The Autonomous Communities and local corporations also make contributions from their budgets.⁴¹³

In terms of EU Funds, ESF is the main fund supporting the delivery of the training offer for adults. In particular, 36.1% of all ESF funding (2.352.015.223 €) during the 2014-2020 programming period was dedicated to Thematic Objective 10 (education): 764 million euros. Additionally, the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme is a financing instrument at EU level to promote a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty and improving working conditions.

Through Erasmus+ in 2019, 92 427 participants in 2 862 Spanish projects benefited from mobility in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning and youth for a total grant amount of € 185.00 million, although only 1.7 million euros were dedicated exclusively to adult education in 2019.

Lastly, the Recovery and resilience Fund reinforces economic and social resilience with measures fostering effective and inclusive education systems to reduce early school leaving rate, skills acquisition in line with current and future labour market needs, including the green and digital transition, and measures to improve the employability of the youth. It also puts forward a labour market reform to reduce the high share of workers on temporary contracts. There are substantial investments to upskill and reskill workers and to modernise the vocational education and training system. The plan also provides for specific actions in the area of active labour market policies, including reforming the system of hiring incentives, developing individual pathways for counselling, reinforcing the system of adult learning, and modernising public employment services. Spain will notably invest €2.1 billion in reskilling and upskilling measures, teachers training, digitalisation and internationalisation of VET and €3.5 billion will boost Spain's innovation capacity by financing research and innovation infrastructure and programmes.

Use of financial incentives

Adults studying non-university post-compulsory education are eligible for the following scholarships and subsidies when they are studying: baccalaureate, intermediate and higher vocational training (FP), professional artistic education or sports education, either in the ordinary modality or in specific modalities for adults, in which the offer of partial enrolment is included. This procedure is the same as the one indicated for the rest of the students in secondary education funding. There are scholarships for students studying language courses in Official Schools, scholarships for university studies, and for vocational training for employment.

⁴¹³ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/adult-education-and-training-funding-79_es

In terms of financial incentives to boost attendance and prevent dropouts, they have been tried in employment workshops, with varying degrees of success, according to one of our interviewees.

Costs and benefits of implementation

The main benefits regarding the implementation of the Recommendation are:

At the national level:

- Overall legitimisation of the educational policy, enabling a common framework for the dialogue between key stakeholders
- Contributing towards the better skills match in the labour market

At the regional level:

- Increased funding available for implementation of the adult learning policy measures designed, contributing towards an increased adult learning training offer and the certifications related

At the institutional level:

- Shift of the curriculum taught from one focused mainly on teaching concepts and content to one based on acquiring competencies, skills, and capabilities.
- Regarding the assessment of the costs, this becomes very difficult, particularly to disentangle the costs specifically related to the implementation of the Recommendation from the generic ones of delivering the adult learning offer, since most of the measures were already in place before the Recommendation.
- However, interviews with organizations delivering adult education have allowed us to gain a deeper knowledge on the associated costs. According to Radio ECCA, an educational, communicative and social action institution, born in the Canary Islands but active throughout Spain; costs differ between formal education and non-formal education. The average for a pupil in formal education and projects range from 350 to 500€. However, the costs for courses (non-formal education) reduces significantly, as it is situated around 50-80€ per course.

5.5. Relevance

Overall assessment:

The Recommendation placed new emphasis on policies that empower adults who are at risk of missing out on economic opportunities and being excluded from full participation in society because of the gaps in their skill set or their low levels of formal educational attainment. This becomes very relevant in Spain, a country which, in spite of major improvements in the past years, still remains below EU progress in several key areas.

Relevance of objectives and measures:

Although positive trends have arisen such as the drop in early leavers rate, this indicator still remains 3.4 points above the European Union average. Moreover, in 2019 only 11.3% of young people (15-29) had upper secondary or tertiary education (3.2 points less than in 2020).⁴¹⁴ Additionally, the share of adults aged 25-64 with low educational attainment

⁴¹⁴ <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:4c9b24fd-b53c-4bba-a019-a4de9ef8815c/notaresu-2022.pdf>

(ISCED 0-2) decreased from 2016 to 2020 but still remains at 37%, one of the highest across Europe, 16 points above the European average. Also, the incidence of low skills among adults is higher than the incidence observed on average in the European countries in all the skills domains considered.⁴¹⁵ This evidence combined with the fact that 57.7% of Spanish adult population is estimated to have potential for upskilling and reskilling, shows the high relevance of the Recommendation in the current Spanish context.⁴¹⁶

The education and skills area in the Spanish context is considerably shaped by low performance in skills activation and skills matching, according to the ESI index.⁴¹⁷ A high proportion of the adult Spanish population works in a field unrelated to their training and there is a clear imbalance between the education fields pursued and the labour market needs. As a consequence, upskilling and reskilling becomes crucial.

Relevance to priority target groups and economic sectors:

The key target groups already identified and addressed include adults with low education level, adults with low digital skills, adults with labour experience without validation/accreditation, as well as immigrants. Moreover, specific economic sectors demands are addressed through concrete PEAC calls in order to promote the accreditation of the competences required by the industry and reduce the skills mismatch challenge already defined.

Additionally, the sanitary crisis deriving from the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to address digital skills in order to be able to continue delivering education. This situation has evidenced the existence of key economic determinants in education, showing high educational discrepancies among adults with different economic backgrounds. Adults who lacked digital skills and/or resources could not follow the online education during the pandemic, increasing differences in educational attainment level base on socioeconomic factors. Moreover, an existing challenge that become more difficult as a consequence of Covid-19 is the ability to engage adult population in need of training but unwilling to pursue it. Therefore, the existence of key target groups such as immigrants, adults with low socio-economic status and lack of digital skills remains persistent.

As a consequence, the evidence demonstrates that addressing specific groups that are more vulnerable to unemployment such as adults with low educational level as well as focusing on specific economic sectors demands to reduce labour market imbalance is still relevant in Spain.

5.6. Coherence

Overall assessment:

The Spanish approach towards adult education already incorporated most of the key features underlined by the Recommendation. All in all, the Recommendation is well aligned with the main national and European policies targeting adult education. However, there are some dimensions of the Recommendation that have not been addressed by Spain or not fully developed yet. Spain's approach should further involve the private sector in the design and implementation of education policies and promote the public-private collaboration. Moreover, the Recommendation highlights the crucial role of evaluation to assess the progress and impact of policies and improve the design and effectiveness of further measures. However, few evaluations are in place in Spain and the few existing remain

⁴¹⁵ https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/spain_country_factsheet.pdf

⁴¹⁶ Ibid

⁴¹⁷ ESI Index (2022): [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-skills-index#:~:text=The%20European%20Skills%20Index%20\(ESI,a%20period%20of%207%20years.](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-skills-index#:~:text=The%20European%20Skills%20Index%20(ESI,a%20period%20of%207%20years.)

internal and are not publicly available. As a consequence, there is a lack of evidence and good practice sharing at the national level and across regions.

Coherence with national policies:

The three stages defined under the Recommendation are clearly addressed in the national policies, particularly those stemming from the employment authorities. In particular, the Employment activation strategy 2017-2020 defines as essential to reduce the mismatch between the labour skills demanded by the productive sectors and those offered by jobseekers, and to also facilitate the retraining of the long-term unemployed, which is included among the main purposes of the Recommendation. Moreover, it also incorporates and further promotes the three stages: skills assessment, tailored offer and validation and accreditation. The first axis of this framework promotes the design of individual integration and training itineraries while the second and third axis focus on training and employment opportunities, encompassing the whole Recommendation.⁴¹⁸

Other national policies focus on specific target groups relevant to the implementation of the Recommendation. For instance, Spanish language courses have been developed to improve immigrants' level of Spanish and promote their integration.⁴¹⁹ Other measures such as the Joint Action to improve Attention to Long-term Unemployed or the *Prepara* programme are designed to address long-term unemployed.⁴²⁰⁴²¹ Therefore, the Recommendation is in line with the national policies and frameworks, both those that were already in place before 2016 and those that have been developed in recent years.

Coherence with EU funding mechanisms:

Moreover, national policies not only show consistency with the Recommendation guidelines and goals, but also with European action on this field such as the Erasmus+ programme. This programme is present at vocational training level but also in Adult Education Centres (CEPA) with the aim of improving the provision of adult education for key competences as well as raising the participation of adults of all ages and socio-economic background in adult education.⁴²² Moreover, EU funds, particularly the Recovery and Resilience Facility Mechanism have financed adult education initiatives such as the creation of new Mentor classrooms. The new Modernisation plan for vocational training is also financed by this mechanism.⁴²³

Other EU funding mechanisms are also coherent with the 2016 Recommendation. The main objectives of the Operational Programme of employment, training and education (POEFE) 2014-2020 financed by European Social Fund (ESF) included reducing and preventing early school leaving, promoting equal access to lifelong learning, improving the knowledge, skills and competences of workers as well as improving the labour market suitability of education and training systems.⁴²⁴

5.7. EU added value

The Recommendation establishes effective guidelines for Member States with the aim of empowering adults with low levels of educational attainment, gaps in their basic skills or low levels of relevant vocational skills demanded in the labour market. Even though the Recommendation becomes particularly relevant given the Spanish context already mentioned in previous sections of this report, Spain has been developing and implementing

⁴¹⁸ <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2017/12/16/pdfs/BOE-A-2017-14858.pdf>

⁴¹⁹ <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/redele/estudiar-espa-ol-como-lengua-extranjera-en-espa-a.html>

⁴²⁰ <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2016/12/07/pdfs/BOE-A-2016-11658.pdf>

⁴²¹ <https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/que-es-el-sepe/comunicacion-institucional/noticias/detalle-noticia.html?folder=/2017/Septiembre/&detalle=prepara-prorroga-abril-2018-190917>

⁴²² https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-11/2022-erasmusplus-programme-guide_es.pdf

⁴²³ Componente 20: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/temas/fondos-recuperacion/Documents/16062021-Componente20.pdf>

⁴²⁴ <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/fse/prioridades.html>

policies in this area for decades. Therefore, the EU added value in terms of policy design is limited. However, it must be highlighted that the Recommendation, despite its non-binding nature, has a powerful role in legitimising existing policies and pushing forward new measures. In this sense, the Recommendation offers an opportunity for authorities and social actors to deliver projects and develop initiatives in this field, as they are supported by the European Commission's Recommendation. In the absence of the European endorsement, the development of policies could encounter more difficulties, especially given the Spanish context in which there is a national Ministry for education, but policies are then implemented differently across the 17 regions. It serves as a powerful instrument to establish and promote collaboration between stakeholders, a crucial component in designing policies.

Another relevant added value of the European intervention is at the funding level. Even though the majority of the adult education system is funded by national funds, some European funds are essential. As mentioned in the previous section ("Coherence"), EU funds such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility Mechanism finance key measures such as those included in the National Digitalisation Skills Plan; the Strategic Plan to promote vocational training and investment encompassing training initiatives to reskill workers at risk of displacement. Under this financial instrument, €7 billion were devoted to the education and knowledge, lifelong learning and capacity building axis, which represents 10.5% of total budget.⁴²⁵ Moreover, more than €2 billion are assigned to employment related measures with the aim of promoting a dynamic, resilient and inclusive labour market. In the educational context, the most crucial European fund is ESF. The ESF co-financed the Operational Programme of employment, training and education (POEFE) 2014-2020 that allocated €764 million, 36.1% of the total ESF contribution objective 10 "Investing in education, skills development and lifelong learning".⁴²⁶ Some measures developed include new cycles of Basic Vocational Training and the implementation of Dual Vocational Training.

Even though the EU added value for the case of Spain is limited given the existing measures already in place before the Recommendation, it has nonetheless had a positive impact in some areas: setting a common framework for advancing the adult education agenda, focusing more on competencies and capabilities, targeting those in need of the most basic skills, and financial provision. Therefore, EU support could be devoted to addressing a key challenge in the Spanish context: reaching the final beneficiaries, and, more specifically, reaching those adults most in need. This is a crucial part of an effective and inclusive approach to adult education, but in practice sometimes it has proven extremely difficult (with ethnic minorities for instance). More resources should be devoted to engaging adults in education and preventing their dropout from training courses after their initial engagement.

5.8. Overall assessment

Spain has witnessed a positive trend in some key adult education measures in the past years, with an increase in the share of adult population participating in training as well as a major decrease in the early leavers' rate. A variety of measures and policies implemented are behind these improvements, such as the development of a key plan for vocational training, as well as new laws on education and vocational training. Moreover, EU funds from the Resilience and Recovery Facility Mechanism are set to finance key reforms, particularly related to the promotion of digitalisation and digital skills. However, this direction was already followed by Spain prior to the publication of the Recommendation in 2016. Before 2016, Spain had already developed a powerful validation and accreditation system (PEAC) and had some very effective measures in place such as *Aula Mentor*. Therefore, even though there is a high level of fulfilment of the Recommendation through a wide range of

⁴²⁵ https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/temas/fondos-recuperacion/Documents/160621-Plan_Recuperacion_Transformacion_Resiliencia.pdf

⁴²⁶ https://www.mptfp.gob.es/dam/es/portal/politica-territorial/local/coop_econom_local_estado_fondos_europeos/fondos_europeos/Periodo_2014-2020/POEFE/Programa-Operativo-de-Empleo-Formacion-y-Educacion.pdf#page=1

measures and initiatives, these actions are not a reaction to the Recommendation but rather a continuation of the existing actions. However, there are some dimensions of the Recommendation that are not fully addressed. A gap in the Spanish adult education system is the lack in the provision of monitoring and evaluating activities which reduces the availability of useful data for future policy design. Another identified weakness is the coordination among the relevant education and training authorities to build a comprehensive integrated adult education system.

However, the Recommendation plays an important role in bringing key actors together under a common framework promoting their collaboration and has also steered the shift in focus of the adult education curricula from a content and concept-based education towards one in which the main goal is for the learner to acquire the necessary competencies and capabilities. Moreover, it also legitimises action on this field by providing powerful EU support.

Therefore, although even though some measures of the Spanish approach towards adult education following the Recommendation implementation have been shown to be effective, important challenges remain:

- A key concern is the high early leavers from education but also the dropout rate of adult learning programmes. A related challenge is reaching those most in need of education. As a consequence, substantial efforts are needed to make the adult education offer attractive in order to both engage beneficiaries and, at the same time, flexible enough to secure their accomplishment.
- Stemming from this, the defined pathways for individuals who have been identified as in need of adult education have to be more holistic, offering the individual all the different kinds of support needed in order for them to acquire the necessary competencies to function well in day-to-day life and to fully engage in the labour market. In order for the system to be able to offer this integral holistic approach, key stakeholders need to come together and work together following a common understanding: providers of social support services, providers of adult education, public authorities and the private sector are all necessary in delivering an effective adult education ensuring the beneficiaries are able to stay on track and can then use the skills acquired.
- One final key area identified as requiring further support and development is specific and tailored training for teachers delivering adult education.

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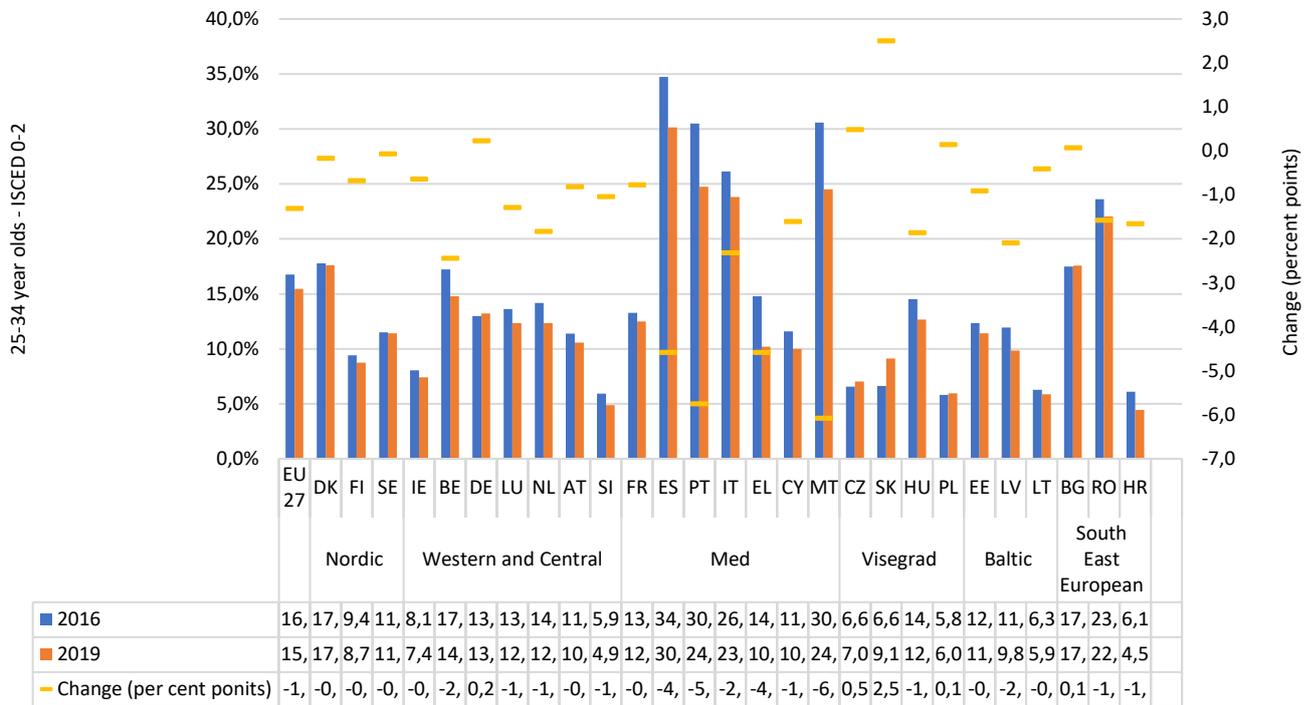
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5.10. ANNEX II: List of interviewed stakeholders

- CEPA (Adult Education Centre)
- Consejería de Educación, Universidades, Ciencia y Portavocía: Aulas Mentor (Regional Authority)
- FAEA (National network for organisations working in adult education)
- INCUAL (National Institute for Accreditations)
- Radio ECCA (Implementing organisation)

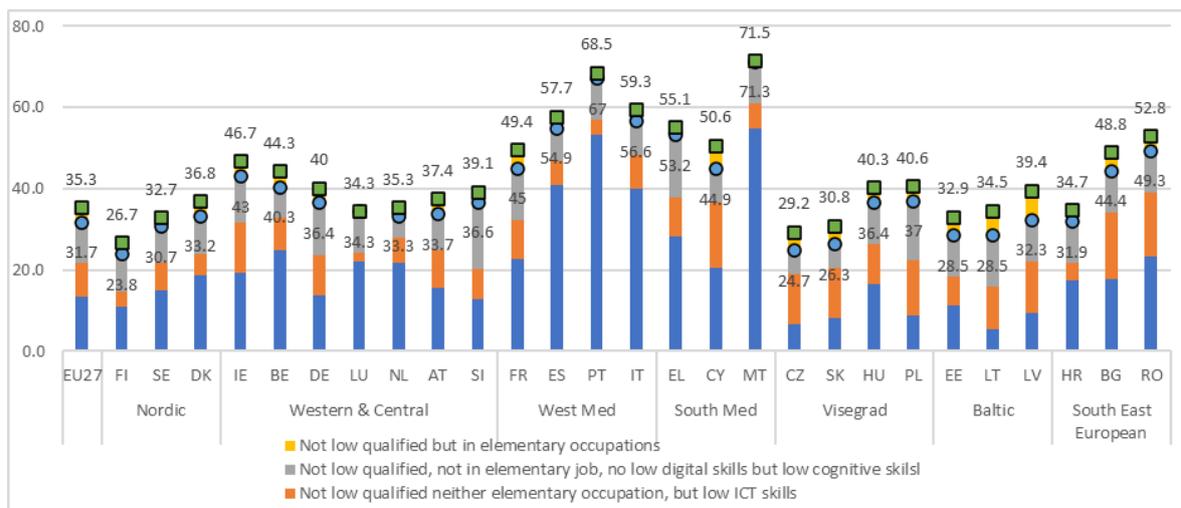
5.11. ANNEX III: List of figures

Figure A4_14 Share of 25–34 year olds with low educational attainment 2016 and 2019, change in percentage points, sorted by geographical region



Source: Eurostat, LFS, Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) - main indicators, edat_lfse_03

Figure A4_15 Estimated adult population with potential for upskilling and with potential for upskilling and reskilling, by country (%) sorted by geographic region, EU-27



Source: Cedefop (2020). Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/475393>

6. Case study France

6.1. National operating context

The development of the skills⁴²⁷ of people with low or no qualifications⁴²⁸ or skills has been at the heart of French policies for many years. The last decade in particular has seen several reforms of vocational education and training (VET, or TVET⁴²⁹) which have continued in this direction.

In 2016, under Hollande's Presidency, France implemented the "500,000 additional training programmes" plan⁴³⁰, which is a sort of continuation of what was proposed in 2013. This plan relates to jobseekers and young people. The main stakeholders that have made it possible to deliver these training programmes are the Public Employment Service (*Pôle emploi*) and the Local Outreach Offices (*Missions locales* in French, which are a sort of Public Employment Service for young people with severe difficulties, beyond education and training or the labour market as it were). The aim is to fight unemployment and social exclusion. This approach has been initiated by the State, the Regional Councils (Local Authorities) and the social partners. It is based on a shared funding of one billion euros. The latest reform, the law for the "Freedom to choose a vocational future" (2018)⁴³¹ belongs to this movement and has tried to address to issues of young people and/or of the least qualified. Indeed, France firmly believes in training to improve the employability of [young] people. The flagship measures are the establishment of "France compétences" which makes it possible to gather the actors and key stakeholders of technical vocational education and training, as well as the setting in motion of the Investment in Competences Plan or Investment in Skills Plan (PIC, *Plan d'investissement dans les compétences*⁴³²). The latter has been in force since 2018 and will end in 2022. It is intended for young people and/or jobseekers. There is also the revamping – i.e., monetisation, digitalisation and therefore improved individual management – of the individual learning account (CPF, *Compte personnel de formation*), which allows each individual user to be autonomous in the construction of his training pathways. In addition, this law has reformed apprenticeship in France, to allow more people to be able to access occupational situations in order to optimise their integration in the labour market.

The target populations, as mentioned above, are young people and jobseekers, and more particularly long-term jobseekers. This corresponds to the population that is most in difficulty in entering the labour market. Indeed, statistics make it possible to make the following observations:

- According to Cedefop figures, around 20% of the population between 25-64 have a low level of education and this figure did not change between 2016 and 2020.
- Access to training for low-level workers did not change significantly between 2016 and 2020 (7.5 in 2016 and 7.9% in 2020)

⁴²⁷ France clearly opted for the "term" competences, which is more relevant than skills, even in English, but will not be use here because it does not match with the term "upskilling" at the core of this document

⁴²⁸ Document to prove one's competences (OECD, 2007) (The French language clearly distinguishes the document ("certification" in French, also used in English) and the ability to work at a given workplace ("qualification" in French, which is not a synonym of "certification", unlike in English in most cases))

⁴²⁹ Technical vocational education and training

⁴³⁰ https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/archives/archives-courantes/plan-500-000-formations-supplementaires/?TSPD_101_R0=087dc22938ab2000818c305e91907ed1b9f1f7ea670577787b34f42e0114f6e2d747ee631bb40368082ace1b2b143000794f8a665814d5b18519b6995c535f2e0f506dc523dec3f463595fd07e01cb2a1f30f7840ea697d31174b7f818acd1a0

⁴³¹ <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/demarches-ressources-documentaires/documentation-et-publications-officielles/textes-et-circulaires/lois/article/loi-avenir-professionnel>

⁴³² https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/le-ministere-en-action/pic/?TSPD_101_R0=087dc22938ab2000c3479b9da3a752f6b2595a6410a8dbd689f0855c655612f726dd98bd8a488acf08f42d6ec01430007af5e6b60c06376138f63adc055eb4267eeefe5f00a5a37c13cb4237275cd16c17723dd560261b0062b100be83572893

- People with a low level of qualification are the most representative of the long-term unemployed (10.5% for levels 0-2 against 2% for levels 5-8)
- People with little or no digital skills are also at the lowest levels of education (level 0-2: 79%). The difference between natives and foreigners is 15 percentage points in 2016 and 14 points in 2020.

Despite the large-scale measures that have been implemented, the skills and access to training opportunities of the target group has not changed dramatically. France continues to develop the PIC, and the support and guidance of young people.

Access to training remains an important issue for France. It is the most qualified people who are trained (Matthew Effect). Those furthest from employment are also far from training. France's challenge is to be able to communicate around the development of skills (and especially basic skills in literacy, numeracy and digital skills). The health crisis has widened the gap in access to training: the massive turn to digital solution has been difficult to set up for low-level and practical/manual training. In addition, the low-level public needs support to succeed in accessing training.

6.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

It is important to stress upfront that France had put in place actions to develop upskilling before the European Recommendation. However, this is not to say that the Recommendation had no impact, but the response should be seen more in terms of consolidation of the measures already in place – rather than in terms of triggering a specific new response – in particular thanks to financial aid from the EU.

Skills development is at the heart of vocational integration policies. Indeed, policies are mainly directed towards those who are the furthest away from the labour market, i.e. jobseekers and especially long-term jobseekers, young people who have left the school system with little or no qualifications (early dropouts) and people with a low level of qualification.

The three stages are in place and at the centre of the global approach: assessment of skills (e.g., CléA), offering flexible and adapted solutions (e.g., PIC, Cléa, Youth Commitment Contract, CEJ, *Contrat engagement jeune*), and validation (e.g., recognition of prior learning, RPL-VAE, *Validation des acquis de l'expérience*; CléA; ILA-CPF; Qualifications Catalogue, RNCP, *Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles*, with now qualifications can be achieved up to 29 of age for certain populations through apprenticeship). France is trying to set up skills development actions that respond to this temporality, i.e., going beyond the juvenile period as such. In France, competences assessment is often the starting point before enrolling in training. This can be achieved thanks to the advisors of the Public Employment Service (*Pôle emploi*), the Regional Authorities (Professional Development Guidance, CEP, *Conseil en évolution professionnelle*), and the Local Outreach Offices (*Missions locales*) for example. Skills assessments are little implemented for low level individuals. Indeed, it is somewhat difficult for individuals with little or no skills. This has been evidenced in the context of the recognition of prior learning system (RPL, VAE, *Validation des acquis de l'expérience*) where basic skills are necessary. Such an endeavour demands guidance, which is not always an option for some of the applicant. The Professional Development Guidance (CEP, *Conseil en évolution professionnelle*) allows individuals to have access to advice to find training that corresponds to their needs, especially for employees. This system has taken time to take hold but in recent years, thanks to greater communication from the professionals who accompany employees, it has been expanding. In the Cléa system, a first part of the assessment is made and then allows to be able to have an adapted offer and to achieve a micro-qualification. Shortly after its implementation, Digital-CléA (CléA-numérique) was developed to meet the needs of industry sectors and the labour market.

Cooperation between the various actors and other key stakeholders is not very effective in France. The State, the Regional Authorities, the social partners and the industry sectors are the main players in skills development. Unfortunately, there are no forums that allow all these stakeholders to meet on a regular basis to discuss skills development issues.

There are various measures that have been put in place since 2016 without being directly related to the Recommendation, that were under discussion for a few years in France. Nevertheless, some major actions are in line with the Recommendation:

- Individual learning account (ILA-CPF, *Compte personnel de formation*): Set up under a first version in 2015, the CPF was modified with the law on “the freedom to choose a vocational future” (2018). The CPF allows everyone to be autonomous in the management of skills development. This account is funded each year to the tune of 500 euros per year and 800 euros per year for jobseekers. People can consult the web site, or the Smartphone Application, dedicated to it and see all the learning opportunities leading to a qualification⁴³³. Users are in direct contact with training providers, and they can buy training directly from them using the money available on their account. The 2018 law made it possible to achieve vocational qualification with the ILA-CPF.
- CléA and Digigal-CléA (Vocational Knowledge and Competences Certificate, *Certificat de connaissances et de compétences professionnelles*)⁴³⁴: The Cléa and Digital-Cléa (CléA numérique) devices allow people with no or few skills, and/or no or few qualifications to be able to take the Cléa assessment and therefore to have their occupational knowledge and skills assessed. In cases where all the skills assessed are acquired then the person will receive a certificate. In the event that certain skills are missing, the person will be able to follow a training and thus develop the missing skills.
- The Investment in Competences Plan or Investment in Skills Plan (PIC, *Plan d'investissement dans les compétences*)⁴³⁵: With the changes in the labour market, the changes in the nature and content of the jobs and the need to fight mass unemployment, competence is the keystone of sustainable and inclusive growth. The Skills Investment Plan thus reflects the French government's desire to change the course of action in public action in terms of access to vocational education and training and employment, through a logic of investment over several years and more contextualization to the skills needs of the territories. To this end, it mobilises nearly €15 billion Euros to: i) finance actions to develop the skills of low-skilled jobseekers and young people without qualifications, including people with disabilities and people from priority neighbourhoods of the city policy (QPV, *Quartiers prioritaires de la ville*) and Rural Regeneration Areas (ZRR, *Zones de revitalisation rurale*); ii) meet the recruitment needs of companies, particularly for occupations/trade-jobs that cannot find applicants (*métiers en tension*); iii) contribute to the transformation of skills: qualification of the workforce to respond to skills developments, in particular in connection with the digital transformation and the ecological transition.
- The Youth Guarantee / Youth Commitment Contract (CEJ, *Contrat d'engagement jeune*)⁴³⁶: The Youth Guarantee was introduced in 2017. The Youth Guarantee scheme is managed by the Ministry of Labour, through the Local Outreach Offices network (*Missions locales*). It is intended for young people under the age of 25 who have had little or no qualifications, who are neither in education nor in training and

⁴³³ <https://www.moncompteformation.gouv.fr/espace-prive/html/#/>

⁴³⁴ <https://www.certificat-clea.fr>

⁴³⁵ https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/le-ministere-en-action/pic/?TSPD_101_R0=087dc22938ab20004f3e0e186248464d8b93129a49dba8a1bbe10097de7a0f5a5468cdc4312159ba0876d80eec143000a44501f738112f91c71711f65b152c9fa7d29be98d09f41ef88a2ee897376e6e98324def7e3df4078caf21ebc79e9a

⁴³⁶ <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F32700>

whose resources do not exceed the ceiling of the Last Resort Benefit for young people (RSA, *Revenu de solidarité active*). Since 1 March 2022, the youth guarantee has been replaced by the Youth Commitment Contract (CEJ), which extends the scheme to jobseekers and young people who are not in a precarious situation.

- The Skills Development Plan⁴³⁷: The Skills Development Plan (formerly the Training Plan) is a document that brings together all the training actions adopted by a company/employer for all the employees. The law does not require the employer to put in place a Skills Development Plan, but there is a strong incentive for the employer to do so. The Skills Development Plan presented by the employer distinguishes two types of training actions: Mandatory training actions, in application of collective agreements or other specific agreements; Other training measures, known as non-compulsory. The Skills Development Plan may also provide for other actions: skills audit (*Bilan de compétences*); recognition of prior learning (VAE, *Validation des acquis de l'expérience*); fight against illiteracy.

There is no data on the changes created by the implementation of the Recommendation. With regard to the measures put in place by France somewhat connected to upskilling, there is a first mid-term review of the Investment in Skills Plan (PIC). The stock-taking exercise is less substantiated than what was expected because of the sanitary crisis. The target populations have been the same since 2013 – and the “500 000 training” Plan - fragile populations and those furthest away from the labour market.

There has not been any real impact of the Recommendation on upskilling policy in France, mainly because all the actions were already underway even before the Recommendation appeared. Nevertheless, the Recommendation has allowed France to realise that its policies were going in the right direction. Experts interviewed during the fieldwork have sometimes indicated that they were not aware of the content of the Recommendation, and for those who are aware of it, or have been in contact with the European Commission, the discussions often predate the adoption of the Recommendation.

6.3. Effectiveness

It is not possible to provide a meaningful assessment of the effectiveness of the Recommendation because France has not directly implemented the Recommendation as French policy was already focused on developing the skills of the least qualified people when the Recommendation was issued.

Nevertheless, the actions that have been put in place and that can align with the objectives defined by the Recommendation are positive. The “500,000 additional training” plan is a success for the Government. The Youth Guarantee has made it possible (Céreq work, MoE) to strengthen the employability of young people. The number of training courses for people with little or no qualifications has increased slightly thanks to the ILA-CPF (individual learning account: *Compte personnel de formation*). The number of people who have been able to benefit from the Professional Development Guidance (CEP, *Conseil en évolution professionnelle*) is increasing: 100,937 occupied participants to the labour market that were accompanied in 2020. This is more than in 2018 for these same audiences (the transition year, 2019, is not significant). The observation is promising given the context of a first year of installation and sanitary crisis⁴³⁸: The beneficiary profiles are not very far from what was observed in 2018, with in particular a significant share of employees of MSMEs (micro and small and medium-sized enterprises). The first mid-term review of the PIC shows⁴³⁹:

⁴³⁷ <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F11267>

⁴³⁸ <https://www.francecompetences.fr/fiche/cep-des-actifs-occupes-en-2020-un-premier-bilan-prometteur/>

⁴³⁹ <https://dares.travail-emploi.gouv.fr/publication/second-rapport-du-comite-scientifique-de-levaluation-du-plan-dinvestissement-dans-les-competences>

- Rapid and significant deployment of training for jobseekers: in 2019, there were 100,000 more entries in vocational training courses than in 2017 and just over 100,000 entries in new programmes created by the PIC to support the least qualified unemployed in a process of access to training. Thus, the rate of access to training for jobseekers one year after their registration increased from 8% to 11%.
- The training courses were organised through different actions, such as the Skills Preparation programme (*Prépa compétences*). Modularity and transitions were encouraged.
- The proportion of jobseekers who take several training courses in a year has increased by almost a third. But at the same time, the total cumulative training time per person changes little. Finally, the least qualified, the target of the programme, see their access to training increase, but no more than the other categories. A major effort is being made to articulate support and training for the benefit of these people, but it seems that it is difficult to change the individual mind-sets and the organisation of courses over a short time.

The target populations for upskilling in France are mainly young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and jobseekers. They have been identified as the target population because they are the most remote from the labour market. The figures show that they do not access employment because of insufficient skills and because they do not– or no longer – know how to return to the labour market. Transversal skills are becoming increasingly important in recruitment and these populations are often struggling to express their skills even if they have some. Reaching out to these target populations is not easy and this has been even more difficult with the health crisis. Digital and remote tools are not easy to use for people who have been far from education and training. Training is still used even more to develop the skills of qualified people (Matthew effect). Financial incentives for young people through the Youth Guarantee have proven helpful.

There have been no economic sectors that have been identified or targeted for the development of individuals' skills. Since guidance and support are provided at the local level, it is the local economic sectors that have been targeted.

The three steps identified in the Recommendation – assessment, targeted training, validation of learning outcomes – had been present in France's policies for a long time. It is not an approach that was developed specifically for implementation as a result of the Recommendation. France is now seeking to make progress in all three steps. One of the difficulties is reaching out to the targeted population and to allow entry into this three-step process. Indeed, there is a whole so-called 'invisible population' that does not have access to information, support and therefore to assessment, training and validation.

The main actors working in the implementation of the Recommendation are: the State, the regional authorities, the Local Outreach Offices, the Public Employment Service, the Transition Pro staff (specific Individual learning account, close to the CPF), the GRETA (Group of Establishments of the Ministry of Education), the unions.

The fieldwork reveals that actors and other key stakeholders find it difficult to work together. There is sometimes a power struggle in the implementation of actions. When people manage to exchange, the diagnoses are ultimately not shared. This lack of collaboration between the different actors is detrimental to end users. For example, some institutions do run taking stock activities, but there is no sharing.

In the early 2000s, the observation was that there were many actors around vocational education and training and coordination was therefore not effective. With this in mind, joint committees have been set up, such as the National Joint Committee on Employment and Vocational Training (CPNEFP, 2016), which is composed of trade union members and

employers' representatives. Subsequently, there was the development of the same committees at regional level. Their role has been to carry out analysis: they give recommendations on topics related to vocational education and training, qualification, employment or the development of partnerships. This body provides a forum for reflection, confrontation and sharing among the professional branches and the social partners.

The Law for the Freedom to Choose a Vocational Future (2018) attempts to centralise the actors and other key stakeholders to best meet the complexity of the challenges of the reform of vocational training and training (with the creation of *France Compétence*, the new body overseeing all vocational education and training). There are six actors (financial and/or operational) involved in the development of competences and especially vocational education and training: the State, *France Compétences*, the Regional Authorities, the Operators of Competence (OPCOs), the Transition Pro associations (for long term qualifying/training individual projects), the professional branches, the private companies. All these actors make it possible to implement competences development policies, and at different levels. *France compétences* is the only national governance body that ensures the financing, regulation and improvement of the VET system. The governance of *France compétence* is quadripartite: it is composed of the State, the Regional Authorities, the trade unions of employees and employers' representative at national and inter-professional level, and qualified personalities. Thanks to this structure, actors can exchange at the national level. On the other hand, actors at the local level believe that exchanges are rare and that studies are not shared. When the various schemes are set up, the social partners, government and employer representatives exchange a great deal. On the other hand, there are no real exchanges between all the partners.

In France, there are guidance services dedicated to supporting people wishing to develop their skills. Again, these services existed prior to the Recommendation. What has been developed is:

- Professional Development Guidance (CEP, *Conseil en évolution professionnelle*) has been a free service since the Law on the Freedom to Choose a Vocational Future(2018). This service allows each participant in the labour market – employed or not – to have the opportunity to take stock of their occupational situation. It makes it possible to develop, formalise and implement a strategy aimed at professional development, integration in employment, skills development, achievement of a vocational qualification, internal or external mobility, retraining/reskilling, occupational transition, resumption or creation of activity. The counsellors depend on the Public Employment Service (Pôle emploi), the Public Employment Service for executive professionals (Association pour l'emploi des cadres, APEC), the Local Outreach Offices (Missions locales), placement organisations (Cap emploi), or on any operator appointed by France Compétences, the body that oversees technical vocational education and training in France since 2018.
- Information and Guidance Centre (CIO, *Centres d'information et d'orientation*). This public service is provided by the Ministry of Education. It welcomes young people and adults. They are oftentimes sent to the “1 youth 1 solution” scheme.
- The Public Employment Service (*Pôle emploi*) supports jobseekers to guide them towards skills development schemes.
- Competence Operators (OPCO, *Opérateurs de compétences*): employees can contact their OPCO to be provided with guidance regarding the choice and financing of their training if they wish to do so.
- Local Outreach Offices (*Missions Locales*): welcome young people aged 16-25. Young people find there counsellors who will help them in all the steps relating to employment and training, to design a pathway to access employment, to be guided

in terms of training and/or to understand the possibilities of help to facilitate the success in these endeavours.

Overall, the flagship schemes have been the Investment in Competences Plan (PIC), the CléA, and the ILA-CPF. The PIC cannot be evaluated in terms of effectiveness – whether the activities achieve its objectives – because the sanitary crisis has led to a situation where many activities have been postponed. The objective was to train two million individuals between 2018 and 2022, and this objective is not met yet. The CléA is also difficult to evaluate in terms of effectiveness because no objectives were set at all at the onset. Nevertheless, the CléA is regularly appraised as successful since the number of CléA certificate delivered in all the Regions – the responsible authority is the Regional Council – is deemed significant, e.g., 1005 certificates awarded in the Region Ile-de-France in 2020 despite the lockdown. The ILA-CPF is among the most systematically scheme put forward as quantitatively successful, even beyond expectations (even if no objectives were set here either). After the reform of the ILA-CPF – from November 2019 to June 2021 –, the figures show that: 8.5 million ILA-CPF were activated/created/opened (compared to 29.6 million individuals in the labour force); there were 2.31 million validated registrations for a learning activity (this number can include multiple registrations per individual), i.e., 7.8% of the labour force, to be compared to 18.8% of the population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training (Eurostat, 2018⁴⁴⁰), with a drop-out rate of 10% for these 2.31 million; there were 3.1 million downloads of the smartphone application *moncompteformation*; 232,990 users (roughly 10%) have made an individual top-up to their accounts to complement their funds available to be able to purchase training (via their credit card); 1 263 EUR is the average price of a learning activity purchased through the CPF; 2.92 billion EUR is the total cost (2.31 billion x 1 263); and there were 13.5 million unique clicks on the CPF platform.

6.4. Efficiency

It is challenging to assess the efficiency criterion for France. As mentioned above on several occasions, France has not entered into a process of directly implementing the Recommendation. The instruments and schemes described in the Recommendation were already in existence before, or were developed way after, the Recommendation. There is no match in terms of timing.

The European Social Fund (ESF) are used at local and regional levels to support projects meant to support and develop the skills of people the furthest away from the labour market.

The French State invests a lot of money in skills development. This involves subsidizing many instruments and schemes. There are financial incentives for companies, such as for the Individual Operational Preparation for Employment (POEC, *Préparation opérationnelle à l'emploi individuelle*) for jobseekers and for individuals involved in the dual system. There are no real financial incentives for the target population. Jobseekers can take training to increase their skills. These trainings are either supported by the ILA-CPF or, for jobseekers, by the Public Employment Service (*Pôle emploi*). They do not receive any additional grant, but they continue to receive their daily allowance for the duration of the training or internship in a company (unemployment benefits when they are jobseekers and qualify for unemployment benefits for instance). For young people, Local Outreach Offices (*Missions locales*) also offer allowances for young people⁴⁴¹ during their period of guidance and Local Outreach Offices finance certain training programmes. It may therefore be seen as an incentive.

⁴⁴⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.pHN?title=Archive:Statistiques_sur_l'apprentissage_des_adultes&oldid=410024

⁴⁴¹ https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/le-ministere-en-action/relevance-activite/plan-1jeune-1solution/1-jeune-1-solution-mesures-jeunes/article/remuneration-des-stagiaires-de-la-formation-professionnelle?TSPD_101_R0=087dc22938ab2000095d34e4c435dd55d2fda10244c31499ffc55a1d4738277f98c1c8b2400efe3708f93c4923143000ca2e9bc112aec357cebefa40ac487f823dcb4066cba61241a65d6d88da3864db13b9cb916834531f44d91d6e34b66815

As regards the costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation, it is not possible to provide it for France; the instruments and schemes being either in existence before the Recommendation or developed autonomously by actors or other key stakeholders.

In terms of costs associated with the implementation of upskilling activities – regardless of the Recommendation – it is important to emphasise that all the instruments and schemes put in place by France came with a substantial budget. However, since the target populations were in deprived situations, the results are sometimes different from the expectations given the extent of the investment: the gap was too important to fill, even with a significant budget. The overall conclusion is that this type of action has a great social weight and support is expensive for sometimes few visible results. The PIC, for example, mobilises nearly 15 billion Euros with an objective to train 2 million low-skilled and unskilled jobseekers and/or young people disconnected from the labour market. This PIC reflects both the desire to focus on skills/competences, and to demonstrate that not everything is over at the end of initial education and training. It aims at leaving no one behind and to transform the vocational training system to support the competitiveness of companies. The budget provided for the GRETA to provide CléA is 600 euros per person. This investment is positive in view of the number of CléA certificates that is increasing and that prove that the CléA certificate and more and more often recognised in the labour market. For example, in 2020, more than 1'000 CléA certificates were awarded by Transitions Pro (a specific component of the ILA-CPF) in the Region Ile-de-France (where Paris is), which is an increase of 16% compared to 2019 despite the health crisis⁴⁴². Finally, each ILA-CPF receive 500 euros per year (800 euros for at risk people, e.g., people poorly qualified) for a maximum of ten years, i.e., 5000 to 8000 euros per person to be spent on training. The most recent figures indicate 38 million potential beneficiaries. For unemployed people between July 2020 and June 2021 for example, there were 656,741 validated registrations (of whom 601,287 are autonomous, i.e., not prescribed by the Public Employment Service for example); This is 34.5% of all validated registrations. 777 million EUR is the total cost (630.44 million for autonomous learners); This is 31.8% of all validated registrations. The financing comes from *France Compétence* (83.9%), the Public Employment Service (*Pôle emploi*, 10.3%) and others (5.8%). In short, the figures changed from 1,992 validated registrations in July 2020 to 50,911 in June 2021 (respectively 3 million EUR and 80 million EUR), with a steady trend upward since then.

6.5. Relevance

All the actions undertaken by France to develop the skills of people furthest from the labour market show that the Recommendation is relevant or very relevant.. However, in the case of France, the Recommendation may not have the same relevance as for some other European countries, precisely because France was already looking for instruments and schemes, and for a plan to develop the skills of jobseekers and young people with little or no qualifications, beforehand. The Recommendation remains relevant in the sense that it has made it possible to stimulate a new positive dynamic, and to obtain funding from Europe for the implementation of the actions.

The different measures and objectives of the Recommendation are still relevant. The health crisis has disrupted the training sector for a year, but the institutions responsible for the target populations have remained active and have sought to adapt to the new situation (e.g., lockdown). As mentioned above, the development of skills for the individuals with no or few skills nor qualifications requires the identification of its people, providing them with information and accompanying them before and all along the training process. To illustrate this, we can quote: “basic skills such as digital ones are quite topical”. As the health crisis has disrupted usual face-to-face training methods, a good command of the basic digital technology has proved essential. In addition, for example, France is increasingly developing

⁴⁴² <https://www.defi-metiers.fr/brevet/plus-de-1-000-certificats-clea-delivres-par-transitions-pro-ile-de-france-en-2020>

training and learning at the workplace (AFEST, *Action de formation en situation de travail*), which is not related to the traditional dual system. This training modality has been put forward by the 2018 law on the “freedom to choose a vocational future” as a key lever for the development of skills. Finally, France continues to develop free guidance services to inform, guide and support individuals.

The target population remains consistent with what was proposed in 2016. Jobseekers are still at the heart of skills development policy as evidenced by the PIC. Young people are also a key target. For example, the Minister of Education passed a law to bring compulsory schooling to the age of 18 (instead of 16 previously), or rather young people have an obligation to own a qualification if they want to leave school after 16 and before 18.

6.6. Coherence

As noted above, upskilling policy in France was already well underway before the Recommendation. Nevertheless, discussions at European level have likely made it possible to improve/amend these policies in line with the objectives of the Recommendation.

There is a strong coherence between what the Recommendation aims to achieve and how, and what has been developed in France in terms of upskilling policies. The main points of the Recommendation are consistent with French policy objectives in this area. The national and regional skills development policy is very coherent on several points:

- CléA and Digital-CléA: France has developed these two tools in order to provide people with little or no qualification with the opportunity to have their skills assessed, and to be able to follow an adapted training to fill the gaps that may have been highlighted by the initial assessment. As a result of this, people receive a certificate. CléA was developed with the help of the professional branches. Trade unions also participated in its development. These principles are consistent with the logic of the Recommendation.
- The Investment in Competences Plan (PIC): this major plan, which is a national plan but governed at the regional level, is an example of support for the implementation of the Recommendation. Thanks to PIC, training programmes for young people and the unemployed have been able to evolve and adapt to targeted populations. France is in the dynamic advocated by the European Union to be able to offer training that is the most flexible.
- Development of training and learning at the workplace (AFEST, *Action de formation en situation de travail*): learning in the workplace is in development in France, as mentioned above; and AFEST have received a lot of attention, including in research spheres⁴⁴³.
- Professional Development Guidance (CEP, *Conseil en évolution professionnelle*): this free service is accessible to all employees and also to jobseekers. In France, support and guidance are seen as important levers for better integration in employment. As mentioned above, people have access to several public guidance and support services in the construction of their training project (*CIO, Transition Pro, Mission Locale, Pôle emploi*, for example).

The European Union supports projects for skills development. Many projects developed in the context of the PIC have benefited from ESF support to be rolled out. European funds are not used in the policy development of the implementation of the Recommendation, but they support the actions resulting from it, particularly at regional level. For example, for the youngest (up to 27 years-old) Local Outreach Offices can provide guidance before and

⁴⁴³ <https://formation-adultes.cnam.fr/actualites/l-afest-cadrages-et-debordements-1275358.kjsp?RH=comcult>

accompany young people during their training and upskilling journey so that they find a job. This period of support includes periods of immersion in companies, participation in training, assessment of young people's skills. Local missions rely on ESF and Erasmus+ funding.

6.7. European Union added value

As mentioned above, France implemented its upskilling policy without explicitly or directly following the 2016 Recommendation. In particular, several key actions, schemes and/or programmes had been designed and started to be implemented in 2015. All communications around upskilling were funded by the Government. As an example, for young people: "1 youth 1 solution" was advertised on different channels, communication documents were developed at the national level and were then declined at the regional level. Indeed, it is the Regional Authorities that are mandated for the development of skills and especially the guidance and training programmes going with it.

Nonetheless, as noted above, a degree of EU added value was generated by the Recommendation in terms of supporting in the consolidation of existing actions, confirming that existing and new actions were going in the right direction, and ensuring that EU funding sources in France were available for upskilling. European aid (such as ESF) has made it possible to set projects and programmes in motion, at the regional level in particular; even if it is difficult to provide a precise breakdown of the sources of the resources. Actions for the development of upskilling have also been the subject of calls for tenders for not-for-profit organisations (associations) or others to make it possible to promote the training and upskilling of young people.

6.8. Counterfactual impact evaluation

No data or existing studies were available to conduct a counterfactual impact evaluation of the implementation of the Recommendation. The monitoring and evaluation of the instruments and schemes set in motion in the context of the Recommendation and the upskilling of the population (mainly jobseekers, and at-risk young people) is a point to improve in France. It seems that the health crisis has delayed the assessment of the PIC however, even independently of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is always difficult to access comprehensive monitoring and evaluation.

6.9. Overall assessment

The development of the skills of people with low or no qualifications or skills has been at the heart of French policies for many years. The last decade has seen several reforms of vocational education and training which have continued in this direction. Skills development is at the heart of vocational integration policies, and policies are mainly directed towards those who are the furthest away from the labour market, i.e. jobseekers and especially long-term jobseekers, young people who have left the school system with little or no qualifications (early dropouts) and people with a low level of qualification.

As such, France had put in place actions to develop upskilling before the European Recommendation. This is not to say that the Recommendation had no impact, but the response should be seen more in terms of the consolidation of the measures already in place – rather than in terms of triggering a specific new response – in particular thanks to financial aid from the EU.

The three steps set out in the Recommendation are in place in France and at the centre of the global approach: assessment of skills (e.g., CléA), offering flexible and adapted solutions (e.g., PIC, Cléa, Youth Commitment Contract, CEJ, *Contrat engagement jeune*), and validation (e.g., recognition of prior learning, RPL-VAE, *Validation des acquis de l'expérience*; CléA; ILA-CPF; Qualifications Catalogue, RNCP, *Répertoire national des*

certifications professionnelles, with now qualifications can be achieved up to 29 of age for certain populations through apprenticeship).

Cooperation between the various actors and other key stakeholders is not very effective in France. The State, the Regional Authorities, the social partners and the industry sectors are the main players in skills development. Unfortunately, there are no forums that allow all these stakeholders to meet on a regular basis to discuss skills development issues.

There are various measures that have been put in place since 2016 which are in line with the Recommendation, even if they were not developed in response to it. These include from example the Individual learning account (ILA-CPF, *Compte personnel de formation*), CléA and Digigal-CléA (Vocational Knowledge and Competences Certificate, *Certificat de connaissances et de compétences professionnelles*), the Investment in Competences Plan or Investment in Skills Plan (PIC, *Plan d'investissement dans les compétences*) and the Youth Guarantee / Youth Commitment Contract (CEJ, *Contrat d'engagement jeune*).

Although there has not been any major impact of the Recommendation on upskilling policy in France (mainly because all the actions were already underway before the Recommendation), it allowed France to realise that its policies were going in the right direction.

In general, while it is relatively easy to describe upskilling schemes and programmes, and to discuss some of their merits, proper monitoring and evaluation of upskilling schemes and programmes in France in relation to the 2016 Recommendation remains difficult since:

- There are no public sources of monitoring and evaluation..
- There is no time coincidence between the upskilling schemes/programmes and the 2016 Recommendation.

6.10. ANNEX I: List of interviewed stakeholders

- AFPA General Delegate of the offer
- GRETA
- High Commissioner for Competences (HCC) - Ministry of Labour
- Ministry of Education. Bureau for occupational High school, apprenticeship and C-VET

7. Case study Hungary

7.1. National operating context

The period of 2017 – 2022 is mostly characterised by the design and implementation of the major transformation of VET and AL systems in Hungary. The VET4.0 Strategy was adopted by the Government in 2019 (Government Decree 1168/2019. (III. 28.)), which was followed by the adoption of the new Vocational Training Act in 2019, as well as the amended Adult Training Act in 2020. The fast-paced implementation of major strategic measures and regulatory changes, including reform of the governing system⁴⁴⁴ was considered as the highest priority and demanded the concentrated effort of government units and stakeholders. The new policies and structures developed also comprise a changing context for the implementation of COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION.

Under the Digital Success Programme⁴⁴⁵, the Digital Education Strategy of Hungary (adopted in 2016) is a distinct pillar for Adult Education and Training included initiatives to raise the general level of digital competences of the citizens. The Digital Workforce Programme (2017) developed together with industry representatives, drew attention to the widening skills gap in the labour market and initiated a coordinated government action plan. The National Digitalisation Strategy 2021-2030 (2019) as overarching strategy for promoting the digital transformation, highlights the need for development of the digital competence of citizens, including improving the training opportunities for adults. The strategy translated already to actions in the Government Decree 1783/2021. (XI.5.) on 'Operational Programme on Digital Renewal Plus'. 'Social Close Up' programmes and 'Public Work Schemes' are run under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior and co-financed by ESF. In 2021 specific regulation was adopted for delivering training in these complex social inclusion programmes targeting primarily the Roma population and multiple disadvantaged regions in order to ensure meeting the specific needs of the target groups, including basic skills (Government Decree 311/2021).

In 2016, the share of adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling is estimated to range between 31.6% and 40.4% of the total adult population, that is to say from 1.7 to 2.2 million adults (CEDEFOP, 2018). The part of the population who completed primary education at the most is 16,6%, 893.000 persons, which is better than the EU average (20,7%). Although the same Cedefop report highlighted, the proportion of those who with low level of digital skills are higher than the EU average. Concerns regarding the high volume of population lacking basic digital skills were also reinforced by the DESI index, the proportion of those having at least basic digital skills only 50% compared to 56% EU average, which ranks Hungary 19 in 2016, well below the EU average. Cedefop report identifies groups at highest risk of low skills, particularly older age people (55-64) as well as unemployed and inactive people.

The OECD Survey of Adults Skills (PIAAC) survey was conducted from August 2017 to April 2018, and results published in 2019 (NOVETAL, 2019a). The main conclusions of the survey are: the proportion of low performing adults in Hungary is close to the OECD average in the case of literacy (18,5/19.7%) and problem-solving in technology rich environments (42,6/43%) but lower than the average for numeracy (17,7%/23,5%). The difference in the proficiency of high and low educated adults in both literacy and numeracy is greater than the OECD average. Few Roma young people manage to obtain secondary qualifications,

⁴⁴⁴ Establishment of the VET Innovation Council (<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/hungary-vet-innovation-council-new-driver-change-vocational-training-0>) and the Sectoral Skills Councils (<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/hungary-sectoral-skills-councils-linking-quality-vet-jobs>) ensures high level of stakeholder involvement in the governing of VET and Adult Training systems in Hungary. Responsibilities regarding vocational education and training as well as adult training were also reorganised in between ministries and ministerial unit during the period, which also had an impact on the implementation responsibilities for UPR.

⁴⁴⁵ More information about Digital Success Programme 1.0 and 2.0: <https://digitalisjoletprogram.hu/en/about>

2/3 of the 18-24 years old left secondary education without completion (Central Statistical Office, 2019a).

Participation of the low qualified in Lifelong Learning (within the 4 weeks prior to the survey) was clearly below the benchmark (IV: 2.7 %) and the participation rate across all levels of educational attainment was only moderately high (6.3 %) and strongly below the LLL-benchmark (15 %). Up to 2019, participation in Lifelong Learning of the low qualified has even decreased (by 0.2 percentage points to 2.5 %), as well as the overall participation rate did (by 0.5 percentage points to 5.8 %), ranked 22nd out of 28 EU countries⁴⁴⁶.

Implementation of COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION challenged by long standing scepticism and refusal toward adult training in general in HU, the lack of awareness of impacts of lacking skills, especially basic skills both in public as well as among businesses. There are certain elements in THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION which are not sufficiently developed in the current adult learning system: including lifelong guidance accessible for people with low skills, limitations in supply especially in basic skills learning, opportunities for professional development for adult educators, opportunities for the formal validation of skills is still very limited.

7.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

As interviewers highlighted [HU1, HU3, HU5], the national approach was determined by the fact, that the Council Recommendation arrived in the middle of the funding period of the multiannual financial framework, MFF 2014-2020. In HU the overwhelming majority of policy measures and programmes in corresponding policy areas like labour market, education and social inclusion are planned and implemented through the operational programmes established under MFF⁴⁴⁷, which channelise EU structural funds and co-financing national funds into priority areas of development. In 2017, most of the resources was already committed to ongoing programmes up to 2021⁴⁴⁸, which left limited space for more comprehensive interventions. In this context the decision of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology⁴⁴⁹ was to select a particular priority target group and develop an upskilling pathway model for them in full compliance with the Council Recommendation, which, based on the piloting experiences can potentially be scaled up in the upcoming MFF period 2021-27. The selected target group was employees with low qualification and low skills in SMEs.

Funded within the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme, EDIOP, a measure called 'Developing labour market competences in convergence regions'⁴⁵⁰ [HU#1] was already in progress of implementation by the Association for Lifelong Learning, was selected and extended with a dedicated component called "Skills Guarantee". The

⁴⁴⁶ Statistics on participation rate is rather contradictory regarding Hungary, as contrary to the presented data from labour force survey the latest AES survey indicates participation rate (in the last 12 months in 2016) which was well above the EU average: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Participation_rate_in_education_and_training_\(last_4_weeks_-_2020_-_and_last_12_months_-_2016\)_\(%25_of_persons_aged_25-64\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Participation_rate_in_education_and_training_(last_4_weeks_-_2020_-_and_last_12_months_-_2016)_(%25_of_persons_aged_25-64).png)

⁴⁴⁷ EDIOP - Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme. The programme co-financed by ESF, ERDF and YEI under MFF 2014-2020 covering six regions eligible for cohesion funds (convergence regions) out of 7 regions in total in Hungary. CCHOP - Competitive Central Hungary Operational Programme - distinct operational programme for Central Hungary Region financed from national and EU resources. Central Hungary (including Budapest) was not eligible for cohesion funds under MFF 2014-2020. Many programmes financed parallel from EDIOP and CCHOP in order to cover all regions in Hungary.

⁴⁴⁸ In the 2019 UP Implementation Report (European Commission, 2019), Hungary reported the most relevant measures already in place (i.e. prior to the 2016 baseline), with 17 relevant measures identified.

⁴⁴⁹ In HU, the Ministry for Innovation and Technology takes the overall responsibility for implementation of UPR, however Ministry of Human Resources responsible for public education and for those arrangements for adults ensuring formal completion of primary education and general secondary education. Ministry for Interior responsible for social inclusion programmes for groups with more complex needs. For example "Actively for Knowledge" offered basic skills and other labour market competences for low educated adults in 18-55 age group with multiple disadvantages under the Human Resources Operational Programme. <https://tef.gov.hu/projektek/>

⁴⁵⁰ The programme focused on the six convergence regions (out of seven in Hungary, Pest County including Budapest is not in the scope of EDIOP, because that is the most developed region).

additional component aimed at developing and piloting an upskilling pathway model incorporating the three-step approach for SME employees, including a toolbox which fits into the implementation context of the programme. It was also expected that the pilot experience will feed a concept development and description of the National Basic Skills System (NBS). With this amendment the programme has become the dedicated priority measure of implementing the Council Recommendation in HU (Government of Hungary, 2016, 'EDIOP-6.1.4-16 Developing Labour Market Competences in the Convergence Region').

The scheme [HU#1] in its mainstream service offered learning programmes to active age citizens to develop key competences like ICT, languages, soft skills for workplace productivity which were provided through community-based open learning centres, on-site in company premises and via the e-learning platform of the Association for Lifelong Learning. The number of participants in the programme over the implementation period 2016 – 2022 was 30,000, with 25,000 completed courses. The additional 'Skills Guarantee' component⁴⁵¹ has contributed to the translation of steps 1 and 2 and partly step 3 of the Recommendation into the specific context of open learning centres working with SMEs. SME employees accessing the 'Skills Guarantee' component are completing a digital-self assessment tool to assess basic skills and other key competences. Tailored learning opportunities were provided in local community learning centres as well as online, but highly customised courses were also delivered at workplaces.

Beside this dedicated initiative, another direct measure was taken within the Erasmus+ programme for National Coordinators for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (2017-19) [HU#2] to raise awareness on the Council Recommendation and to facilitate the national implementation. The project included the compilation of a State of the Play Report for supporting the national implementation of the Council Recommendation, taking stock of previous and ongoing programmes, available human and institutional resources and assets for building UP-s in HU, as well as collected available data on UP target groups in HU. The project also identified relevant stakeholders at policy level and invited representatives of corresponding policy areas, key governing bodies, the economy and businesses, NGOs to raise awareness and facilitate cohesive approaches. With their participation a series of 4 workshops were conducted by EBSN⁴⁵² to identify existing building blocks and gaps as well as to find inspiring international approaches and fitting practices. Project results were shared toward wider professional public on 2 national and 6 regional conferences.

Additionally, as part of the review of ongoing national programmes several longstanding programmes targeting adults with low education and low skills were considered as partly in compliance with the Council Recommendation. No changes were implemented in these programmes upon the adoption of the Recommendation, but several interviewees [HU1, HU3, HU4] noted these programmes as corresponding to the national implementation of the Council Recommendation.

'Training of the low-skilled and those employed in public work schemes' [HU#3] addressed step 2 in the Recommendation, through allowing individual learning plans to accommodate personal preferences, with exemptions from completion of certain modules in case prior knowledge is certified. This certification process fulfils some of the step 3 validation requirement, although it is not possible to validate whole qualifications but only parts or modules could be validated by training providers in this measure. Over the course of the programme (2015-2021), more than 100,000 participants accessed training with 68,000

⁴⁵¹ Introduction to the 'Skills Guarantee' offer on the programme's website: https://nyitok.hu/nyitok_keszseggarancia

⁴⁵² The policy support mechanism created by the National Coordinator project was presented on the the annual EBSN conference in Tallin in 2019: 'Policy Support for the Implementation of Upskilling Pathways in Hungary', EBSN, 2019. https://basicskills.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Workshop2.3_Zolt%C3%A1n-V%C3%A1rkonyi-and-Enik%C5%91-Jarmaczki_Policy-Support-for-the-Implementation-of-Upskilling-Pathways-in-Hungary-1.pdf

successfully completing training, of which 64.000 people were those with a low educational level.

The 'Combating the Digital Gap Project' [HU#4] contributed to the provision of steps 2 of the Recommendation by offering attractive entering courses to the digital world. Courses were linked to competences at level 1 and 2 included the digital competence framework and adapted to learner groups' contexts and needs by the training providers. Only those who successfully completed level 1 could enter the course at level 2. Overall, the project involved 260,000 people, with the number of people successfully completing digital competence development training being 234,000.

The 'Improving the quality and content of 21st century vocational training and adult education' project [HU#5] contributed to the provision of steps 2 and 3 in the implementation period, with one component of the project focussing on the development and testing of validation procedures, methods and toolsets. Overall, the project had the aim of contributing to the systemic development of VET and Adult Education and did not follow an integrated approach to upskilling, although many different project outputs and outcomes can be used as building blocks to support the Recommendation. The validation tools were tested by 300-400 participants.

There is no evidence of significant changes and shifts in policies upon the adoption of the Council Recommendation. However, Interviewees [HU1, HU3, HU5] emphasized that the Recommendation generated higher attention to the upskilling challenges of low educated and low-skilled population, raised awareness on the needs for more targeted policies.

There is no evidence on how the Council Recommendation influence new policy design. Planning of new programmes for the new MFF 2021-27 already in progress, but interviewees had no information about details of programmes addressing the target population. By the end of 2020, the concept of the National Basic Skills Development System (NBS) was finalised⁴⁵³ by the Association for Lifelong Learning as an outcome of [HU#1], which was also discussed with and endorsed by the Ministry for Information and Technology. The paper outlines a comprehensive approach on how upskilling pathways can be introduced in a more systemic way, integrating community learning, vocational education and training and workplace learning in the SME context, which offers a variety of pathways and stepstones to address individual needs with the ultimate purpose of leading to upper secondary qualification.

7.3. Effectiveness

In Hungary, important steps were made in designing and building upskilling pathways, however systemic integration and mainstream implementation remained for the following financing period. Systemic implementation of Council Recommendation is challenged by structural development needs, like delays in introducing national validation system, lack of accessibility to lifelong guidance for adults with low skills as well as limitations of existing programme funding.

As a response to the the Council Recommendation, SME Employees with low qualification and low skills were identified as priority target group in Hungary. SMEs constitute 99% of all enterprises in HU, 70% of the labour force (i.e. 2,1 million employees) employed by SMEs (Central Statistical Office, 2019b), but produce less than 50% of GDP. Based on national survey, only 38% of SMEs supported employee training compared to 91% of larger enterprises (Central Statistical Office, 2016). Comparative analyses on international competitiveness highlight training as major factor where Hungarian SMEs lagging behind (ENDRŐDI-KOVÁCS, V. – NAGY, S., 2022). SME employees are least supported and got fewest chances to get into training on the Hungarian labour market. At the same time there

⁴⁵³ Description of the national basic skills system: https://nyitok.hu/nemzeti_alapkeszsegfejlesztési_rendszer

are no established channels to reach out to this group, and there is a complexity of organisational and personal barriers to overcome.

Beside SME employees there were other highlighted target groups with low level of skills and education who were already addressed by policy measures before the Council Recommendation adopted, and considered to be relevant also in the context of the implementation of the Council Recommendation. 50% of participants of public work schemes completed only primary education, further 10% even less. [HU#3] measure started already in 2015 and reached out to more than 100.000 participants by 2021, two third of them female, one third belonging to the Roma population. Local PES offices, who had long standing personal relations to many of the public work scheme participants had a key role in recruiting them for training. It was intended to prioritise those living in disadvantaged regions or remote areas, where access to training is even more difficult. The other long-standing challenge has been to ensure at least basic digital skills for the 50% of the working age population, cc. 2,5 million people. [HU#4] measure reached 260.000 active age citizens without basic digital skills and offered introductory courses. Most of the participants had no more than elementary education. The programme incorporated incentives for locally based training providers and institutions to reach out to target groups in the surrounding local communities. Critical feature was in successfully reaching out to this high volume of people that trainings were available locally or in a very close vicinity, sometimes organised in community places or workplaces, so even people in remote areas could get access to essential digital skills.

In Hungary, legislation supports skills assessment, tailored learning, and recognition of prior learning as part of the adult training provision. However, it is rarely implemented in an integrated way as introduced by the Council Recommendation. Programmes started before the adoption of the Council Recommendation, like [HU#3] and [HU#4] included only certain elements of the three-step approach, but [HU#1] was specifically designated to work out a three-step model in its implementation context.

In [HU#3], Participants of Public Work Schemes are invited to take part in a need assessment consultation in which they can express their choice of preference for trainings. Basic skills programmes are recommended by mentors based on the consultation. In [HU#1] within the 'Skills Guarantee' component a self-assessment tool focusing on key competences and basic skills was developed and integrated into a digital platform. By filling out the questionnaire learners raise awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses and develop individual learning plan in consultation with the learning counsellor. Participants are encouraged to revisit the self-assessment questionnaire after their learning plan completed to assess their own progression.

National programmes directed at persons with low level of skills and education were making efforts to ensure certain level of customisation of learning offers towards individual situation and interest. But programmes are often limited in accesibility in time and place as well as in their range of learning offers. The programme funding mechanism does not support designing learning pathways across different programmes. Basic skills programmes are offered if the local provider is prepared to deliver. Adjustment of course level to the level of basic skills of the participants highly depend on the preparedness of the teachers⁴⁵⁴.

[HU#1] represent a good example for offering customised learning opportunities. SME employees taking part in the 'Skills Guarantee' programme can choose from 60-70 short, 20 to 30-hour learning programmes. All the programmes aim at developing key competences in different contexts which can help learners to better orientate themselves on the labour market and function at the workplace. Flexibility in delivery is also highly important, courses can take place in the workplace as agreed with the employer and the

⁴⁵⁴ The recently adopted legislation on complex social close up training ensures highly customised support for the upskilling of Roma and other multiple disadvantaged groups with low educational background, who could benefit from it in the programmes launched under the MFF 2021-27.

participants, but also in the open learning centres scheduled as agreed. Some cases participants prefer on-line training or self-paced e-learning. As self-confidence grow, participants can design their upskilling pathway toward the vocational system.

In general, recognition of prior learning is encouraged by law, but rarely practiced, as it has to be initiated by the learner and carry out by the training provider. The national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning is not introduced yet in HU, although its components are being constructed⁴⁵⁵. This causes limitations in designing and building upskilling pathways solutions fully in compliance with the Council Recommendation.

In [HU#1] SME employees taking part in the 'Skills Guarantee' programme skills assessment is transferred into a personal portfolio visualising also skills gained through informal and non-formal learning. Completing learning programmes specific skills guarantee certificate is awarded acknowledging skills obtained as well as progression in the learning pathways, which eventually will become integral part of the personal portfolio. The personal portfolio also as an HR tool introduced to SMEs on the local labour market, enabling them to make use of the complete skillset of the employees, as well as to facilitate recruitment processes.

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders at national level were facilitated by the [HU#2] National Coordinators for the Implementation of EAAL (2017-19) project. Experts delegated by government units belonging to different Ministries, national chambers, business associations as well as professional bodies represented in the VET Innovation Council⁴⁵⁶ were invited to consult the State of the Play Report as well as to take part in a series of international workshops as part of the for the implementation of the Council Recommendation in Hungary.

Outreach as well as guidance and/or mentoring services typically implemented relevant in the context of the measures. Outside of the programmes, lifelong guidance service designed for adults especially with low qualifications is not available in HU yet.

As a response of the Council Recommendation, in [HU#1] the national network of open learning centres coordinated by the Association for Lifelong Learning was exploited as a platform for reaching out to SME employees. The network consisting of 52 local units, each employs a learning counsellor, whose role was to reach out to companies and individuals in the surrounding small regions. Local learning partnerships were also initiated with representatives of businesses, municipalities and community organisations. The network also employed mobile coordinators to reach out to SMEs beyond the scope of the local centres. Learning counsellors supported skills assessment and guided learners to design their individual learning plans.

In [HU#4] *Combating the Digital Divide*, beside training providers the Digital Success Network with 1415 spots and 1600 'digital success mentors' had an important role in getting 260.000 adults with low digital skills on board to enter into basic digital skills training.

Monitoring of progress and implementation of measures supporting upskilling were integrated into the monitoring mechanisms of EU social fund as defined by regulation. Priority measure [HU#1] selected to implement "Skills Guarantee" model was closely monitored by Ministry for Innovation and Technology to ensure compliance with the Council Recommendation. However, there are no specific arrangements for monitoring and

⁴⁵⁵ Within measure [HU#5] comprehensive assessment methodology has been developed and tested by 300-400 individuals to support the launch of the national validation system.

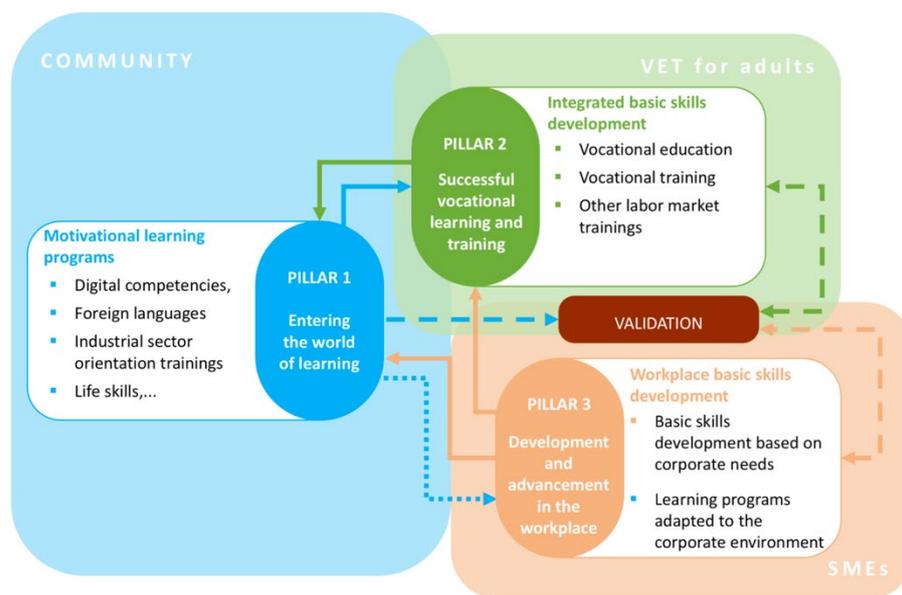
⁴⁵⁶ VET Innovation Council (<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/hungary-vet-innovation-council-new-driver-change-vocational-training-0>) is the strategic governing body for VET and Adult Training, involving government representatives from a number of policy areas, economy, professional bodies as well as social partners.

evaluation of the implementation of the Council Recommendation involving also other stakeholders.

By the end of 2020, the concept of the National Basic Skills Development System (NBS) was finalised⁴⁵⁷ by the Association for Lifelong Learning as an outcome of [HU#1], which was developed in consultation with and endorsed by the Ministry for Information and Technology. The paper outlines a comprehensive approach on how upskilling pathways can be introduced in a more systemic way, integrating community learning, vocational education and training and workplace learning in the SME context, which offers a variety of pathways and stepstones to address individual needs with the ultimate purpose of leading to upper secondary qualification.

Figure A4_16 Support of Upskilling Pathways in NBS

Support of Upskilling Pathways in the NBS



The aim of the document is to provide a strategic approach and systemic framework for the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. The three pillars of the system description provide an opportunity for competence development in three main life situations:

- Pillar 1 of the NBS provides low-threshold entry into the world of learning for those who have not been in education and training for a long time and therefore face a lot of uncertainty and doubt.
- Pillar 2 of the NBS promotes successful accomplishment of vocational education and training for adults and the prevention of dropping out through personalized basic skills development and support, and through the development of the basic skills-conscious policy and operation of the education / training institution.
- Pillar 3 of the NBS supports adaptation to workplace expectations and changes through workplace basic skills learning tailored to company needs.

There is no information about actual plans of implementation in the new period of MFF.

⁴⁵⁷ Executive summary of the concept also available in English at: https://nyitok.hu/nemzeti_alapkeszsegfejlesztési_rendszer

7.4. Efficiency

HU exploited established measures and implementation platforms under the European Social Fund operation for the implementation of the Council Recommendation. High number of individuals could get access to relevant upskilling opportunities free of charge, although skills assessment and validation was not available in most cases. There are no calculations available on the efficiency of the measures yet, but programmes successfully managed to meet targeted indicators.

Major policy initiatives and programmes with resource needs are implemented via the EU funding mechanisms in HU, which integrate national co-financing too. Due to this approach, corresponding EU operational programmes serve as integrated design and management instruments for policy implementation and provide also comprehensive overview of investments. As far as the implementation of the Council Recommendation in HU is concerned, EDIOP - Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme is the main instrument for allocation of resources. For the implementation of [HU#1], [HU#3], [HU#4], [HU#5] ESF resources are allocated and used⁴⁵⁸.

As interviewers highlighted [HU1, HU3, HU5], the national approach was determined by the fact, that the Council Recommendation arrived in the middle of the funding period of the multiannual financial framework, MFF 2014-2020. In 2017, most of the resources was already committed to ongoing programmes up to 2021⁴⁵⁹, which left limited space for major interventions.

In this context [HU#1] was selected as priority measure for the Council Recommendation, and the allocated resources were increased. The measure financed the development of an upskilling model for SME employees within the context of the already running programme by the national network of Open Learning Centres. Experiences of piloting the approaches and used methodology would be feed into a new national policy on a systemic approach for building upskilling pathways for SME employees, outlined in the Concept for the National Basic Skills System (NBS), which is to be implemented in the upcoming MFF period 2021-27. The allocations for other upskilling related EDIOP measures like [HU#3], [HU#4] remained unchanged upon the Council Recommendation. [HU#2] was financed by Erasmus+ initiatives for 'the National Coordinators for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (2017-19)'.

All upskilling services including training was available free of charge ([HU#1], [HU#3], [HU#4]). For participants of public work schemes [HU#3] salary was paid during the period of the training. Upon request, training was organised on the site of the companies in [HU#1] saving time and costs for the participants. In such cases, some of the training occasions were organised in working hours, depending on the agreement with the employer. It is proved to be strong incentive when employers promoted participation on training.

Eligible costs for financing were determined by ESF regulation. All development and implementation costs relating to outreach measures, guidance, assessment, offering tailored learning as well as recognition of skills obtained are eligible cost under ESF funding.

In the period 2015-21 in [HU#4] 'Combating the Digital Gap' with an investment of 41,5 million euros (EDIOP + CCOP) 260,000 were involved and 234,000 completed basic digital courses, while in [HU#3] 'Training of low-skilled and those employed in public work schemes' with a funding of 96,77 million EUR more than 100,000 were involved, out of them 64,000 people with low educational level completed training. According to interviewees, cost

⁴⁵⁸ Human Resources Development Operational Programme, HRDOP, overseen by Ministry for Human Resources funds initiatives for the education and social inclusion of adults with low level of educational background, among others programmes address the Roma population. Those programmes were not seen as part of the scope of the Council Recommendation in HU.

⁴⁵⁹ In the 2019 Implementation Report, Hungary reported the most relevant measures already in place (i.e. prior to the 2016 baseline), with 17 relevant measures identified.

benefit ratio could be considered rather high in these programmes because of the combination of effective centralized coordination and high level of involvement and motivation of local stakeholders, including municipalities, training providers as well as local PES offices. Exploiting existing programme platforms and cooperation structures like of the national network of open learning centres in [HU#1] contributes also to efficient implementation. Centrally developed approaches and tools, i.e methodology, learning resources, diverse digital platforms, tools as well as professional support to staff enhanced efficient local implementation.

7.5. Relevance

Compared to the EU average and V4 countries Hungary is lagging behind in regard to basic digital skills as well as competence development of employees with low skills in the SME sector. Accessibility to effective upskilling solutions is limited especially for those employed in SMEs. Need for systemic approach toward building upskilling pathways also highlighted by recent reforms and policies in digitalisation as well as in VET and Adult Training.

The recent pace of growth of the economy (7,1%⁴⁶⁰ in 2021) and the burning labour shortages intensifies the need for more effective upskilling policies to increase productivity of existing workforce as well as to activate still inactive labour capacity. Research highlights, there is an expressed demand for labour with at least secondary level qualifications by employers (Köllő, 2018). Efforts like measure [HU#4] taken to combat digital skills gaps are still not sufficient, concerns are prevailing regarding that almost 50% of the labour force still lacking basic digital skills. No significant progress has been made in this area⁴⁶¹, and recent policies like National Digitalisation Strategy (Ministry for Innovation and Technology & Ministry for Interior, 2019) and the Government Decree on Operational Programme on Digital Renewal Plus (Government of Hungary, 2021), defined new targets and further measures for the next 7 years. The national competence framework for digital skills, Digkomp (Government of Hungary, 2019b), aims at supporting the implementation of comprehensive upskilling system for digital skills, including skills assessment, tailored learning offers and validation.

Moreover, it is also highlighted, that “tailored solutions are needed for each target group”, and “all training should be based on skills assessment and competence development designed on the basis of labour market needs, in order to enable individuals with significant lack of skills to actively take part in training and employment”⁴⁶².

SME employees as priority target group of the implementation of the Council Recommendation is absolutely remained relevant. SMEs are in the most vulnerable units of the economy, when it comes to disruptive changes, and coping with the challenges of digitalisation is much more demanding, than other segments of the economy. Hungarian SME employees taking part in training is very low. Percentage of enterprises that train their employees; 2015: Hungary 48,3, EU avg: 72,6%⁴⁶³. According to the recently developed and adopted strategy for the reinforcement of SME-s in the period 2019-30 (Ministry for Innovation and Technology, 2019a), employees taking part in upskilling initiatives in Hungarian SMEs is 50% that of the EU average and 30% that of in the Czech Republic. SME-s offering ICT training to their employees 14,3% in Hungary and 19,6% in the Czech Republic. The choice of selection of SME employees as primary target group is justified that

⁴⁶⁰ GDP in Hungary in 2021, Summary Report, Central Statistical Office
<https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/gyor/gde/gde2112.html>

⁴⁶¹ according to the digital skills indicator, DESI, Hungary was ranked 19 in 2016, and 22 in 2021 as far as human capital dimension is concerned.

⁴⁶² Page 17 in VET4.0 https://api.ikk.hu/storage/uploads/files/angol_szakkepzes_4_0_20210421pdf-1630061765173.pdf

⁴⁶³ 2018 SBA Fact Sheet – Hungary
<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/38662/attachments/14/translations/en/renditions/native>

implementation of UP should contribute to the increase of productivity of employees and competitiveness of SMEs.

Already established measures for developing basic digital skills for low-skilled, low educated citizens as well as offering upskilling pathways to those taking part in the public work schemes are absolutely relevant. Based on the integrated three – step approach, guidance, and quality learning opportunities including basic skills learning the effectiveness of the measures could be further improved.

It is also important to emphasize, that up until now, not all the elements of the Recommendation have been implemented in a coherent way, like the validation step, lifelong guidance system, accessibility of basic skills provisions as well as other supplementing measure are still relevant objectives for the future.

Customised supports and incentives are needed for the inactive, long term unemployed as for the employees with low educational background and skills to obtain skills for.

The Council Recommendation is more relevant than ever in HU, especially in the context of the skills needs for resilience in times of rapid changes (impacts of the pandemic, the war, and digitalisation).

7.6. Coherence

The Council Recommendation is in coherence with the key reform policies and new VET and AT legislation in HU. However, implementation is hindered by delays in setting up and implementing national validation system, lack of policy and accessibility on lifelong guidance for adults as well as limitations of existing programme finances.

Upskilling of adults with low educational background and low basic skills is the primary target group of the whole operational programme EDIOP for the period 2014-2020. Youth Guarantee was given a very high priority also in the national context, and the Recommendation functioning as complementary measure. Raising productivity and competitiveness of SMEs and their labour force are the highlighted aims of some of the recent strategy, including the Digital Workforce Programme (2017) and the Strategy for Reinforcing the Hungarian Micro-, Small-, and Medium sized Companies (Ministry for Innovation and Technology, 2019b). Both documents defines measures for increasing training opportunities for employees with low education and skills level.

Providing access to skills assessment have been ensured by adult learning legislation already for while, but restricted to measuring against criteria for entering a specific course or module. No legislation adopted yet as far as assessment of validation of skills obtained via informal and non-formal learning is concerned. As part of the implementation of the Digital Education Strategy (Government of Hungary, 2016), a recently adopted government decree established a national framework for digital competences for citizens, DigKomp⁴⁶⁴ and by supplying also corresponding assessment tools citizens will have opportunities to have their digital skills assessed and recognised. Assessment of other basic skills like literacy and numeracy will be ensured for the participants of 'Complex Social Close-up Programmes' according to the recently adopted government degree⁴⁶⁵. Skills assessment and tailored learning has become a general expectation towards training providers in the policy reform documents like Strategy for VET4.0 as well as Government Decree 311/2021.

In HU, the national implementation of the Council Recommendation is in full coherence with EU funding mechanisms. As far as the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (EDIOP) is concerned, its primary target group is the active age citizens with

⁴⁶⁴ <https://digitalisjoletprogram.hu/hu/tartalom/digkomp>

⁴⁶⁵ Government Decree 311/2021: https://tef.gov.hu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Komplex_JogszabalyiHatter.pdf

low educational background and with low level of skills, both in the field of employment, vocational education and training policy. All of the programmes related to the Council Recommendation in the MFF 2014-20 period was funded via EDIOP. Unfortunately, programmes are always limited in time, accessibility and available training opportunities, which enforce limitations towards setting up individual upskilling pathways optimally. Integrating funding relating to different measures or programmes to finance full upskilling pathways is not resolved yet.

7.7. EU added value

As interviewees emphasised [HU1, HU3], that there is a very clear added value of raising awareness on the needs of adults with low level of education and skills, including the need for effective basic skills provision and upskilling pathways. The project [HU#2], National Coordinators for the Implementation of EAAL (2017-19) financed by Erasmus + contributed to awareness raising of policy experts and stakeholders' representatives to a high extent. As expressed also, the Council Recommendation offers a very clear and simple framework for designing policies which address adults with low educational attainment and low level of skills, an approach, which is also compatible with the approaches applied in the ESF planning and operation principles too, so it can be adopted easily by member states. All the UP related measures in HU, regardless of the fact that they were initiated before or after the adoption of the Council Recommendation, were financed via the European Social Fund. All the outcomes of the 'Skills guarantee' component of [HU#2], including the concept and description of the National Basic Skills System (NBS) would not have been achieved without EU level intervention.

7.8. Overall assessment

The Council Recommendation induced relatively small actual changes in policies but rather important impacts. At the time of the adoption of the Council Recommendation, Hungarian adult training sector had been waiting for a major reform and new perspectives already for years to address its challenges in areas like effectiveness, quality, relevance, financing, coherent and clear legislation and less administration. In a multi-stage approach, and with a high involvement of stakeholders, the government launched the reform process by setting up new strategies, governing structures, new frameworks for legislation – starting with the VET sector and followed by adult education and training. The reform process absorbed significant capacities from policymakers, regulators as well as stakeholders from economy, professional and social partners in the period of 2018-22. So far, the reform process resulted a better environment for accommodating upskilling policies in line with the Council Recommendation. However, there are still important building blocks, structural elements missing. The three-step approach partially implemented, the national validation system is not in place yet, the importance and need for lifelong guidance is not recognised. There are still very limited opportunities for professional development for adult trainers and educators. The dominating project financing in adult learning does not support the combination of upskilling opportunities, building structures and capacities, continuity in knowledge building and professional development for institutions and staff, as well as permanent and predictable accessibility of learning opportunities and other services are not ensured.

In this context the selection of SME employees as the primary target group was very relevant and important step, due to the fact the employees of SMEs have less chance to get into relevant training, and one of the most vulnerable groups towards disruptive changes. They are also one of the most difficult target group to reach out, and the necessity to gain the supportive attitude and cooperation of employers makes their involvement rather complex challenge.

The national network of open learning centres ensured platform to reach out to SMEs and piloting the three-step model, with the limitations already mentioned (lack of integration of

the validation element, limited possibilities of combination with other upskilling opportunities, for example with vocational learning). As most significant impact of Council Recommendation is the approval of the concept for the national upskilling system, called National Basic Skills System, which ensures a systemic integration of three-step model into three settings, community learning, vocational education and training as well as work-place learning, in which individuals could build their learning pathways according to their needs and interest combining upskilling opportunities in each setting. Several of the building blocks of such system developed and piloted in the actual measure, but there is still no information if the implementation of the concept will get financed in the new FFM 2021-27 together with the establishment of the national validation system.

The Council Recommendation made an important impact on raising attention to the specific upskilling challenges of persons with low skills and education, the need for the development of basic skills provisions as smaller stepstones to higher level qualifications. It was emphasized by interviewees, that the three-step model and supplementary measures gave a very clear and logical approach to designing upskilling measures in a more comprehensive and effective way. The recently adopted new regulation on complex social close-up training follows and implement this logic in the specific contexts of multiple disadvantaged groups.

7.9. ANNEX I: Bibliography

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7.10. ANNEX II: List of interviewed stakeholders

- Association for Lifelong Learning (NGO operating at national level)
- Ministry of Finance, Deputy State Secretariat for the Implementation of Economic Development Programmes, Representing the Managing Authority for EDIOP
- Ministry for Innovation and Technology, Deputy State Secretariat for Vocational Education (The Unit was part of Ministry for National Economy in 2016)
- Ministry for Innovation and Technology, State Secretariat for Employment Policy, Department for Labour Market Programmes
- National Office for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning (NOVETAL), Department for Project Coordination

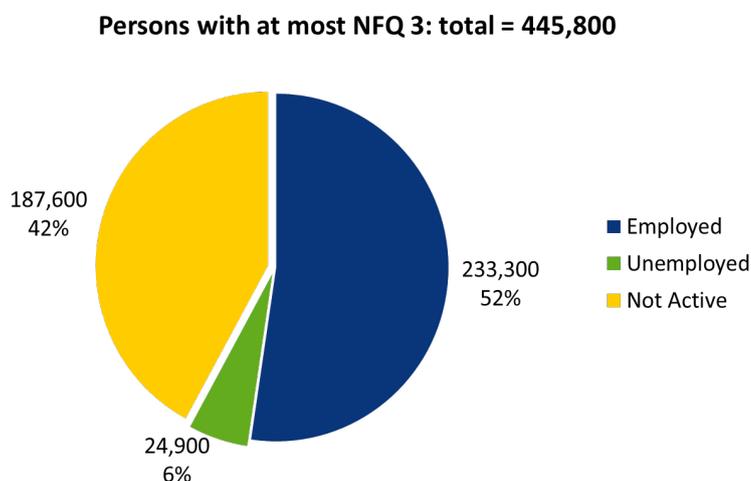
8. Case study Ireland

8.1. National operating context

When the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways was published in 2016, Ireland was already in a good position in terms of meeting the Recommendation's provisions in terms of policy. A Community Employment scheme and a work-based learning scheme had been in place since the early 2000s, both of which were precursors to the upskilling pathways (UP) approach. In July 2013, the 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) were dissolved and replaced by 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). At about the same time, the national training and public employment service (FÁS) was dissolved, and its functions were split between a government department for social welfare and the 16 ETBs. Similarly, the Further Education and Skills Service (SOLAS) was created in October 2013. These changes sought to put FET on a much firmer footing in Ireland's educational offering and it meant that by 2016 Ireland already had policies and programmes in place to address most of the priorities in the Recommendation.

In the last decade and a half, funding decisions and allocations to the FET sector have, in a cumulative way, shifted the focus of the adult learning sector away from overall personal growth (including resilience and wellbeing) to one of economic return, through a focus on work-readiness and up-skilling for employment. Despite this, the level of adult participation in lifelong learning in Ireland in 2017 (8.9%) was lower than the EU average (10.9%). It was also below the 15% average target set by the ET2020 framework. While the participation rates for unemployed people and people who are economically inactive were similar to the EU average, the participation rate for those in employment in Ireland in 2017 was 8.3% which was well below the EU average of 12%.

Figure A4_17 Persons with at most NFQ 3



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (LFS data) - Employment Status (25-64 years), Q3 2017

In 2011, it was estimated that just under one fifth of Irish adults struggled with basic literacy skills, while just over a quarter had poor numeracy skills.⁴⁶⁶ More recent figures, from the 2016 Irish Census of Population, highlighted that 86,498 persons who had finished their education did not progress higher than primary school. In 2017, males aged 25-64 years old with a primary education or below were over three times more likely to be unemployed (15%) when compared to males with a third level qualification (4%). The corresponding values for females in 2017 were 11% and 3%.⁴⁶⁷ The rate of employment for those (aged

⁴⁶⁶ CSO, (2012). PIACC 2012 Survey Results for Ireland.

⁴⁶⁷ CSO (2018) Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2017

20-64) with at most lower secondary education in 2010 was 46.7% which increased to 49% in 2016, while the corresponding figures for those with tertiary education were 79.4% and 82% respectively.⁴⁶⁸

When the Recommendation was published in 2016, there had been a dramatic decline in the levels of unemployment which had been very high following the 2008 financial crisis and years of austerity that followed thereafter. From a peak of almost 355,000 persons at the beginning of 2012, the number of unemployed persons had more than halved, falling to approximately 137,000 persons (on a seasonally-adjusted basis) in the first quarter of 2018. Over the same period, the rate of unemployment relative to the labour force (persons aged 15 and over) fell from a peak of 15.9% in 2012 to 5.8% in the first quarter of 2018. As a result of this, a significant number of persons who are part of the UPS target cohorts were already in employment. There were, however, significant skills shortages in certain industries, most notably in the construction industry, but also in software, accountancy, engineering, risk management and compliance in the financial sector, clinical testing and fault-finding among others.

By August 2021, however, figures from the Central Statistics Office show that the Covid-19 crisis had a significant impact on the labour market in Ireland.⁴⁶⁹ While the standard measure of Monthly Unemployment was 6.4% in August 2021, the Covid-19 Adjusted Measure of Unemployment indicated a rate as high as 12.4% if all claimants of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) were classified as unemployed.⁴⁷⁰ This alternative measure was down from 17.1% in August 2020. Breaking the results down by broad age group, the traditional Monthly Unemployment Rate for those aged 15 to 24 years was 16.9% in August 2021, while it was 4.8% for those aged 25 to 74 years. The Covid-19 Adjusted Measure of Unemployment was 25.6% for those aged 15 to 24 years and 10.1% for those aged 25 to 74 years, overall indicating a greater impact in employment terms of Covid-19 on younger age cohorts. At the same time, as Covid-19 restrictions on public gatherings began to ease in the latter part of 2021, skills shortages in hospitality, tourism, customer service and retail emerged. As noted in the new Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy published by SOLAS in June 2020⁴⁷¹, there is a short-term imperative for FET to lead the response to the critical up-skilling and re-skilling needs of those who have lost their jobs as a result of Covid-19, as well as the challenges that continue to emerge linked to Brexit.

8.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

There is little evidence of specific or significant measures having been taken in response to the Recommendation. In 2016, Ireland was still recovering from a very severe period of financial austerity due to the 2008 financial crisis. The Department of Education and Skills established an Upskilling Pathways Steering Group comprising representatives of adult learning providers, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and other relevant stakeholders, to consider existing national strategies, circumstances and resources and to identify priority target group(s) and appropriate measures to meet the UP recommendations. The Steering Group took the view that Ireland should not add any new, clearly identifiable UP measures to a FET system that was still bedding down after the huge changes involved with the creation of SOLAS and the ETBs and which was already seen as confusing and hard-to-navigate. The Group agreed that the Recommendation would be folded into existing provision. According to one stakeholder "They didn't put UP up in lights"

⁴⁶⁸ CSO and Eurostat LFS figures; <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

⁴⁶⁹ Central statistics Office 2021 Monthly unemployment August 2021
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentaugust2021/>

⁴⁷⁰ The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment is a social welfare payment for employees and self-employed people who have lost all their employment due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

⁴⁷¹ SOLAS 2020 Future FET: Transforming Learning. The National Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024. Dublin https://www.solas.ie/fi/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf

and “if you asked most people in 2016-2020 what the UP Recommendation was, they probably wouldn't be able to say.”⁴⁷²

In September 2018, the Steering Group sent an update report to the European Commission outlining the measures that were already in place in the country to implement the provisions of the Recommendation.

These included:

- Employee Development Policy
- Skillnet Ireland
- Adult Literacy support
- Mapping of the Irish National Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework
- Community Education and SICAP
- Intreo Referrals

The Steering group update report identified a number of priority cohorts within Ireland's response to the UP Recommendation: Learners with low education attainment in employment

- Lone parents
- Travellers
- Migrants
- People with disabilities

SOLAS is the state agency responsible for Further Education and Training and it forms the basis of the existing measures that respond to the UP Recommendation's provisions. The agency has an annual budget of approximately €800m – 68% of funding coming from the exchequer and 32% from the employer-funded National Training Fund. The majority of this funding is channelled through Ireland's 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) who deliver FET provision either directly or via a network of contracted training or community education and training providers in response to the needs of their respective regions. The Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019 focussed on skills provision for social inclusion and mobility, economic growth and insulation from unemployment.

- Awareness Campaign - SOLAS funded the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) to commission and manage in 2016, 2017 and 2018 an advertising campaign, “Take the First Step”. This was a national campaign to support people who have difficulty with reading, writing, maths or technology, to get the help they need. The campaign includes a national and regional radio advertising, video on demand, outdoor advertising, digital marketing and PR. An evaluation was undertaken in 2016 and its' findings informed the campaign in 2017 and beyond. The 2018 campaign centred around four people sharing their stories through a variety of media channels. The content and message of each individual's story focused on the benefits of returning to further education, as well as demonstrating that this issue was not confined to any particular demographic segment

⁴⁷² Stakeholder interview.

- Broaden access routes and range of provision, including distance and blended learning
- Target better outcomes through accredited provision
- Facilitate literacy provision for personal, family, social and community contexts and provide funding for non-accredited group provision, with emphasis on the recruitment of specific priority groups. In 2018, SOLAS commissioned NALA to develop, in conjunction with the FET sector, 'Good Practice Guidelines for Family Literacy Practice in ETBs'
- Focus on data collection and analysis with intensive feedback to providers to support evaluation and programme review
- Identifying and developing priority research areas with a focus on improving literacy and numeracy practice, in particular by conducting robust research into the practice and impact of integrating literacy and numeracy into all FET programmes at various levels and various settings in order to identify and disseminate best practice in that regard

To progress implementation of both the FET Strategy and the FET Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, the SOLAS / ETB Strategic Performance Agreements and Planning Frameworks outlined a number of key improvements and provision targets for the period 2018 - 2020, such as:

- The implementation of the FET Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, including, improved Literacy and Numeracy screening and assessment systems, ESOL policy and awareness.
- A FET Sector provision target of a 10% increase in the rate of certification on courses primarily focused on transversal (social mobility) skills development.
- A FET Sector provision target of a 10% increase of adults, who are seeking FET provision, engaging in lifelong Learning interventions

A new FET Strategy was published by SOLAS in June 2020.⁴⁷³ The central premise of the new strategy is that FET is for everyone and will serve as a major driver of both economic development and social cohesion. The Strategy is based around three strategic pillars:

- building skills - to anticipate and respond to rapidly evolving regional and national needs;
- fostering inclusion - ensuring that supports are available to allow any individual, regardless of background or formal education level, an opportunity to learn and develop; and
- facilitating pathways - by offering clear and simplified pathways into FET, within FET and from FET, encouraging and facilitating ongoing engagement at all stages of people's lives and careers.

The strategy is underpinned by a focus on four enabling themes:

- digital transformation - building on the first technology enhanced learning (TEL) strategy, transforming the way in which learning is offered to fully

⁴⁷³ SOLAS 2020 Future FET: Transforming Learning. The National Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024. Dublin https://www.solas.ie/ff/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf

embrace blended and online; exploring comprehensive and accessible digital solutions to improve learner access, including exploring individual learning accounts;

- learner and performance focus - offering the diverse FET learner base clear pathways and agreeing robust indicators of FET success in generating outcomes of employment, progression, active inclusion, lifelong learning, meeting critical skills needs, and new models of delivery together with 'distance travelled' tools which capture and measure 'soft' or 'transversal' skills development of learners;
- staffing and structures – addressing legacy issues and focussing on professional development of FET staff; and
- capital development - FET capital stock is of variable quality and is characterised by small scale dispersed facilities. The strategy, as a first step commits to fully understand the nature, purpose, quality and investment requirements across all capital infrastructure. The strategy commits to commencing a full review with ETBs to construct a detailed database of FET buildings, their purpose, size and condition, provision type, numbers of learners and staff, and ownership details.

Enhanced focus on Adult Literacy

As outlined in the previous sections, Ireland's adult literacy strategy had been primarily embedded in the country's FET strategy for the last decade, until the publication in September 2021 of a new 10 year 'Adult Literacy for Life'.⁴⁷⁴ The new strategy seeks to ensure that every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully engage in society and realise their potential. The strategy has the following targets:

- Decrease the share of adults in Ireland with unmet literacy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 18% to 7%.
- Decrease the share of adults in Ireland with unmet numeracy needs, that is PIAAC Level 1 or below, from 25% to 12%.
- Decrease the share of adults in Ireland without basic digital skills from 47% to 20% (as measured by Digital Economy and Society Index).

The strategy is based on a cross-government, cross-economy and cross-society approach. It involves political leadership; a Programme Office with a Cross-Government remit; Cross-Government Implementation Committee; National Literacy Coalition; Regional Literacy Coalition; Regional Literacy Coordinators; and Dedicated Funding for Collaboration. The strategic direction will be driven by a system of National Literacy Annual Action Plans. Community education is named as a key actor, offering a "range of literacy, numeracy, digital skills development and other courses and supports". The Strategy commits to continuing to build targeted funding schemes to support the community education and community development role in addressing the digital divide and supporting people with literacy needs. Targeted funding support schemes such as the Mitigating Against Education Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) aim to provide funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners in accessing and participating in community education. Funding

⁴⁷⁴ Government of Ireland. 2021 Adult Literacy for Life: A 10 Year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy. Dublin https://www.solas.ie/ef/70398/x/b78324692b/15607_all_strategy_web.pdf

under MAEDF is allowed for digital technologies, including the supply of devices, software and systems, or CPD training, to facilitate high quality learning and delivery.

Despite the new strategy, some adult education providers were concerned about the level of funding provided for adult literacy. They highlighted that in 1997, data showed that 1 in 4 adults had literacy difficulties. While the budget to address adult literacy had increased a lot since then, doubling almost year on year to reach ca. €20m in the mid-2000s and €30m in 2021, it was still much lower than the €100m that a parliamentary committee had recommended for it to be at this stage.

Changes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

The Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025⁴⁷⁵ is aimed at assisting people back to work as the economy and labour market recovers from Covid-19. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it had been intended that the strategy statement would focus primarily on ways to increase employment rates among groups with low levels of labour market participation, including lone parents, people with disabilities, qualified adults (adult dependants of those in receipt of a social welfare payment) and people from minority groups. It was also intended to make a particular effort to increase labour market participation of young people who are not in employment, education, or, training (NEETs) and to develop specific programmes to encourage older inactive people, for example, people who had left employment to take up child-care or other caring duties, to return to the workforce. However, Covid-19 dramatically changed the context for the strategy and refocussed the strategy towards actions designed to restore unemployment back to or below its pre-pandemic levels of 2019, when the economy was close to full employment. The strategy outlines labour market activation, upskilling and reskilling programmes as well as employer subsidies to incentivise employers to hire from the live register. Overall, the Strategy sets out 83 actions which:

- Aims to help 75,000 long-term unemployed into work
- Provide subsidies of up to €10,000 for employers who take people off the Live Register (unemployment register)
- Offers a New Work placement Experience Programme to provide 10,000 paid, quality placements
- Provides a special package of supports for young people with youth unemployment to reduce from 44% to 12.5% by 2023
- Provides for 50,000 further and higher education training places
- Focuses on utilising Remote Working and e-Learning opportunities to help people into the workforce

Aontas, the adult learning organisation in Ireland, reported that, despite the significant effort made by providers and learners and additional funding support, since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a reduction in participation in adult learning by specific cohorts of society.⁴⁷⁶ For Further Education and Training (FET), this includes:

- A 25% reduction in certification at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) levels 1-4

⁴⁷⁵ Department of Social Protection.2021. *Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025*. Dublin <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/#>

⁴⁷⁶ Aontas 2021 What is Happening in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Ireland? <https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Policy/What%20is%20Happening%20in%20ALE%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

- A 24% reduction in participation in FET by Travellers and Roma
- A 15% reduction in participation by Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- A 15% reduction in participation by people over 50 years
- A 14% reduction in participation by people with disabilities

Skillnet

Skillnet Ireland is a national programme to support businesses to up-skill staff that is well-established and embedded throughout many sectors. It was established in 1999 and comes under the purvey of DFHERIS. In 2020, 81,895 people in 21,695 companies undertook Skillnet training. It operates on a joint investment model, where government grants are combined with contributions from enterprise, thus reducing costs and other barriers for businesses.⁴⁷⁷

8.3. Effectiveness

Ireland has been successful in meeting many of the goals of the UP Recommendation, but not by specific design in response the Recommendation. Ireland was already in a comparatively strong position in 2016 when the Recommendation was published and the national initiatives implemented since then have reinforced Ireland's effectiveness in meeting the Recommendation's provisions.

As outlined in an earlier section, the Upskilling Pathways Steering group established by the Department of Education and Skills identified several priority cohorts within Ireland's response to the UP Recommendation:

- Learners with low education Travellers
- Migrants
- People with disabilities
- attainment in employment
- Lone parents

In the Steering Group update report to the Commission in 2018, the Irish Government acknowledged that reaching various cohorts would present challenges, but it also argued that it would be possible to do so via existing arrangements. It said that the established links between government departments, various client groups, NGOs and representative bodies meant that these cohorts could be included in high quality, accessible and flexible education and training programmes to support them in acquiring minimum levels of literacy, numeracy, digital competencies and other skills relevant to the labour market and active participation in society.

Aontas, the adult learning organisation in Ireland, contributed to the analysis of these priority groups in 2018. It said it was essential that Travellers were identified as a target group within the range of the UP Recommendation because data showed that the odds of Travellers leaving school without having completed second level (the Leaving Certificate or equivalent) were 33 times higher than for non-Travellers. While Traveller women have higher educational attainment than males, there was added pressure on these women to be stay

⁴⁷⁷ <https://www.skillnetireland.ie/about/>

at home mothers due to the cultural practices of early marriage and large family sizes.⁴⁷⁸ More recently, in 2021 the National Skills Council identified the unequal division of care falling to women, particularly for women that are lone parents and lack of support for persons with disabilities to work in a flexible manner with modified job tasks as barriers to participation in education and the labour market.⁴⁷⁹

The 2018 update report also outlined Ireland's approach to the three pillars of UP (skills assessments, tailored learning offers and the validation and recognition of skills) by highlighting existing practices and procedures in:

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- Outreach, guidance and support measures
- Tailored and flexible learning
- Validation and recognition of skills

Skills assessment is provided across further education and training services delivered by the ETBs. The 'Initial and ongoing assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ level 1-3 – Guidelines and Toolkit'⁴⁸⁰ assists learners in building and sustaining their literacy and numeracy skills. This resource provides accurate initial and ongoing assessments and responds to the complexity of literacy and numeracy skill assessment in a way that is designed to be learner-centred, rigorous, supportive, user-friendly and accountable. The toolkit is in use across the national network of ETBs and has been endorsed as the national assessment tool for NFQ Levels 1-3 (up to EQF 2).⁴⁸¹

The Qualifications Act 1999, superseded by the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, established the legal basis for the development of the **recognition of prior learning (RPL)** in Ireland. These Acts place RPL within the access, transfer and progression policy for education and training providers. These providers are required to establish policies and procedures which include for the formal assessment of knowledge, skill and competence previously acquired by learners for the purposes of the achievement of awards or partial awards, and for access to and exemptions within programmes of education and training. However, there are still difficulties in the application of RPL in practice⁴⁸² and the government and other national stakeholders agreed that more work is needed to improve the use of RPL in Ireland, especially in the more informal community education sector, and they are open to learning from other EU Member States in this area.

Tobar – a pilot project in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The Tobar project involved ten ETBs from across the country and members of the Irish Defence Forces (ranks from Private to Non-Commissioned Officers) participating in a national pilot project in 2018-19. Through the project, members of the Defence Forces could have the skills, competencies and knowledge acquired in their years of service within the Defence Forces validated and certified through Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI) certification up to level 6. This was done through a structured process of identifying, documenting and assessing evidence of their prior formal, informal and non-formal learning. The aim of the project was to help ease the transition of Defence Forces

⁴⁷⁸ Aontas, Upskilling Pathways <https://www.aontas.com/AONTAS%20-%20Upskilling%20Pathways%20.pdf>

⁴⁷⁹ National Skills Council 2021 Barriers facing women and people with disabilities <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/2f06b-national-skills-council-discusses-barriers-facing-women-and-persons-with-disabilities-in-accessing-the-labour-market/>

⁴⁸⁰ <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/5451e6dd60/initial-and-ongoing-assessment-of-adult.pdf>

⁴⁸¹ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7044-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

⁴⁸² <https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/European/Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning%20Report-FINAL.pdf>

members back into civilian life and assist them in achieving certification that would increase their employability prospects in the 'civilian world'. A total of 91 learners achieved awards which included 21 major and 386 minor awards. A project evaluation report was published in 2021.

One concrete initiative that has taken place has been the creation in 2015 of an RPL Practitioner Network. The network aims to:

- Provide a coherent practitioner voice to shape and inform policy development
- Support the development of a community of practice, providing opportunities to share learning, face to face, online and through practical sharing of toolkits and resources
- Promote good practice, informed by national and international practitioner and policy perspectives⁴⁸³

In 2021, Aontas and the Centre for Adult Continuing Education (ACE) at university College Cork (UCC) developed and delivered a continuing professional development (CPD) programme for community adult education tutors and staff to build their capacity in the area of RPL. The Certificate in Continuing Professional Development in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a special purpose award worth 10 ECT credits and has been designed specifically for adult and community educators to support their work in the use of RPL when dealing with marginalised and vulnerable groups, and employees with low educational qualifications.⁴⁸⁴

The validation of learning

A new project among third level institutions in Ireland commenced in 2021 to put in place a consistent and coherent approach to RPL within and across the higher education sector (HCI Project, 2021). This four-year project is a welcome initiative that will allow what is normally a marginalised process to become fully embedded within the third level sector.

In terms of tailored learning offers, the creation of the public employment service Intreo in 2012 was designed to offer a 'Personal Progression Plan' type approach. The creation of Intreo saw the integration of unemployment benefit payment centres and public employment services. Prior to this, jobseekers had to interact with three separate departments/agencies to access benefit and employment services (the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), Community Welfare Service (CWS) and FÁS). Intreo saw the introduction of a new case management system that linked unemployment benefit payments to active engagement with jobseekers to support them into employment or training. This engagement is underpinned by the principle of mutual obligation, whereby jobseekers are required to engage in job search and/or education, training or employment programmes in exchange for receiving benefit payments and efficient employment services. Under the Intreo system, activation commences immediately (i.e. on the day that a jobseeker makes a benefit claim) as opposed to the jobseeker having to be unemployed for a certain period of time (three months) before being engaged with for the provision of employment services. Their job search activity is structured around a personal progression plan which sets out the actions a jobseeker should take to enhance his or her prospects of finding employment. If a jobseeker fails to engage with their progression plan, they are sanctioned through the loss of benefits.

An adult learning organisation stated however that they did not think that Intreo in reality was providing a personalised assessment and pathway. Intreo did not carry out literacy

⁴⁸³ <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/2016/04/18/rpl-practitioner-network-ireland/>

⁴⁸⁴ <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-ccpdpl/>

assessments for example, whereas the adult guidance services provided by the ETBs would be more likely.

ETBs are involved in an Erasmus+ project with Norway and Malta: CITO (Check in, take off) - self assessment of literacy, numeracy and digital skills that would then direct a learner to a programme of learning. Covid-19 delayed its implementation, and it is now due to end in Feb 2022. They are working on dissemination and sustainability, and on updating the toolkit.

In terms of cross-sectoral cooperation and engagement at all levels of education framework, one adult education stakeholder said that Ireland's small size and geography meant that it was easy to “connect the dots between stakeholders” and that there was a history of good cooperation between national education stakeholders through the Europe-wide Bologna Process for higher education which created a good base on which to build. However, following the Covid-19 pandemic and the government's focus on reducing unemployment, community education stakeholders have expressed concern around the diminution of the community education/social inclusion agenda as they see adult education being increasingly viewed solely as a means for skills development to reduce unemployment and respond to employer needs.

8.4. Efficiency

It is difficult to form a judgement on the efficiency of the UP Recommendation in Ireland because there was no specific EU funding stream attached to it and the provisions of the Recommendation were implemented through existing national measures. In particular, the implementation of the Recommendation was part of the core business of ETBs in Ireland and it was therefore funded through ETBs' normal operating costs. It came primarily from the national budget, although ESF co-funding played a role.

VET and adult education providers found it difficult to assess the efficiency of UP actions because success is a relative concept. They pointed out that FET students and adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are different to students in higher education - they are more likely to drift in and out of education and not follow a linear path so their value-for-money (VfM) pathway is not so clear to track. One adult education provider said that “if someone comes in the front door of a FET institution, then that is a successful outcome.” There is also the question of what is ‘efficient and cost-effective use of funds’ – “just because a learner might not receive (or want) a certification at the end of their course does not mean that it hasn't helped them in getting a job, in helping their kids with their homework, or facilitated their better interaction with the healthcare system, etc.”

Stakeholders also pointed to the long-standing criticism in Ireland that there were too many bodies offering the same thing: ETBs, local schools, SOLAS, CSOs, trade unions, etc and it could be very confusing for anyone looking for a basic adult literacy course. However, they did highlight a recent improvement in the FETCH Courses website (www.fetchcourses.ie) which serves as a one-stop shop for anyone wanting to do a FET course. Stakeholders said that there was a clear perceived lack of reliable data on FET outputs and outcomes which undermined confidence that poorly performing programmes were no longer being financed and that available resources were directed towards areas identified as being of significant importance on the basis of emerging national or regional intelligence. While there had been improvements in this area through the Programme Learner Support System (PLSS)⁴⁸⁵, one of the weaknesses highlighted by stakeholders is that it doesn't collect qualitative data on how, for example, people have improved their soft

⁴⁸⁵ The Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) is a joint project between SOLAS (the National Further Education and Training Authority) and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). PLSS is a suite of software applications that are designed to provide an integrated approach to the collection and processing of personal data of users of PLSS and FET programmes funded through SOLAS, and the outputs, outcomes and performance of such programmes.

skills. SOLAS and EBTI are working to improve the PLSS system to be able to collect more qualitative (and helpful) data in the future.

Stakeholders had differing views on the efficiency of ESF funding and other EU funds in supporting the UP agenda. The key areas of investment chosen for the ESF in Ireland revolve around activation of the unemployed, social and labour market inclusion, education and training and youth employment. ESF funding contributes in particular to the following programmes:

- Bridging Foundation training for ESL and poorly educated people to give them basic skills to go on to the next level of training
- Specific Skills training which are specific to a profession, e.g. construction, sales and marketing
- traineeships - they are similar to apprenticeships in offering a blend between work-based learning and more formal learning
- Back to Education Initiative (BTEI): short courses to try and get people back into education and training.

The national ESF authority took the opportunity to avail of the option of 100% ESF co-financing option in the last funding round. Ireland's total allocation in the 2014-2020 round of the ESF was fully drawn down based on expenditure and participants to the end of 2019 (as opposed to 2020 as would have normally been the case). This allowed Ireland to use national funds for other purposes.

An evaluation conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic of the ESF-funded Youthreach programme showed that the ESL rate in Ireland was very low, therefore the ESL students that were enrolling on Youthreach courses were by default some of the hardest-to-reach and most difficult students to support. While the overall numbers of participants were declining, the costs weren't because reaching these people was more cost-intensive in any case.

Some stakeholders were sceptical about how the ESF funding has been used, and to what extent it has helped drive the national agenda. Erasmus+ and EASI were also used to implement some parts of the UP agenda but they are ultimately small pots of funding and they are difficult to use because of the co-funding requirements. On the other hand, they said that the data collection and reporting requirements associated with EU funding were actually beneficial in many ways because they helped to bring rigour and transparency to adult learning provision.

8.5. Relevance

The UP agenda is still considered relevant in Ireland, particularly considering the changes brought about by Covid-19 to the employment landscape, but stakeholders' opinions differ on the relevance of the Recommendation itself. A government representative said that global trends such as automation and digitalisation meant that the UP agenda remained very relevant, and not just for low-skilled workers. For example, the professional body Engineers Ireland had a big emphasis on continuing learning for its members. The idea of "once and done", i.e. a learner completes a course, gets a certification, and that's the end of the learning pathway, is outdated. Adult learning needs to be more of an ongoing process, with HEIs having an important role play in meeting this need by delivering shorter and more targeted courses.

On the other hand, an adult education organisation said that the adult learning agenda had evolved since 2016 and that due to the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) there was

now a greater focus on social rights as a whole rather than a narrower view on just workers' skills. Looking at adult education through the prism of 'skills' automatically places an emphasis on the workforce, but there are, for example, people with intellectual disabilities who may never be classified as fully employed but who still have rights as potential and capable employees. There is also an ongoing conversation about learning for learning's sake - not everyone wants to get a certificate at the end, it is more about personal validation and a sense of self-worth. This is recognised to some extent in Ireland's new Adult Learning Strategy.

An adult education and training provider said that the UP target groups were still valid and needed ongoing support, e.g. long term unemployed, but it also needed to deal with reality of those people who are now presenting themselves and looking for help. These people are increasingly the cohort of people already in work who are looking to reskill and upskill, rather than the traditional target groups. But the other task is to encourage people who were in FET before the Covid-19 pandemic to come back into FET after the pandemic. This will align with the promotion of the new 10 year 'Adult Literacy for Life' literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy. <https://www.solas.ie/alnd-strategy/>

All stakeholders highlighted the huge impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the UP agenda and its ongoing relevance. One stakeholder said that there was a "sense that the ground is shifting in workforce trends after Covid-19", Covid-19 highlighted the ongoing educational divides in Ireland that need to be addressed, for example, those who go to HEIs and those who go to FET, rural vs urban, rich vs poor, etc. In that sense, the UP Recommendation's overarching goals are still relevant to the Irish policy landscape.

8.6. Coherence

The UP Recommendation was essentially folded into existing national provision, so in that sense, it was very coherent with national policy.

At an overall national level, the Economic Recovery Plan⁴⁸⁶ sets out how the full resumption of economic activity and getting people back to work after the Covid-19 crisis will be supported. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan⁴⁸⁷ outlines how Ireland intends to utilise an initial allocation of €915 million in grants from the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. The second pillar of the four-pillar strategy is to help people back into work by extending labour market supports and through intense activation and reskilling and upskilling opportunities, driven by Pathways to Work 2021-2025. Pathways to Work 2021-2025 will help unemployed people get back into employment through intense activation, upskilling and reskilling opportunities and engaging with employers, and thereby reducing the risk of labour market scarring and long-term unemployment. The Plan commits to a reinvigoration of Ireland's Skills Framework and architecture to minimise skills mismatches and ensure the country's skills approach is routed in the digital and green transition, and broader areas of opportunity and growth. In particular, lifelong pathways between and within Further Education and Training and High Education will advance lifelong learning rates.

However, one adult education provider was concerned that there would be an overemphasis on digital literacy in the context of a green and digital transformation, with insufficient attention given to basic literacy and numeracy.

8.7. EU added value

There are differences of opinion amongst Irish stakeholders about the level of EU added value from the Recommendation. Those who saw a higher level of added value

⁴⁸⁶ Government of Ireland 2021 Economic Recovery Plan <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/709d1-economic-recovery-plan/>

⁴⁸⁷ DPER 2021 Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d4939-national-recovery-and-resilience-plan-2021/>

said the Recommendation had certainly led to a more common understanding across Europe about what Upskilling Pathways are and should be and that the Recommendation had raised the expectations that Ireland should strive for. Having an EU Recommendation allowed some stakeholders to keep the discussion on upskilling on the agenda. Stakeholders also welcomed the transparency and accountability associated with implementing an EU Recommendation and they pointed to the evaluation of the UP Recommendation itself as proof of the rigour being brought to the process of implementing Upskilling Pathways in Europe. The EU's Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) were also highlighted as a useful external viewpoint which helped to put a focus on population groups and economic sectors that might not otherwise be dealt with because they weren't "low hanging fruit". Similarly, the rigorous data-collection requirements associated with ESF funding and the need to conduct regular project evaluations were seen as helpful practices. Finally, one education and training provider said that the EU-wide nature of the Recommendation meant that it was helpful for their staff to compare notes with other EU Member States and to share best practice in the field.

Equally, however, stakeholders recognised that the implementation of the Recommendation was at very different stages in different EU Member States, and that this was likely due to different levels of resources. While the EC could help in setting a common goal for the UP programme, it needed to allow Member States the flexibility in getting there in a way that suited them best. There could be no 'one size fits all' approach for EU measures in this area - the national circumstances and settings would always take priority. While meetings between EU Member State national officials could be helpful, as could OECD data, national considerations would always dominate. A government stakeholder also said that the EU added value came not mainly from meetings of government officials, but from the wider economic and social comparisons that could be drawn from wider stakeholder groups, such as European industry-led initiatives on skills. For the Irish industrial sector and economy post-Brexit, it would be essential for Ireland to be linked into these European discussions and business considerations.

8.8. Overall assessment

The Council Recommendation has not had a marked impact on UP provision in Ireland. The existing structures and practices in 2016 meant that the provisions of the U-P Recommendation were already largely in place and it is not possible to clearly attribute developments since 2016 to the Recommendation. The Recommendation is nevertheless part of the wider EU policy support for, and emphasis on, skills and training and this has helped to shape the policy landscape in Ireland. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant changes to employment practices and the provision of education and training in Ireland mean that the overarching goals of the UP Recommendation remain highly relevant and are firmly embedded into national strategies for the coming years.

8.9. ANNEX I: Bibliography

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8.10. ANNEX II: List of interviewed stakeholders

- Aontas
- Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Skills (DFHERIS)
- Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
- EU Funds.ie (ESF Managing Authority)
- National Adult Literacy Association (NALA)

9. Case study Sweden

9.1. National operating context

Sweden has a long tradition of adult education. Already in the 1930s-1940s, there were initial discussions about the need to provide education for adults to complete previous non-completed education from elementary or upper secondary school, enabling individuals to become eligible for higher education and/or fill gaps on the labour market through labour market programmes set up by the PES⁴⁸⁸. This led to the establishment of the municipal adult education – *Komvux* – in 1967. Today, *Komvux* remains the main pathway for completing elementary and upper secondary education, while also aiming for reduced social and cultural differences between groups in society and enabling participation and democratic engagement.⁴⁸⁹ In addition to *Komvux*, independent folk high schools provide a similar offer of courses.

Courses are provided free of charge and student grants and loans are available since the 1960s. In 1974, the law about study leave entered into force, requiring employers to grant employees a leave to study after a certain period of employment, also in cases where the studies had no immediate relevance for the current employment.⁴⁹⁰ This legislation is still in place today. In 1984, a legislation about education for adults entered into force, establishing the responsibility of municipalities to provide education for adults to complete elementary school (*Grundvux*) or upper secondary school (*Komvux*).⁴⁹¹ Today, adult education and *Komvux* are regulated by the Swedish Education Act and the Regulation about adult education.⁴⁹²

Current reforms and changes include an obligation for newly arrived immigrants with low education to participate in adult education.⁴⁹³ In addition, there are proposals for better coordination of adult education and the supply of skills, including a recent proposal for validation of skills supply and lifelong learning to better map and validate knowledge, skills and experience of the students signing up for adult education.⁴⁹⁴

The target group for adult education includes all citizens in need with a priority given to those with the greatest need. In Sweden, the share of adults with low numeracy skills is 15,2% and adults with low literacy skills is 13,8%.⁴⁹⁵ As regards digital skills, the share of adults aged 25-64 with low or no digital skills was estimated to 27% in 2016, and 24% in 2019.⁴⁹⁶ Overall, the estimated population with potential for upskilling and reskilling is 32,7% according to Cedefop.⁴⁹⁷

Women have since long made up the majority of students at *Komvux*, accounting for approx. 60% in 2018. Indeed, also the unemployment rate for low-qualified women is higher (over 25%) than for low-qualified men (under 20%).⁴⁹⁸ The share of foreign-born people enrolled in adult education is high both as regards courses related to elementary school degrees (96%) and courses related to upper secondary school degrees (40%). Over the

⁴⁸⁸ Short vocational training for specific professions with a clear connection to shortages on the labour market set up by the Swedish PES, <https://arbetsformedlingen.se/for-arbetsokande/extra-stod/stod-a-o/arbetsmarknadsutbildning>

⁴⁸⁹ Olofsson, Waldensjö (2020), Vuxenutbildning för arbetsmarknaden, Underlagsrapport till utredningen om en modern arbetsrätt, Statens offentliga utredningar

⁴⁹⁰ Studieledighetslagen (1974), (SFS 1974:981), https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-1974981-om-arbetstaga-res-ratt-till_sfs-1974-981

⁴⁹¹ Vuxenutbildningslagen (1984), <https://lagen.nu/prop/1984/85:37>

⁴⁹² Swedish National Agency for Education, <https://www.skolverket.se/regler-och-ansvar/skollagen-och-forordningar>, Skollagen 2010:800; Vuxenutbildningslagen 2011:1108

⁴⁹³ Swedish National Agency for Education, <https://www.skolverket.se/regler-och-ansvar/aktuella-regeländringar>

⁴⁹⁴ Validering för kompetensförsörjning och livslångt lärande, <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2022/02/prop.-202122123/>

⁴⁹⁵ Cedefop (2020) Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways, <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/475393>

⁴⁹⁶ Eurostat 2016, 2019

⁴⁹⁷ Cedefop (2020)

⁴⁹⁸ Eurostat (2020)

past 10 years, the share of foreign-born people has increased by 13%.⁴⁹⁹ There are also specific courses provided by the municipalities for people with disabilities (*Särvux*).

9.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

In Sweden, the implementation of the Recommendation relies on measures that were in place already prior to the Recommendation with a focus on providing basic skills for adults, and the reinforcement of these measures to support upskilling.⁵⁰⁰ Therefore, the below sections will provide an overview of the measures responding to the objectives of the Recommendation.

The national government finances the municipalities' activities related to adult education; however, each municipality decides how to allocate the funds to provide the courses required either by themselves or through outsourcing. *Komvux* is the main institution and provides various courses including those to complete elementary school or upper secondary school, apprenticeship courses or vocational packages, as well as Swedish for Immigrants ("SFI", in place since 1994). In addition to the standard study grant, a higher "study start support" grant was introduced in 2017 for unemployed adults with short previous education to study at basic or upper secondary level, aiming to improve their possibilities for establishment on the labour market.⁵⁰¹

As regards the three-steps approach outlined in the Council Recommendation, these principles are implemented in Sweden and are further described in the below section on Effectiveness. Coordination and collaboration are in place involving pertinent actors, as highlighted in the **following sections presenting recent and current initiatives taking into consideration the objectives of the Council Recommendation**:

Regional Yrkesvux (vocational packages) is part of *Komvux* and addresses shortages on the regional labour markets. At least three municipalities need to cooperate to organise these courses, taking into account the needs of the labour market in the involved municipalities and to provide a good skills supply. Planning is carried out through consultation with the public employment services, representatives for employers, and actors in charge of regional developments.⁵⁰² In the context of the 2014-2022 "Knowledge Boost", the Swedish government increased the spending on this type of regional vocational training.⁵⁰³ The target group consists in people who have not completed upper secondary school or other individuals who need to complete vocational training at upper secondary level. The interest for Regional Yrkesvux is high among foreign-born adults, constituting 53% of the students in 2019.

Since 2015, *Komvux* offers combined courses that are designed to target foreign-born people with low education and low knowledge of the Swedish language. The objective is to ensure that these people can learn the language while approaching the labour market. In this context, vocational training is combined with the course Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) or Swedish as a Second Language (SVA). In order to support the municipalities in organising these combined courses, the government has suggested an additional 14 000 study seats for approx. SEK 1,5 billion (EUR) in 2022.⁵⁰⁴ While being highly effective at the start, it was suggested in the interviews that due to changing patterns in the priority groups,

⁴⁹⁹ Olofsson, Waldensjö (2020), Vuxenutbildning för arbetsmarknaden, Underlagsrapport till utredningen om en modern arbetsrätt, Statens offentliga utredningar

⁵⁰⁰ Commission Staff Working Document (2019), Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures

⁵⁰¹ Olofsson, Waldensjö (2020), Vuxenutbildning för arbetsmarknaden, Underlagsrapport till utredningen om en modern arbetsrätt, Statens offentliga utredninga; Commission Staff Working Document (2019), Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures

⁵⁰² Komvux, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/kunskapslyftet-2020-komvux/>; Ministry of Education and Research (2018), Implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

⁵⁰³ Kunskapslyftet, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/>

⁵⁰⁴ The current currency rate as off 28 March 2022: 100 SEK = 9,56 EUR

large groups of individuals do not have sufficient skills for these courses. Combined courses start only when the student has reached a certain level at SFI (level D) while many individuals remain at level A or B for a long time without being able to access any vocational orientation. To respond to this need, some municipalities have started offering a vocational orientation also at basic level, but this is done without any funds from the national government.⁵⁰⁵

Apprenticeship trainings for adults are provided through *Komvux*, with the aim of providing the students with a basic vocational training, increased professional experience, as well as opportunities to receive guidance from a mentor within a specific profession. At least 70% of the course need to be conducted in a workplace. Municipalities may apply for a specific national grant to provide this type of course.⁵⁰⁶

Municipalities can establish Learning Centres (*Lärcentrum*) in connection to the schools, with the aim of enabling teachers or other staff to be present to provide support to students outside of teaching hours. Each municipality decides how to design the *Lärcentrum* and what services to provide. Services may include study rooms, libraries, technical equipment such as wifi and computers, guidance and study support. Since 2017, municipalities may apply for national grants in cases where they cooperate with other municipalities to establish or further develop the *Lärcentrum*. The national grants for *Lärcentrum* were increased from SEK 50 million to SEK 90 million in 2021 and 2022.⁵⁰⁷

Independent folk high schools provide for an alternative pathway enabling people to complete previous studies or adjust career choices through vocational training. They often have the same courses as *Komvux* but further individualise their teaching. Like *Komvux*, they tailor learning to the needs of individuals through an individual study plan. Since 2016, their offer of vocational training has been adapted to sectors with particular deficits and shortages. In 2022, the government provides further investment in the folk high school, corresponding to 3000 new study seats for approx. SEK 300 million. The folk high schools have become popular among newly arrived immigrants and foreign-born people. In 2020, 48% of the students were foreign-born, out of which 58% were women and 42% were men. This institution also plays an important role for people with disabilities.⁵⁰⁸

Education and training obligation for newly arrived immigrants was introduced in 2018. The aim is that newly arrived immigrants that are involved in the establishment programme of the PES and who are considered in need of education and training to find work shall enrol in a course. The public employment services are responsible for informing the target group and guiding them towards education, training or preparatory courses.⁵⁰⁹

It is difficult to identify potential impact of the Council Recommendation on the design of upskilling pathways in Sweden as measures were already in place prior to the Recommendation. Interviewees consulted in the context of the case study said that while no specific measures were initiated following the Recommendation, the objectives of the Recommendation are in line with the Swedish measures and also strengthen the national policy.⁵¹⁰

The recent focus on the combined courses for foreign-born adults to combine language learning with vocational training, together with the new obligation to study for newly arrived

⁵⁰⁵ Interviews (PES, Skånes kommuner); Bransch-SFI in Trelleborgs kommun (presentation)

⁵⁰⁶ Apprenticeship training, <https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/anordna-och-administrera-utbildning/anordna-utbildning-pa-gymnasieniva/anordna-utbildning-pa-gymnasial-niva/laringscentrum-starta-laringsutbildning>

⁵⁰⁷ *Komvux*, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/kunskapslyftet-2020-komvux>

⁵⁰⁸ Folkhögskola, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/kunskapslyftet-2020-folkhogskola/>

⁵⁰⁹ Ministry of Education and Research (2018), Implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

⁵¹⁰ Interview (Ministry of Education)

immigrants with low education, can be mentioned as ways of targeting specific groups in need of education.

Furthermore, the Regional Yrkesvux is in line with the recommendation's focus on considering and prioritising economic sectors and shortages in the labour market. Overall, spending on adult education has increased in recent years. This should also be seen in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic during which the government increased the number of study seats importantly, and employers were granted state support when they offered staff the possibility to use working hours for competence development.⁵¹¹

9.3. Effectiveness

The implementation of the Recommendation is effective in Sweden as an extensive system of adult education activities in line with the Recommendation was in place already prior to its publication.

Rather than establishing criteria to identify specific target groups, Sweden offers a wide choice of courses to adults with gaps in their education.⁵¹² Furthermore, the foreign-born adult population in Sweden constitutes an important share of people with low/basic education and has therefore become a significant group of beneficiaries of the adult education courses. Also, youth and young adults represent an important group as they are often disadvantaged by the fact that they have limited work experience to compensate with.⁵¹³ One interviewee underlined that there is a need to adapt existing courses to the needs of those newly arrived immigrants that do not yet have sufficient language skills to enrol in the combined courses. It was suggested that there should be a connection to the labour market already at the lower levels of SFI (currently combined courses are generally available only at D level, while they are not available for level A-C of SFI).⁵¹⁴

Barriers to an effective implementation consist in a lack of motivation to study and that the groups with low education sometimes do not see the value of education.⁵¹⁵ This lack of motivation may be related to lack of finances and thus priority given to employment where possible, and in some cases cultural factors. As mentioned above, the lack of connections to the labour market at lower levels of SFI may also impact motivation. Finally, insufficient study seats in municipalities constitute a barrier. The PES regularly advice individuals with low education to enrol in courses to increase chances on the labour market and have been advised by the government to increase the number of people referred to studies. However, it was reported that on several occasions the courses might be full or not available.⁵¹⁶

While no economic sectors are specifically prioritised through the Swedish measures, elderly care and nursing are important orientations within the vocational training in terms of number of participants.⁵¹⁷ Also vocational orientations towards childcare and leisure, as well as industrial technician have grown importantly in recent years.⁵¹⁸ One example to highlight here is in the elderly care or nursing where employees without a degree may have the possibility to undertake studies during working hours to become e.g. assisting nurse.⁵¹⁹

As regards the three-steps approach outlined in the Council Recommendation, it can be considered that Sweden applies these steps. The interviewees consulted in the context

⁵¹¹ Interview (Ministry of Education)

⁵¹² Interview (National Agency of Education)

⁵¹³ Interviews (PES and Skånes kommuner)

⁵¹⁴ Interview (Skånes kommuner); (there might be local differences due to municipalities' priorities)

⁵¹⁵ Interview (Ministry of Education)

⁵¹⁶ Interview (PES)

⁵¹⁷ Interviews, Komvux, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/kunskapslyftet-2020-komvux>

⁵¹⁸ Komvux, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/kunskapslyftet-2020-komvux>

⁵¹⁹ Socialstyrelsen, Äldreomsorgslyftet, <https://statsbidrag.socialstyrelsen.se/kommuner/satsningen-aldreomsorgslyftet/>

of this case study agreed that all three steps are included and also highlighted that these principles are much discussed at municipal level. The below sections provide further details:

5. Skills assessment

A validation process is conducted at the start of a *Komvux* course or within the context of a specific orientation course, as established by the Regulation about adult education. The aim is to map, assess, evaluate and document the existing skills and competences of each individual. This validation may affect the length of the study period, as well as the level and choice of courses.⁵²⁰

Validation is also provided by the PES – both towards educations and professions/sectors. Interviews indicated that while existing measures are in line with the Recommendation, there is a need to use this validation measure further.⁵²¹

In February 2022, the government presented a proposal concerning i.a. the validation process within *Komvux* to make sure that the needs of the labour market and the needs of the individuals are taken into consideration to a larger extent. The objective is to ensure a more effective skills supply, establishment on the labour market and increased opportunities for adjustments during the individual's working life.⁵²²

6. A tailored and flexible learning offer

The Swedish Education Act and Regulation about adult education establish that each student shall have an individual study plan including objectives and planned extent of the studies. The study plan should be elaborated by the student and staff from the school and can be revised when needed. The school's headmaster has the ultimate responsibility concerning the right of each student to have an individual study plan.⁵²³ *Komvux* is organised through the provision of individual courses and modules rather than programmes, enabling the students to select courses according to the individual study plan.

7. Validation and recognition

Upon completed *Komvux* studies, a diploma is provided to the student including relevant information such as type of studies, courses completed, and the total amount of study points gathered. The government has recently decided about a new grading system that will better reflect the skills and competences of the students. The other part of the validation is the industry validation for a profession done by the industry councils and employers at local level.⁵²⁴

The collaboration between the public employment services and the municipalities is of importance regarding both the matching of courses provided with the shortages on the labour market and prognosis of relevant developments on the labour market, as well as the identification of people in need of adult education and provision of guidance. According to interviewees, there is always a focus on how to improve and develop this cooperation. However, it was also mentioned that the recent reform of the PES, in combination with the pandemic, has had a negative impact on the extent of the collaboration in recent years.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁰ National Agency for Education (2013), Validering inom vuxenutbildning, <https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.6bfaca41169863e6a65a739/1553965044103/pdf3037.pdf>

⁵²¹ Interview (PES)

⁵²² Validering för kompetensförsörjning och livslångt lärande (Government proposal, February 2022), <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2022/02/prop.-202122123/>

⁵²³ National Agency for Education (2013), Individuell studieplan inom vuxenutbildningen, <https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.6bfaca41169863e6a656653/1553959751842/pdf2957.pdf>; Eurydice report (2021), Adult education and training in Europe, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/node/11855_en

⁵²⁴ Interview (SALAR)

⁵²⁵ Interview (PES, Skånes kommuner)

Regarding outreach activities and provision of guidance, several actors and authorities cooperate to provide educational and career advice, even though the schools and municipal adult education institutions have the main responsibility.⁵²⁶ Since 2018, municipalities can apply for a state grant to carry out outreach, information and guidance measures.⁵²⁷ Also, the PES works to identify individuals in need of training or education in order to establish themselves on the labour market. This can be done through physical meetings at the PES but also increasingly through digital channels (e.g. website provides information about what specific training, education or courses might be required for a specific job).⁵²⁸

Monitoring activities are conducted and published by the relevant national agencies (e.g. National Agency for Education, Public Employment Service, Swedish National Council of Adult Education). However, no monitoring measures specifically related to the Council Recommendation have been identified. In some cases, regions or municipalities carry out evaluations as well.

In terms of good/bad practices, a number of examples can be highlighted:

- **A well-functioning system** is in place targeting all adults with low education and offering a flexible education free of charge that can be combined with work and also makes the student eligible for a grant. The flexibility of the system (evening/distance courses) and the initial assessment of skills make it possible to sign up for courses even without any grades or diplomas from previous studies.⁵²⁹
- **Cooperation between *Komvux* and the public employment services** facilitating the identification of people with low education, as well as the provision of information about existing measures and courses. PES can instruct an individual to study while receiving income support for up to one year. Cooperation with other stakeholders such as representatives for employers, ensures that the needs of the labour market are reflected in the courses offered.
- **Some interviews highlighted that there could be a further focus on the needs of the individual**, both as regards courses available and validation measures. Furthermore, occasions where municipalities have not been able to offer the courses/study places required were also mentioned.

9.4. Efficiency

The measures and activities related to adult education in Sweden that are in line with the Council Recommendation are overall implemented efficiently.

Measures and activities are in principle funded by the national budget. Funds are allocated to the municipalities and the municipal authorities are in charge of how to allocate them in order to ensure that the measures required are in place.⁵³⁰

EU funds represent a limited part as regards upskilling activities. In some cases, ESF support or Erasmus+ have been used for specific projects. For example, Regional Yrkesvux started as a pilot project with ESF funding.⁵³¹ Furthermore, ESF funds were used for the development work for the combined courses. In addition, the Asylum, Migration, and

⁵²⁶ Eurydice report (2021), Adult education and training in Europe, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/node/11855_en

⁵²⁷ Commission Staff Working Document (2019), Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures

⁵²⁸ Interview (PES)

⁵²⁹ Interview (National Agency for Education)

⁵³⁰ Interviews (Ministry of Education, National Agency for Education)

⁵³¹ Interviews (Ministry of Education, SALAR)

Integration Fund (AMIF) has previously been used for a project in 2016-2018 to provide early validation of newcomers' skills and identification of matching employers' needs.⁵³²

In addition to the actual provisions of various courses and upskilling activities, financial incentives are used to encourage participation. Firstly, courses are provided free of charge and students are eligible for study grants (SEK 3300 per month for full-time studies) and have the possibility to take a student loan without interest rate (SEK 7560 per month for full-time studies). Furthermore, specific groups with low education/no upper secondary degree and that have been unemployed for a certain amount of time are eligible for a higher grant (approx. SEK 9000 per month – *studiestartstöd* / "study start grant"). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the access to this grant was extended to include also newly unemployed people for a period in 2020-2021 and the total spending was increased by the government.⁵³³

Another incentive to be highlighted is subsidies provided to employers to allow their employees to have a shorter working day so as to ensure competence and skills development as part of their employment.⁵³⁴ Through "introduction jobs", work can be combined with training or studies, and subsidised time is set aside for the employee to conduct vocational training, studies in Swedish, or other appropriate education.⁵³⁵

Regarding the main costs associated with the implementation of these measures, the budget and its allocation differ from one municipality to another. Funds consist of municipal taxes, as well as general and specific grants from the national government. Each municipality decides on how to distribute the funds to schools, elder care, etc. according to local needs. In 2020, total costs of *Komvux* were estimated to SEK 6,7 billion while total costs for SFI were estimated to SEK 3,6 billion⁵³⁶. In the period 2014-2018, costs of *Komvux* increased by 22% and costs of SFI increased by 49%. As regards *Komvux*, 53% of the total costs constitute education while other costs include facilities, tools, and other. Concerning the folk high schools, total costs were estimated to SEK 3,7 billion in 2018.⁵³⁷

As regards the benefits, interviewees suggested that the spending is proportionate to the benefits achieved. To provide some examples, in 2016, about 50% of students were established on the labour market following completions of studies at upper secondary level at *Komvux*, and about 16% enrolled in higher education studies.⁵³⁸ It was mentioned by one interviewee that the overall approach is to invest in peoples' access to upskilling leading to employment, rather than spending on long-term income support.⁵³⁹ This is the case for example in the provision of the combined courses where initial costs might be higher (due to e.g. having more than one teacher) but the long-term benefits are important leading to higher participation in the labour market, faster establishment and less exclusion.

9.5. Relevance

It can be concluded that the Council Recommendation remains relevant for the Swedish context. While measures and activities were in place prior to the Recommendation, it has

⁵³² Commission Staff Working Document (2019), Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures

⁵³³ Studiestöd, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/studiestod/>

⁵³⁴ Interview (Ministry of Education)

⁵³⁵ Implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, Government offices of Sweden, Ministry of Education and Research, 2018

⁵³⁶ Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner,

<https://skr.se/skr/skolakulturfratid/forskolagrundochgymnasieskola/vagledningsvarpavanligafragor/samycketkostarskolan.2785.html>

⁵³⁷ Kostnader för utbildningsväsendet (2014-2018), Statistics Sweden,

https://www.scb.se/contentassets/c1c800f27cae4b12894d379ef1bf6bb1/uf0514_2018a01_sm_ufsm1901.pdf

⁵³⁸ Statistics Sweden,

https://www.scb.se/contentassets/e16b0bec73954db684c57ec2437057ff/uf0549_2019a01_br_a40br1902.pdf

⁵³⁹ Interview (SALAR)

been important in strengthening the national policies. Furthermore, interviews conducted indicate that there might be a need to further focus on certain groups of individuals (i.e. foreign born population with low skills in the Swedish language). It was also mentioned that validation can be improved to further focus on the individual's needs and should also be used more.

Interviewees consulted suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic has made these measures even more relevant, and the government encouraged people to use the lockdown as an opportunity for skills development by increasing funds for adult education.⁵⁴⁰ Also, the total sums for student loans were temporarily increased and it was made easier for people to access the "Study start grant".⁵⁴¹

Activities and measures in place in Sweden, in line with the Recommendation, remain relevant for both the target groups and economic sectors that have been mentioned in previous sections. There is a general gap between required competencies and those of jobseekers. Adult education and validation are therefore central.⁵⁴² The combined courses in place are highly relevant as participation in adult education among foreign-born adults remains high. These courses motivate this group as it increases their employability and also make their study period more efficient and shorter. Generally, the combined courses are available from SFI level D, while large groups of individuals with less knowledge of the language or with low/no education are placed in levels A or B. This means that they cannot access any vocational training for a long period. To address this need, some municipalities have taken the initiative to offer SFI course with a connection to the labour market from Day 1. However, this is financed by the municipalities without further national funds.⁵⁴³

As regards validation, applying to both validation of previous competences (skills assessment) and validation after completed courses offered by e.g. the municipalities, efforts have been made to improve within this area in recent years. A National Delegation for Validation was appointed in 2015, and a proposal was presented in February 2022. Even if validation is in place today, it has been observed that it is used too rarely and not in a satisfactory way. Therefore, the proposal introduces a responsibility of the municipalities to undertake a validation where this is requested by the student for the courses offered by them, and to ensure that validation is provided also for other courses (that are outsourced). It should also be clarified what is meant by validation and what kind of documentation is required following a validation.⁵⁴⁴ This focus by the Swedish government shows that the Recommendation's objectives related to the three different steps in general, and validation in particular, are highly relevant in the Swedish context and further work to improve is ongoing. Interviews conducted also indicated that validation should be further focused on the individual's needs and include skills gathered also through non-formal and informal training, as well as through professions where there are no formal trainings in the educational systems.⁵⁴⁵

Concerning the needs of specific economic sectors, measures are in place to ensure that any shortages in the labour market are addressed, e.g. Regional Yrkesvux which aims to cover the specific needs of the regional labour market, while increasing the possibilities of finding a job for each individual following completed vocational courses. Furthermore, the labour market programmes in place since many years and offered by the PES represent another opportunity.

⁵⁴⁰ Interviews (Ministry of Education, SALAR)

⁵⁴¹ Studiestöd, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/studiestod/>

⁵⁴² Interview (PES)

⁵⁴³ Interview (Skånes kommuner); Bransch-SFI Trelleborg kommun (presentation)

⁵⁴⁴ Validering för kompetensförsörjning och livslångt lärande, Regeringens proposition (2021/22:123), <https://www.regeringen.se/492449/contentassets/971dd7fe52ab4c9f8d23354b74a4621c/validering-for-kompetensforsorjning-och-livslangt-larande-prop.-202122123>

⁵⁴⁵ Interview (Skånes kommuner);

Also, the government's long-term strategy for reducing and counteracting segregation, launched in 2018 and running up to 2028, is relevant for upskilling and underlined the importance of activities in this area. For example, the strategy mentions measures to create possibilities for adults to undertake studies for an establishment on the labour market, to ensure a more effective establishment of newly arrived immigrants on the labour market and prevent long-term unemployment.⁵⁴⁶

9.6. Coherence

The Council Recommendation can be considered coherent with the main policies and programmes in place in Sweden. Measures in place are regulated by the Swedish Education Act and the Regulation about adult education, both being well connected with the Recommendation. Furthermore, measures provided by the PES are highly relevant in this context.

As regards national policies, objectives of municipal adult education in Sweden include to provide support and motivation for adults in their learning activities, and to give opportunities to develop skills and knowledge with the aim of strengthening their role both on the labour market and in the society, as well as to foster the personal development. The needs and conditions of each individual shall be the starting point for the choice of educational activities. Priority shall be given to people with the least education or those that are most in need of education.⁵⁴⁷ Furthermore, the individual study plan elaborated for each student based on his/her needs, is established by law. Also, a *Knowledge Boost Programme* (Kunskapslyftet) is in place for the period 2014-2022 consisting in increased funds for adult education with the aim to e.g. increase the number of study seats at *Komvux* and other pathways.⁵⁴⁸

Municipal authorities are responsible for the provision of adult education as well as related outreach activities. This is done reflecting the needs of target groups (e.g. people with non-complete degrees or that have been unemployed for a long period, foreign-born adults) through providing courses to complete previous degrees which in turn may facilitate establishment on the labour market or access to higher education. Courses provided also reflect the needs of the labour market in some cases e.g. through the provision of the Regional Yrkesvux which considers shortages on the regional and local labour market. Following a national investigation in 2020, there will be stricter requirements for municipalities as off this year to ensure that courses offered are based on labour market needs. In this context, the National Agency of Education has been commissioned to elaborate recommendations for planning and dimensioning of the courses bases on these needs. This will also imply further collaboration with the PES.⁵⁴⁹

The work of PES is also aligned with the Recommendation, identifying individuals with low education and lacking basic skills, guiding them towards available courses that will provide them with competences needed for the labour market. Indeed, the government has requested the PES to advice more jobseekers to enrol in education as a first step, however, interviewees indicated that sometimes there are not enough study seats available in the municipalities, indicating a potential lack of funding and incoherence between national and local priorities.

⁵⁴⁶ Regeringens långsiktiga strategi för att minska och motverka segregation (2018), <https://www.regeringen.se/49feff/contentassets/a29a07890ec24acd900f5156bf45f08/regeringens-langsigktiga-strategi-for-att-minska-och-motverka-segregation.pdf>

⁵⁴⁷ Mål för vuxenutbildningen, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/utbildning-for-vuxna/mal-for-vuxenutbildning/>

⁵⁴⁸ Kunskapslyftet 2014-2022, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/kunskapslyftet/>

⁵⁴⁹ Gemensamt ansvar – en modell för planering och dimensionering av gymnasial utbildning, <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2020/06/sou-202033/>; Dimensionering av gymnasial utbildning för bättre kompetensförsörjning (Lagrådsremiss 2022), <https://www.regeringen.se/48fedd/contentassets/1dacf49b03794cf6b1e70b2ace697194/dimensionering-av-gymnasial-utbildning-for-battre-kompetensforsorjning>

Regular activities related to adult education and upskilling pathways in Sweden are in principle funded by the national budget, while only a few specific projects are funded by relevant EU funding mechanisms. In this case, the ESF, Erasmus+ and IMFA have been used. For example, initial activities related to Regional Yrkesvux and Combined courses were funded through these mechanisms.

9.7. EU added value

While it can be considered that the Council Recommendation provides an EU added value in general, interviewees suggested that this added value may have been greater in other EU Member States that did not have well-developed structures for adult education in place prior to the Recommendation. Overall, the delivery of formal education to adults in Sweden is the highest in the EU-27 and matched in numbers only by Finland.

In Sweden, the objectives of the Council Recommendation would have been achieved without an EU-level intervention as measures and activities related to adult education have been in place in Sweden for a long time. However, in other EU Member States, EU-level actions have been more important. According to interviewees, further actions and support may be needed in some countries in order to reach the objectives of the Recommendation. Financing of adult education is seen as a core issue and the national coordination is important.⁵⁵⁰ However, in Sweden these activities are in general funded by the national budget while only some pilot projects have been funded through EU funds.

Interviewees also mentioned that EU-level interventions enable Member States to learn from each other and exchange experiences. This is the case also for Sweden, for example in the case of validation.⁵⁵¹

9.8. Overall assessment

Already prior to the Council Recommendation, Sweden had a well-developed and flexible adult education and training offer, as well as labour market training, in line with the Recommendation. In 2015, the Knowledge Boost Programme was initiated including state-funded study places in vocational adult education at upper secondary level, higher vocational education, education at folk high schools, as well as higher education. Several activities have been covered in the framework of this measure including special grants for unemployed individuals with low education, combined courses for newly arrived immigrants including both language learning and e.g. vocational training, an education and training obligation for newly arrived immigrants, as well as further emphasis on vocational training taking into account shortages of the labour market at regional level.

While Sweden has a long tradition of adult education, no activities with a specific connection to the Council Recommendation have been identified. However, interviewees consulted in the context of the case study underlined the importance of the Recommendation in strengthening and confirming the national policy. Furthermore, recent years have seen further increase in national funds spent on relevant initiatives, an increase in study seats, and several initiatives as mentioned above. Measures have also been taken to improve validation, with a national delegation appointed in 2015 to monitor, support and encourage coordinated development and to propose a national strategy for validation.

Key barriers identified relate to the lack of motivation among students, as well as the cost of studying. However, measures are in place to address this by providing courses free of charge as well as study grants and a study loan. Also, the combined courses have proved to be important in motivating students as they are more closely connected to the labour market. However, they could potentially be made available at lower levels of SFI to reach

⁵⁵⁰ Interview (Agency for National Education)

⁵⁵¹ Interviews (Ministry of Education, Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), Skånes kommuner)

out to a larger group. Outreach activities are in place under the responsibility of municipalities, however, in some cases smaller municipalities may have difficulties in fully implementing this due to lack of funds. Also, the PES is important in guiding individuals towards training and education, however, in some cases it is difficult for the municipalities to match these needs and provide a sufficient offer of courses.⁵⁵² The skills assessment and individual and flexible offer of courses and modules should also be put forward as a success factor. Overall, leading up to 2019, participation in Lifelong Learning increased strongly in Sweden, both of the low qualified (by 4.4 percentage points to 23.7 %) and the overall participation rate (by 4.7 percentage points to 34.3 %).⁵⁵³

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⁵⁵² Interview (PES)

⁵⁵³ Source: mapping document

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9.10. ANNEX II: List of interviewed stakeholders

- Ministry of Education
- Municipalities of Scania (Southern Sweden) (Skånes Kommuner)
- National Agency for Education
- Public Employment Services (Arbetsförmedlingen)
- Sweden's association of local authorities and regions (SALAR)
- Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)

10. Case study Netherlands

10.1. National operating context

The **decision-making process related to upskilling pathways (UP) in the Netherlands has seen some changes over the years.** Before 2005, there was limited action in this field. Mostly individuals and employers were responsible for upskilling and cooperation and concrete actions were limited. Between 2005 and 2010 there was a push forward, and the government stepped in to share in the responsibility. This period was characterized by structural cooperation and foundational actions. However, from 2011 on, there was a loss of momentum, where the role of the government deteriorated, and cooperation was limited. In 2017 there was a new break-through moment with more intensive cooperation with the government and comprehensive actions. Currently, adult learning is considered a joint responsibility of the government, education, employers and individuals and there is a focus on an integrated, multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach. An inter-ministerial programme on adult learning has been launched, which includes five points of action and several new measures. Furthermore, an inter-ministerial action programme on the prevention of low literacy and the promotion of basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) has been set up (Cedefop, 2020A).

Target population

To better understand the national operating context, it is important to identify the target population in relation to skills and employment. **In 2020, the total estimated adult population with potential for upskilling and with potential for upskilling and reskilling in the Netherlands was 35.3%**, which equals the EU-27 average (Cedefop, 2020B). Considering the age group of 25-64 year olds with low educational attainment (ISCED 0-2), we see an ever bigger decrease of 3.9 pp from 22.9% in 2016 to 19.0% in 2020 (Eurostat A). However, except for eight Member States, the share of low-qualified adults is higher among foreign born people than among native born. With a 0.9 pp increase from 8.6% in 2016 to 9.5% in 2020, this difference between foreign born and native born low-qualified adults remains below- average compared to the EU-27 average of 15.3% in 2020 (Eurostat B).

Regarding education, training and skills, the Netherlands performs relatively well compared to the rest of the Member States. The total share of 25-64 year olds in education and training slightly increased from 18.8% in 2016 to 19.5% in 2019 (Ibid). The difference in participation rate between the highest and the lowest educational attainment level (25-64 age, 2019), is however larger in the Netherlands (18.8%) than in the EU-27 (14.4%) (Eurostat C). Furthermore, we see that in 2019 the participation rate in education and training (25-64 age) among the employed, unemployed and inactive was structurally higher in the Netherlands compared to the EU-27 average (respectively 20.8%, 19.5%, 12.7% vs. 11.4%, 10.7%, 8.8% in the EU-27) (Eurostat D)⁵⁵⁴. The Netherlands is in the top 5 of best performers in the EU as to numeracy and literacy, with a low numeracy skills rate of 14.4% and a low literacy skills rate of 13.2% (Cedefop, 2020C)⁵⁵⁵. Regarding digital skills, it is the second best performing country in the EU, with only 19% on adults (25-64 age, 2019) having low or no digital skills compared to the EU-27 average of 41% (Eurostat E)⁵⁵⁶. When distinguishing between the share of foreign born and native born individuals with no or low digital skills, the Netherlands has made some considerable improvement by dropping from 15% in 2016 to 7% in 2019 and is close to the EU-27 average of 9% in 2019. The

⁵⁵⁴ Eurostat, LFS Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex, age and labour status TRNG_LFS_03.

⁵⁵⁵ Cedefop data based on the PIACC, OECD assessment scores, 2012;2015; Cedefop (2020). Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/475393>

⁵⁵⁶ Eurostat, Individual's level of digital skills, isoc_sk_dskl_i.

share of unemployed adults with low educational attainment (age 25-64) decreased from 7.6% in 2016 to 4.6% in 2020, to be the lowest in the EU. Also the long-term unemployment rate for different education levels is among the lowest in the EU. When taking into consideration gender, we see that the difference in unemployment rate of low-qualified adults is 1 pp between women and men (respectively 5.8% vs 4.8%).

Finally, regarding policies, we see that **the Netherlands has a relatively low level of spending on training as part of ALMPs per capita** compared to other Nordic, Western and Central European countries. In 2019 for example, it spent 45 million euro on this purpose. What is remarkable is that the proportion of 25-64 year olds that reported having received a skills assessment in the Netherlands is the highest in the EU (9.5% in 2016).

Challenges related to upskilling pathways

Several challenges related to skills have been identified which are related to incentivizing people to participate in the labour market and the recognition of skills. In the 2017 OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report: (i) ensuring adults have the right combination of skills to promote success in work and society, and strengthen productivity, innovation and social inclusion; (ii) promoting continuous skills development in adulthood, especially among low-skilled adults; (iii) boosting labour market participation and employment in high-quality jobs; (iv) improving the activation of under-represented groups in the labour market; (v) strengthening skills use within companies of all sizes; (vi) improving the recognition and validation of skills developed outside of formal education, especially for the vulnerable groups in Dutch society; (vii) increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of public and private skills financing; (viii) strengthening the skills assessments and anticipation information to address current and future skills imbalances; and (ix) broadening stakeholder engagement in policy dialogue to foster more equitable skills outcomes. Recent challenges identified by the Dutch government in 2021 include: (i) the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact (need for online learning skills, increasing shortage of apprenticeships and internships, changing and disappearing jobs); (ii) ensuring continuous political commitment; ensuring strong regional infrastructure; (iii) ensuring solid and accessible guidance for adults; (iv) offering flexible learning possibilities; outreach and mobilisation; and (v) ensuring solid monitoring and evaluation (Cedefop, 2020D).

10.2. Actions taken in response to the Council Recommendation

Implementation in the Netherlands is part of the Government's wider and established policy to achieve a breakthrough in developing lifelong learning policies (LLP), including support for low-skilled adults and those with the greatest learning needs. The two main policy approaches related to Upskilling Pathways are policies to stimulate adult learning in general (with limited distinction between various target groups) and policies that specifically focus on improving basic skills of people with a low level of basic skills (adults, children and young people). For both policy approaches, several ministries work together and built upon policy that had already been implemented before the 2016 Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways.

Examples of upskilling actions

Several policies concerning upskilling pathways and lifelong learning have been initiated since 2016. First, the 'Dutch language, arithmetic and digital skills' initiative, launched in 2018, offered courses aimed at adults who want to boost their literacy, numeracy or digital skills, and covering step 1 of the Recommendation. Target groups include illiterate adults, adults who want to improve basic skills to enrol in VET, adults for whom Dutch is a second language. Second, the SLIM-subsidy, launched in 2020 aims at stimulating adult learning for employees in specific sectors, such as in individual and

cooperating SMEs, in agriculture, catering and recreation industries. As such, this initiative supports the delivery of step 2 of the Recommendation. Third, the Count on skills' programme, running from 2021-2024, intends to provide people with the necessary basic skills (reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills) to participate in society, both online and offline. It targets all citizens who are illiterate, innumerate and who lack digital skills. The accessibility and outreach to the target groups is one of the most important pillars of the programme and it also remains one of its biggest challenges. The programme also includes a subsidy arrangement that is available to employers that can be used to improve the basic skills of their employees. As such, this programme supports step 2 of the Recommendation. Fourth, the STAP-budget is an individual learning budget for employed and unemployed citizens looking for work. It is foreseen to be implemented in 2022. This initiative contributes to the implementation of step 2 of the Recommendation.

Other actions include three projects launched in 2018 to improve flexibility between training offers; offer skills assessment and guidance for employees over 45 years in selected occupations; and empower them to take their careers on to retirement age. The Netherlands is also engaged in a National Skills Strategy process, with a Diagnostic Report published in 2017. Its priority areas are fostering more equitable skills outcomes, creating skills-intensive workplaces, and promoting a learning culture, all of which align to supporting the implementation of the 2016 Recommendation even if they are not explicitly linked to it.

10.3. Effectiveness

Overall, it appears difficult to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and the extent to which it has led to changes in the levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills or developments in lifelong learning. Many policy measures and initiatives already existed before the Recommendation, and there is certain degree of alignment between these. The importance of upskilling pathways is being recognized and it is high on the policy agenda in the Netherlands. This has been the case before the Recommendation. Therefore, the effectiveness of the Recommendation has had a limited effect on the Dutch government's agenda on upskilling.

Priority target groups

To assess the effectiveness of the implementation, it is important to have a clear picture of who these policies target. **Priority target groups face difficulties in accessing the labour market and are therefore often under-represented in the labour market**, such as older workers, who have difficulties regarding re-activation of their skills on the labour market; NEETs, which in the Netherlands are a relatively small group, but who face specific challenges; the large share of employed youth in temporary jobs; immigrants with difficulties to integrate in the labour market. Vulnerable groups that face particularly difficulties in the validation of prior learning (VPL) include low-skilled (low literacy or numeracy) people, immigrants, the unemployed, and the employed on temporary contracts.

Important barriers to the participation of these groups on the labour market are (i) insufficient incentives; and (ii) insufficient support to work. These are especially true for older workers, certain categories of youth and immigrants. Barriers to upskilling pathways are (i) the outreach to target groups; (ii) negative experiences with learning; and (iii) a limited amount of time and financial means. The ministry does look into how to mitigate these barriers for the target groups. There is quite a gap in participation in skills development between practically and theoretically educated adults, where those lower educated are often underrepresented. It remains a challenge to alter society's understanding of formal education towards regularly skills development during one's career. **Possible success factors to support these groups are related to outreach and accessibility**, this includes public employment services (PES), and targeted active labour market policies (ALMPs), as

well as going out in the field and meeting the target group⁵⁵⁷ and deeper collaboration with the private sector.

Priority economic sectors

Certain sectors facing important challenges, such as the digital and energy transition and labour shortages, are also paid specific attention. Sectors that face shortages are education, healthcare, safety, and some areas of the public sector (SER, 2021). The main sectors where low-literacy and low-numeracy are the most common are the cleaning industry, construction and infrastructure, and agriculture. While LLPs tend to be quite generic, there are a few programmes that include specific policy areas such as the 'Top sectors' (e.g. agriculture, chemistry, energy, health, logistics) and the technology sector. The 'Count on Skills' programme does not focus on a specific sector but transcends multiple economic sectors.

Application of the three-step approach in designing upskilling pathways

All steps of the three-step approach were already implemented in the Netherlands before the 2016 Recommendation. First, related to skills assessments, progress has been made, many regional initiatives have been set up and many organisations are now involved with skills assessment. Currently, a common skills terminology is being developed for the use by different organisations and several tools to assess skills exist; such as the VET schools' intake focus on prior learning, and a literacy meter and numeracy meter (which have been implemented in other Member States). Second, the tailor-made supply of skills development is improving but there is still a long way to go as the quality of the offer is not always sufficient. There is a large offer from public and private education, and municipalities face difficulties in assessing the quality. Since 2016, extensive effort has been spent on improving the flexibility of vocational education and training. For example, there is a subsidy arrangement for VET schools to make their learning offer for adults more flexible, and as of recently it is possible to obtain certificates for successfully completing components of degrees (instead of receiving a formal degree for completing the entire programme). Third, regarding validation and recognition, the Netherlands has a market for validation. Recognized Acquired Competences (*Erkennen Verworven Competenties*, EVC) certificates are offered through cooperation agreements between schools and private providers and are not regulated by the government. However, as many organisations are involved, more coordination is needed.

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders

Coordination might be complex given the number of partner and fragmentation around the implementation of initiatives. There is ample collaboration between multiple ministries at the government level. The Ministries of Education, Culture and Science, of Social Affairs and Employment and of Economic Affairs and Climate intensively collaborate on the LLP agenda. The Ministries of Education, Culture and Science, of Social Affairs and Employment, of Health, Welfare and Sport and of the Interior and Kingdom Relations intensively collaborate on the basic skills policy agenda. There is also close collaboration with municipalities, especially on the basic skills policy agenda. Other important stakeholders in the field are: (i) the Association of VET Colleges (MBO Raad), a sector organisation which represents public VET schools; (ii) the NRTO, the Dutch Council for Training and Education which is the sector organisation for private schools; (iii) the SBB, the *Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*, which aims to improve the connection between education and the labour market and which is involved in setting qualification standards; (iv) the Stichting Lezen en Schrijven, aiming at improving literacy,

⁵⁵⁷ Municipalities and local organisations collaborate with ambassadors who previously had low levels of basic skills to reach out to the target group.

numeracy and digital skills; (v) the SER (Sociaal Economische Raad), the Social and Economic Council which plays a significant role in the LLP agenda as an advisory organisation to the Dutch government; (vi) Kennispunt LLO, which facilitates knowledge sharing among VET organisations; and (vii) the UWV Leerwerkloketten which are spread throughout the 35 Dutch labour market regions to provide local, low-entry advice to adults. However, there is room for improvement on cooperation between these different stakeholders. Especially regional organisations, who have their own agenda, might need more guidance from the government to better align and clarify their roles.

As seen in the discussion of the challenges in upskilling pathways, outreach to the target groups is still insufficient. Two important outreach measures are worth mentioning. First, Adult Learning Labs have the purpose of including the learner's voice and were established in the period 2018-2019. Second, in 2021 a national campaign was launched by the Dutch government to raise awareness on the topic of basic skills.

Monitoring and evaluation measures

Monitoring and evaluation are key to the lifelong learning and basic skills policy programmes. The 'Count on Skills' programme is monitored in its entirety and mid-term and final reports are presented to the Dutch Parliament. LLP measures are being regularly monitored and evaluated as well and all reports are being made publicly available. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is currently also involved in developing a national monitoring tool to increase the insight and transparency of outreach to adults with low levels of basic skills. However, launching the monitoring tool has proven to be quite complex, as municipalities work according to very different approaches.

Good and bad practices

Some good practices that have been identified do touch upon the outreach to the target groups and the type of support offered. These are: (i) strengthening the outreach of the public employment services (PES), targeted active labour market policies (ALMPs), and meeting the target group; (ii) stronger collaboration between the public and private sector to reach these under-represented groups, as well as by social partners; (iii) subsidies to employers have also shown positive results as they are well aware that they benefit from having employees with a sufficient level of basic skills who are, as a result, employable in the long term. Three important lessons have been learnt until now. First, the role of the government is crucial in assuring the accessibility of adult learning for certain vulnerable groups. Second, rather than a theoretical policy approach, the perspective of the learner and practice should be the starting point and boosts cooperation and coordination. Third, a long-term perspective is needed as adult learning requires continuous commitment.

10.4. Efficiency

The support offered at the EU level, has been shown to contribute to the efficiency in attaining the policy objects related to upskilling pathways in the Netherlands. It has been supportive, in the sense that most measures and initiatives were already in place before the 2016 Recommendation. However, an important issue that affects the efficiency of the implementation of the Council Recommendation, is that the actions aiming at stimulating literacy, numeracy and basic skills, as well as lifelong learning, are highly fragmented. It must be said that in the meantime, synergies are beginning to emerge, and networks and partnerships have started up to compile good practices in order to learn from each other.

EU and national programming and funding

There is extensive use of EU subsidies and funding, such as the ESF and Erasmus+.

Two important programmes are the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), which partially funded a project focused on the flexibilization of the VET learning offer for adults, and the Structural Reform Support Service (now TSI), which provided subsidies to improve the monitoring and quality assurance of the basic skills learning offer in the Netherlands, conducted in collaboration with the OECD. EU funding in the light of the COVID-19 recovery is promising, and the amount of subsidy has increased to improve basic skills as well as to stimulate lifelong learning. After the pandemic, a EUR 1.4 billion 'social package' has been proposed which includes substantial funds for education, training and guidance. At the national level, subsidies have been provided to municipalities, employers and VET schools to incentivise participation in UP. Three important aforementioned initiatives of financial support are first, the STAP-budget, an individual learning budget for adults. Second, the SLIM-subsidy to stimulate adult learning in SMEs. And third, the Count on Skills subsidy for employers to provide basic skills training to their employees. While subsidies have been made available for retraining purposes, there do remain a lot of regulations which cause confusion regarding eligibility of people.

Costs and benefits of the implementation

It is quite difficult to link any costs directly to the implementation of the 2016 Recommendation. As previously mentioned, many initiatives and measures already existed before the 2016 Recommendation. Furthermore, while the development of new or existing initiatives has been fully in line with the Recommendation, their development cannot be fully and directly be attributed to it, except for some specific programmes. For example, the 'Tel mee met Taal 2016-2018' programme managed to meet most of its quantitative objectives as to reaching 45.000 illiterate adults, establishing 'Taalhuizen/Taalpunten' in the 35 labour market regions, to settle on language agreements within regions, to join forces with 300 employers etc.⁵⁵⁸

10.5. Relevance

The 2016 Council Recommendations on Upskilling Pathways regarding basic and digital skills, lifelong learning and the flexibilization of education, are perhaps more relevant than ever. Given current challenges such as COVID-19 and the green and digital transition, it is clear that action is needed to ensure that no one is left behind and can participate in the labour market.

Relevance of the objectives and measures of the Council Recommendation

The objectives defined in the 2016 Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways are still relevant to the current socio-economic and policy context in the Netherlands, despite changing circumstances. The Recommendation was since the beginning to a large extent in alignment with the existing policy measures and initiatives. Regarding basic skills and the flexibilization of VET, a lot of progress has been made since 2016. Lifelong learning remains urgent, and this is illustrated by the formulation of human capital agendas on the provincial level or the inclusion of LLP in all election programmes of city councils. Job transitions have an impact and are closely related to mismatches on the labour market. Large shortages on the labour market, the energy transition, the digital transition, and ageing are some of society's main challenges right now.

Relevance to priority target groups and economic sectors

⁵⁵⁸ Please find the 2016-2018 evaluation by Ecorys NL here: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/03/09/bijlage-3-monitor-actieprogramma-tel-mee-met-taal-2016-2018>

Given those current challenges, having the necessary basic and digital skills, and lifelong learning are crucial to ensure resilience and opportunities on the labour market. Upskilling pathways are thus more relevant and urgent than ever. **The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the vulnerability of groups with a low level of basic and digital skills, as well as the importance of acquiring new skills.** It can be said that the target groups have become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially in the context of job transitions, different actors such as the UWV, vocational education and training, municipalities and other regional mobility teams are committing up to help (unemployed) people with a vulnerable labour market position in their job transitions.

10.6. Coherence

Coherence with national and regional policies

The objectives, target groups and measures to implement upskilling pathways have been certainly coherent with education and training, employment and social policies at the national and regional level in the Netherlands. As mentioned before, the 2016 Recommendation has arrived to cover previously existing policy initiatives in the Netherlands. Regarding other related EU level policies, the New Skills Agenda includes suggestions for individual learning accounts and microcredentials. New policies in the Netherlands are increasingly shaped in line with these topics, an example is the STAP-budget. Also EU funding mechanisms largely cover the ongoing measures and initiatives. The EaSI and TSI have partially funded relevant projects and Erasmus+ tailors towards adult learning. In general, the European Commission has offered sufficient and good working financial arrangements that contribute to the Netherlands' policy goals on upskilling pathways.

10.7. EU added value

It is not straightforward to assess whether the objectives of the 2016 Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways could have been achieved without EU level intervention. While many initiatives are shaped by national policies, EU policy and support provides something to hold on to and the large subsidies help. Furthermore, it allows for comparison of national policies with other Member States. Furthermore, considering the implementation of the 2016 Recommendation, it is difficult to pinpoint the extent of EU level support, as many initiatives were already going on before the Recommendation.

10.8. Overall assessment

The Netherlands performs relatively well regarding skills and participation in education compared to the rest of the EU. However, more can be done to reach out to the priority target groups and increase their participation both in education and on the labour market as important barriers to their participation remain. These groups include older workers, young people, immigrants and the low-skilled. Some sectors are also more affected by the current challenges and face serious problems related to skills. Special attention goes to these sectors. Many stakeholders are active in the field and offer support to these vulnerable groups. An important issue is the coordination of these stakeholders, as we observed that the actions taken are quite fragmented.

While several initiatives were already in place before the 2016 Council Recommendation, there have been several new initiatives concerning upskilling pathways, targeted at low-skilled adults mostly. The subjects are high on the agenda in the Netherlands and policies continue to be developed. Extensive support for this is offered from the EU level in the form of subsidies and funding and these are being used for several ongoing projects.

Overall, it is clear that the objectives of the 2016 Recommendation continue to be of high relevance. Especially after since the COVID-19 pandemic, these issues have become even more urgent, and that the target groups have been hit hard. Continued and effective support to these groups is thus necessary. Finally, we can conclude that the added value of the 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways lays mostly in the support offered by the EU to the ongoing national policy process, notably in the funds provided.

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Annex 5 – Consultation synopsis report

1. Outline of the consultation strategy

This document provides a synopsis of the stakeholder consultations conducted for the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults. The consultation strategy was developed on the basis of the Evaluation Roadmap.⁵⁵⁹ The Roadmap indicates that the **aim of the consultation activities** is to gather the views and opinions of the wide variety of stakeholders involved in policy making and implementation of the types of measures outlined in the Recommendation, to inform the evaluation work. The consultation activities addressed the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, relevance and EU added value of the Recommendation and the progress made towards raising the levels of literacy, numeracy and digital competence amongst low-qualified/low-skilled adults.

A wide range of **stakeholders** were involved in the consultation process, including national and regional authorities responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills or employment policies; social and economic partners; education and training providers; organisations representing the low-skilled; individuals benefitting from upskilling pathways interventions; as well as other relevant stakeholders at European, national, regional level; and the general public.

To adequately reach these stakeholders, different consultation **activities and methods** were used:

- A **public consultation**, including position papers submitted by organisations responding to the public consultation;
- Targeted consultations, including:
 - Interviews with stakeholders on the EU and national level
 - Case studies of 10 countries⁵⁶⁰ which also included consultations with key stakeholders in the form of in-depth interviews
 - Three internet-based surveys targeting coordinating and implementing organisations of upskilling measures, organisations representing/working with the low-skilled and adult learners themselves;
- **Other targeted consultations** including exchange of views with the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVV) and the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT), exchange of views with the European Network of Public Employment Services, consultation of the National coordinators for adult learning and the EQF advisory group).

The consultations were implemented as foreseen.

2. Overview of consultation activities

⁵⁵⁹ European Commission, Improving adults' basic skills ("Upskilling pathways recommendation") – evaluation: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12637-Improving-adults-basic-skills-Upskilling-pathways-recommendation%E2%80%9D-evaluation_en

⁵⁶⁰ Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden.

The **evaluation roadmap** was open for consultation for four weeks between 12 January 2021 and 9 February 2021, with the aim of gathering the views of relevant stakeholders on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions and to share any relevant information that they may have on the evaluation of the Recommendation.

The main aim of the **public consultation** was to provide an open channel for all interested stakeholders to provide their input. The consultation took the form of an e-survey with closed and open questions, addressing the key evaluation criteria and tailored to the different stakeholder groups. The public consultation was open for 13 weeks from 16 December 2021 to 17 March 2022.

The **targeted consultations** aimed to gather more detailed input from stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Recommendation in different capacities. The targeted consultations consisted of six main sub-activities as described in the following sections.

Targeted interviews with EU and national level stakeholders focused on two key stakeholder groups: EU level stakeholders directly and indirectly linked to the education, training, and adult learning policies; and national level stakeholders responsible for adult learning, training, vocational education and training, skills policies (these included primarily Ministries of Employment and/or Social Affairs and Ministries of Education, as well as other stakeholders such as national agencies responsible for education and training, adult learning or vocational education and training that are not direct Ministries). The targeted semi-structured interviews were conducted from October 2021 to February 2022.

A selection of ten **case studies** were conducted as part of the evaluation research. As part of the case studies, additional interviews were conducted with representatives involved in the practical implementation, operations, and monitoring of national approaches to the implementation of the Council Recommendation. The case study interviews were conducted from March to April 2022.

Three internet-based surveys were conducted. The first survey targeted coordinating and implementing organisations, with a focus on national and regional authorities in charge at operational level of upskilling initiatives. The second survey targeted organisations representing potential target groups of the Recommendation and working with low skilled adults. The third survey aimed to gather the views of beneficiaries of upskilling measures namely adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and competences and organisations representing them.

An **expert meeting** was held online on 24 February 2022 to gather the views of selected consultees on preliminary findings on all evaluation criteria, and provide examples of approaches, good practices and lessons learnt. Consultees included thematic experts, as well as representatives from national authorities with overall responsibility for the implementation of upskilling pathways, and those in charge of implementing upskilling pathways on the ground.

A **validation workshop** was held on 1 June 2022 as a final consultation activity to validate the findings of the evaluation study and for selected consultees to share their views on the findings and lessons learned. Selected consultees included representatives of national authorities in charge of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, representatives from social partners and EU level civil society organisations and experts.

Lastly, **other targeted consultations** included an exchange of views in dedicated meetings with the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT), the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT), the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network), the national coordinators for adult learning and the EQF advisory group.

2.1. Summary and reflection on challenges

The consultation methods were implemented as planned, in line with the agreed consultation strategy. The targeted interviews posed some challenges, such as delays due to the unresponsiveness of a number of national level stakeholders. Moreover, some EU level stakeholders felt that they did not have the relevant expertise to contribute to the study but provided contacts of their national partners. There were some challenges in securing answers to the surveys, as there was a geographical imbalance in the responses, with certain countries being over-represented. The impact of this on the consultation strategy was minimal, however, as the other targeted consultations conducted, and the interviews in particular, allowed the research team to still gather in-depth views of a range of stakeholders across the EU27.

3. Information on consultation activities and stakeholder groups consulted

All relevant stakeholders as identified in the evaluation roadmap were consulted through the consultation activities, as set out in .

Table A5_138 Overview of stakeholders consulted in all consultation activities

Type of stakeholder	Public consultation	Evaluation roadmap	Targeted interviews	Surveys	Expert meeting	Validation workshop	Other targeted consultations
Ministries and institutions responsible for education and training policy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ministries and institutions responsible for employment policies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Other relevant public institutions responsible for adult learning, training, VET and skills policies	X	X	X	X		X	X
Social and economic partners at national and EU level	X	X	X	X		X	X

Education and training providers	X	X	X	X			X
EU level institutions/policymakers	X	X	X	X			X
Organisations representing low-skilled adults and target groups	X	X	X	X			
Beneficiaries	X	X	X	X			
Research/academia and other international organisations	X	X	X			X	
Citizens	X	X					

3.1. Evaluation Roadmap

The total number of respondents to the consultation on the evaluation roadmap was 14. These included six responses from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), five responses from economic and social partners (four trade unions and one business association), one from EU citizens, and two from other types of stakeholders.⁵⁶¹

3.2. Public consultation

The total number of respondents to the public consultation was 60. The data on respondents showed a somewhat **unbalanced geographical distribution**. A total of eight responses referred to Belgium as their country of origin (including four EU level organisations and one international organisation), followed by seven to Lithuania, five to both Italy and Germany, and three to Ireland and Poland. Not all EU Member States were represented among the respondents, and a total of four responses were received by respondents from non-EU countries.

In terms of the type of respondents, the public consultation targeted the following main groups:

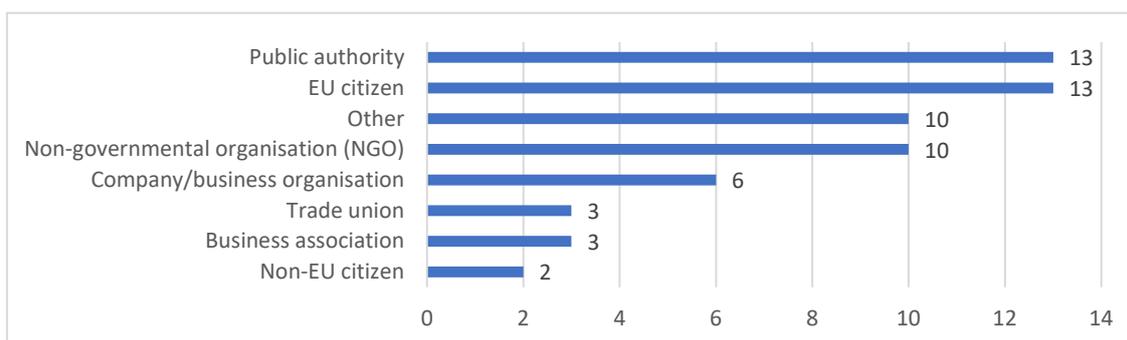
- Group A – organisations: Public authorities, NGOs, companies or business organisations, and trade unions;
- Group B – individuals: either EU or non-EU citizens;

⁵⁶¹ European Commission, Improving adults' basic skills ("Upskilling pathways recommendation") – evaluation: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12637-Improving-adults-basic-skills-Upskilling-pathways-recommendation%E2%80%9D-evaluation/feedback_en?p_id=18724489

- Group C – others: respondents representing other types of groups than those listed in Group A or B.

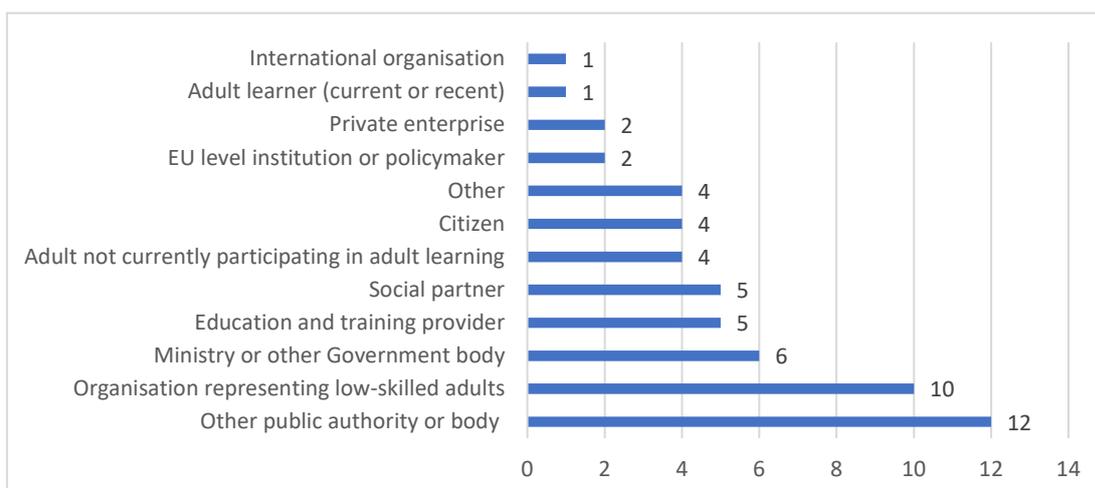
Out of the 60 respondents, the stakeholders with the largest number of responses were public authorities (n=13, 22%) and individuals who are EU-citizens (n=13, 22%), followed by non-governmental organisations (10, 17%) and those who indicated that they belonged to a group not listed as a main stakeholder group in the questionnaire (i.e. Other) (n=10, 17%). The remaining respondents represented company/business organisations (n=6, 10%), trade unions (n=3, 5%), business associations (n=3; 5%) and non-EU citizens (n=2, 3%). presents the breakdown of respondents by main stakeholder groups.

Figure 221 Breakdown of respondents by main stakeholder groups



Respondents were asked to further specify the capacity in which they are replying to the public consultation by indicating which **sub-group of stakeholders** they belonged to from the list provided. In total, 56 respondents (93%) gave their answer to this question, presents the breakdown of respondents by sub-group of stakeholders and shows that the largest group of respondents belonged to public authorities or bodies which are involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies (12 out of 56, or 21%).

Figure 223 Breakdown of respondents by sub-group of stakeholders



Ten position papers were also submitted in response to the public consultation outlining different organisations' views on the Recommendation/.

3.3. Targeted interviews with EU and national stakeholders

A total of 123 interviews were undertaken. 14 interviews of EU level stakeholders and 109 interviews of national level stakeholders were undertaken.

Table A5_239 Targeted interviews completed

EU level		
DG EAC - Unit B2 (2 interviews)		
DG EMPL - Unit G1		
Eurochambers		
All-Digital		
European Federation of Education Employers		
European Training Foundation		
European Association for the Education of Adults (2 interviews)		
European Association of Regional & Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning		
ERGO Network		
European Forum for Technical and Vocational Education and Training		
European Basic Skills Network		
Eurofound		
Total EU level interviews		14
National level		
Type of stakeholder	Countries covered	Number of interviews conducted
National and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for adult learning/training	AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, DE, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SE	41
National and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for employment policies	BE, BG, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, RO, SK	22
Other national and regional public authorities or bodies	BE, CY, DK, EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, LV, LU, MT, PL, RO, SK, SE	35
Social partners, economic actors, and EU fora on skills	CZ, FR, IT, MT, PT	9
Representatives of education and training providers	HR, IT	2
Total of national level interviews		109

3.4. Case studies

48 interviews were conducted for the case studies, with stakeholders from the following categories in each of the case study countries:

- Ministries, governmental departments, or intermediaries responsible for implementing the initiatives;
- Regional or local authorities that are engaged with upskilling pathways, adult learning or lifelong learning strategies;
- Relevant implementing organisations of selected initiatives/schemes;
- NGOs, think tanks; research centres, academics or other organisations that engage with public policies in the areas of skills and adult learning
- social partners (trade unions and employers);
- Public employment services
- VET centres and education centres involved in the practical implementation of upskilling initiatives

3.5. Internet-based surveys

Potential respondents to the internet-based surveys were identified through consultation with national authorities, adult learning providers, civil society organisations and other stakeholders that were interviewed for the study. Civil society organisations in particular were used as multipliers to reach out to adult learners and to other national organisations representing low-skilled adults. Targeted emails were sent out to multipliers and invitations to contribute to the surveys were also included in organisations' newsletters in order to increase reach.

A total of 108 responses were received for the **survey targeting organisations either coordinating the implementation of upskilling measures or implementing upskilling measures**. The data showed a somewhat unbalanced geographical distribution in the responses. While respondents represented all Member States with the exception of Hungary, a total of 21% (n=23) of respondents selected Bulgaria as the country in which their organisation was active. This was followed by Italy (n=12, 11%), Lithuania (n=9, 8%) and Portugal (n=6, 6%). Furthermore, 5% of respondents selected Belgium (n=5) and Germany (n=5), whilst 6 countries received 4 responses each (Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Romania), accounting for 4% of the total number of responses. The remaining 14 countries had 3 or less responses.

A total of 180 responses were received for the **survey targeting representative organisations of low-skilled adults**. 129 (72%) responses were submitted by organisations based in Portugal. The remaining responses were submitted by organisations based in Poland (n=9, 18%), Austria (n=7, 14%), Bulgaria (n=7, 14%), Germany (n=5, 10%), Slovenia (n=4, 8%), Belgium (n=3, 6%), Greece (n=2, 4%), Italy (n=2, 4%), Romania (n=2, 4%), Sweden (n=2, 4%).

A total of 119 responses were received for the **survey of adults participating in upskilling initiatives**. However, more than half of the responses were submitted from Portugal (n=41, 40%) and Poland (n=33, 32%), and Italy (n=17, 17%). The remaining 11 responses were submitted from Slovenia (n=6, 6%), Romania (n=2, 2%), and Austria (n=1, 1%), Bulgaria (n=1, 1%), and Estonia (n=1, 1%),

3.6. Expert meeting

The online expert meeting was attended by a total of 40 participants, 25 of these were representatives from 12 Member States (Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain). The remaining 15 were representatives from the European Commission and the research team.

3.7. Validation workshop

The online validation workshop was attended by a total of 32 participants. Of these, seven were representatives of EU level organisations, while 15 were representatives from 14 Member States (Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden). The remaining 10 were representatives from the European Commission and the research team.

3.8. Other targeted consultations

The following additional online meetings were organised as part of the targeted consultations:

- EQF Advisory Group consultation on Upskilling Pathways: this meeting took place on 25 January 2022 and was attended by 37 participants;
- PES Network and National Coordinators for Adult learning consultation on Upskilling Pathways: this meeting took place on 4 February 2022 and was attended by 34 participants;
- Upskilling Pathways Consultation webinar with ACVT/DGVT members: this meeting took place on 15 February 2022 and was attended by 41 participants.

4. Methodology for data processing

The feedback on the **evaluation roadmap** was conducted by carrying out a qualitative analysis of the responses to identify common trends and relevant insights.

For the **public consultation**, the analysis of results was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data analysis included analysis of frequency distribution for each of the variables related to the closed-ended questions, and cross-tabulations between specific variables and characteristics of respondents and between specific variables, though the low number of responses has limited the possibilities for this. For the qualitative data analysis, information was classified by related variable (number of question) and analysed to identify additional information and trends.

For the **targeted interviews with EU and national level stakeholders**, the write-ups from the interviews were collected and exported into analytical grids, broken down by the different questions and by the respective evaluation criteria. The research team used the analytical grids to carry out an in-depth analysis of the data to inform the relevant sections and annexes of the interim and final reports.

Information gathered from the **case studies interviews** was used in the analysis of each country case study report. The case study reports were used to inform the analysis carried out by the research team for all sections of the final report.

The **surveys** were analysed using both quantitative (to analyse the frequencies of the closed answers) and qualitative methods (for the open questions, to analyse complex concepts and substantiate and interpret the quantitative data with relevant insights). Survey findings were used by the research team for all sections of the final report.

For the **expert meeting and validation workshop**, the outcomes of the discussions were collected in meeting reports drafted by the research team. These were used by the research team for all sections of the final report.

5. Overview of results of consultation activities

5.1. Effectiveness

Consulted stakeholders largely agreed that **Member States have facilitated access to upskilling opportunities since the adoption of the Upskilling Pathways** in 2016. 65% (66 out of 101) of survey respondents from organisations coordinating and implementing upskilling initiatives agreed that adults with low levels of skills have had greater access to adult learning measures over the past five years to a great or a fairly large extent and 65% (31 out of 48) of respondents to the public consultation stated that they consider the Recommendation as very or mostly effective in helping low-skilled adults take part in adult learning measures. However, stakeholders across different groups highlighted that **differences remain across Member States**. This mixed picture is reflected in the interviews, where national authorities consulted emphasised that the situation is not uniform across the EU27. This view is confirmed by the survey of implementing and coordinating organisations, with just over half of respondents (21 out of 41, 51%) stating that the Recommendation has contributed only to a small extent to changes in levels of literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Moreover, both the responses to the Roadmap and the feedback from the EU level stakeholders and national authorities participating in the validation workshop highlighted the need to ensure that the measures to implement the Recommendation are adequate and high quality.

There was large agreement amongst stakeholders (national authorities, PES, trade unions, EU level stakeholders) consulted that Member States have identified a **broad target group** for upskilling pathways, with most measures targeting the 'low-skilled' in general. In the survey of implementing and coordinating organisations, 77 out of 108 respondents (71%) identified adults with low levels of basic skills as the priority target group of adult learning measures. Nonetheless, the surveys and interviews (national authorities, PES, trade unions, EU level stakeholders) show that Member States have made some **efforts to prioritise the most in need** within this broader group. This is clear in the results of the survey of implementing and coordinating organisations, where the long-term unemployed (67% or 72 out of 108 respondents) and economically inactive people (47% or 51 out of 108 respondents) were the second and third most selected target groups of adult learning measures. The case studies also confirm this, for example by highlighting that a number of Member States have prioritised vulnerable groups in their provision of upskilling measures. Despite this generally effective identification of the target groups most in need, the study (e.g., responses to the Roadmap, surveys) has also identified **some groups that have not been adequately prioritised**, including older workers, which were identified by 24% (26 out of 108) of respondents to the survey of implementing and coordinating organisations as the group that should have been targeted by upskilling measures since 2016, but was not.

Stakeholders from implementing organisations in particular identified key success factors in reaching target groups including: *informal* outreach by establishing personal relations with target groups and involving actors outside public authorities; individual and tailored approach to training offers; strong cooperation between actors. However, some barriers were also identified including financial obstacles; stigmatisation of the target group and its

impact on motivation; global pressures of digitalisation and automation which have resulted in an increased need for upskilling beyond the low skilled.

The consultation activities show that Member States have made efforts to apply or improve **the three-step approach** in the design of upskilling pathways since 2016:

- Consultations with national authorities and implementing organisations through the interviews, case studies and surveys confirm that the **skills assessment** is the most common step, with 60% (29 out of 48) of respondents to the public consultation indicating it had been implemented to a very large or fairly large extent in their country or in the EU, and 67% (52 out of 79) of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations stating that skills assessment measures are accessible to priority target groups.
- **Tailored learning offers** are also a relatively common step, with the 73% (80 out of 108) of survey and 65% (31 out of 48) of public consultation respondents across all groups indicating that learning offers are tailored to the needs of target groups to a large or fairly large extent.
- **Validation** is the step that is the least implemented in Member States, with 40% (19 out of 48) of respondents to the public indicating it had been implemented to a small extent or not at all, as establishing fully functioning validation systems remains a challenge regardless of the strength of existing adult learning provisions.

Consultees across groups agreed that different **stakeholders are involved in the implementation of the Recommendation** - from social partners, to PES, and local level actors (e.g., NGOs) - and that structures for cooperation (e.g. central working groups or councils) exist in the majority (22) of Member States. The involvement of stakeholders was also identified as an important aspect of upskilling measures by respondents that submitted a position paper in the context of the public consultation. However, results from the public consultation suggest that cooperation is not always fully effective: while the **validation and recognition of skills** acquired is seen as being delivered to a fairly large or very large extent in cooperation with relevant stakeholders by 51% (23 out of 45) of respondents, the percentage of respondents selecting indicating that cooperation only happens 'to a small extent' or 'not at all' is only marginally different (40% or 18 out of 45). Replies to the Roadmap, as well as views expressed in the surveys, interviews, expert meeting and validation workshop further highlight that the involvement of local actors should be improved, particularly to strengthen guidance and outreach, and that social dialogue can play a key role in the design, implementation and monitoring of upskilling measures.

Despite variations in the level of implementation and impact across the EU, stakeholders (national authorities, PES, trade unions, EU level stakeholders) agree that the Recommendation has **acted as a catalyst to accelerate progress in upskilling**, by bringing increased attention to adult, stimulating cooperation between relevant actors, raising awareness on the challenges faced by the low-skilled. However, EU level stakeholders providing responses to the Roadmap and written contributions following the validation workshop highlighted the lack of systematic data on the upskilling measures implemented as a critical gap that does not allow to identify the direct impact of the Recommendation on the target group and on the situation of the low-skilled in Europe as a whole.

5.2. Efficiency

Stakeholder consultations identified a wide range of costs associated with the Recommendation:

- **Adjustment/administrative costs:** The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations found that 82% (55 out of 67) of the respondents had incurred adjustment/administrative costs to implement adult learning measures over the last five years. Qualitative evidence from the interviews and the public consultation also identified **staffing costs** as a common expenditure linked to designing, delivering, and monitoring the Recommendation. Case studies further highlighted costs associated with organising meetings/information days to inform other stakeholders of the Upskilling Pathways measures.
- **Financial incentives:** Financial incentives (e.g., to education and training institutions; employers; learners) were mentioned both by respondents to the surveys and the public consultation, as well as by interviewees particularly national authorities, as a common cost.
- **Costs incurred by learners:** The consultations showed a difference in opinion with the regards to costs incurred by learners as a result of engaging in upskilling measures (e.g., travel and accommodation costs; education and training material; forgone earnings to take part in training). 58% (60 out of 102) of respondents to the survey of adult learners indicated that they did not incur in any cost, whilst interviewed national authority stakeholders highlighted that costs to learners can be high.

Adult learning measures introduced in the last five years have been identified by stakeholders as contributing to a range of benefits for society, employers, and individual learners. In terms of **benefits for the learners**, according to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, approximately nine in ten respondents considered that the adult learning measures introduced in the last five years contributed to individuals gaining a qualification (94%, 96 out of 102), gaining access to further education (93%, 95 out of 102), gaining access to employment (92%, 94 out of 102), and gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills (89%, 91 out of 102). In addition, the vast majority of respondents to both the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations and the survey of organisations representing low-skilled adults noted that the measures contributed to individuals gaining more confidence (82%, 88 out of 102, and 86%, 44 out of 51 respectively), improved individuals' participation in society (77%, 83 out of 102, and 94%, 48 out of 51 respectively), and improved individuals health and wellbeing (73%, 74 out of 102, and 76%, 39 out of 51 respectively). Respondents to the survey of adult learners highlighted a similar range of benefits for adult learners, additionally finding that learners benefited from being able to change careers, from gaining a higher paid job, and from being able to better support others in their learning.

At societal level, consultees, in particular EU level stakeholders identified greater attention for **education provision for low-skilled adults as a political priority** as one of the main benefits of the Recommendation. According to national authorities consulted through the interviews and the case studies, the Recommendation not only provided a common framework, but also pushed authorities to give more attention to adult education. This, moreover, was perceived by consultees as having positive ripple effects in the medium to long term.

While most consulted stakeholders, due to lack of data, could not identify factors that influenced efficiency or provide views on whether benefits could have been achieved at a lower cost, the overall consensus was that the Recommendation has contributed to improving efficiency of adult learning measures. However, it is clear from the outcomes of the interviews and surveys that the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on efficiency, as it slowed down delivery efforts. This was mentioned by stakeholders from all stakeholder categories.

5.3. Relevance

Consultations showed a strong agreement across stakeholder categories that the **key objectives of the Recommendation continue to be highly relevant to the current EU socio-economic context**, with 87% of the respondents to the public consultation (41 of 47) indicating that providing learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults is still very relevant today. 95% (39 of 41) of the respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations also agreed that the objectives of the Recommendation were still relevant to the current socio-economic and policy context in their country or region.

Respondents to both the public consultation and the consultation on the evaluation roadmap stressed the relevance of the Recommendation in **responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**, as well as the digital and green transformation, particularly in relation to supporting vulnerable groups. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the relevance of the Recommendation was also highlighted in replies to the Roadmap, in the position papers submitted in response to the public consultation and was confirmed by the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, with 55% (n=21) of respondents noting that the pandemic had increased the relevance of the measures defined in the Recommendation to the needs of the target group.

Consulted stakeholders (EU level stakeholders, national authorities responsible for education and employment policies, social partners) also agreed as a whole that the **three-step approach** in the Recommendation provides a useful structure and guidance for Member States to adopt measures addressing specific needs at the national or regional level. National authorities responsible for upskilling that participated in the expert group agreed that developing **skills assessments** is still a very relevant measure for achieving the goals of the Recommendation. Moreover, consulted stakeholders identified ensuring **validation and recognition of skills and competences** as a key area of relevance to support individuals in the recognition of their skills and employers in understanding how these match their needs. National authorities responsible for upskilling participating in the validation workshop highlighted the three-step approach represents a key strength of the Recommendation, and that, for the future, efforts should focus on fostering the functional integration of all three steps.

Lastly, the outcomes of the targeted consultations highlighted that the priority target groups set out in the Recommendation were still considered to be relevant. This was further confirmed by the outcomes of the public consultation, to which all target groups of the Recommendation listed were considered to be very relevant, with respondents identifying adults with low levels of basic skills (33 respondents out of 45, 73%), older workers above 55 years old (32 respondents out of 45, 71%), and long-term unemployed adults (32 respondents out of 45, 71%) as the most relevant sub-groups. However, consulted stakeholders across all stakeholder categories emphasised the need to pay greater attention to the **heterogeneity of the priority groups** by ensuring that measures are better targeted at specific sub-groups of the low-skilled where needed, and that more efforts are made to strengthen outreach towards these groups and increase awareness of the need for upskilling.

5.4. Coherence

Overall stakeholders (EU level stakeholders, national authorities responsible for education and employment policies, social partners) expressed the view that there is a **good level of coherence** between the objectives, target groups and measures defined in the Recommendation and relevant policies and strategies national and regional level. The survey of coordinating and implementing organisations shows that a very high share of

respondents (88% or 36 out of 41) considered that the objectives, target groups and measures to implement adult learning measures have been coherent with education and training, employment and social policies at national/regional level. Stakeholders shared the opinion that the level of **coherence tends to be much higher in Member States where specific national policies or strategies for upskilling low-skilled adults exist**.

Despite the overall positive feedback, stakeholders from national authorities in particular underlined that aligning national and regional policies with the Recommendation can still present challenges, which vary depending on the specific national context. In particular, EU stakeholders consulted in the validation workshop and the case study interviews identified a number of areas for improvement including: a more specific focus on diversity, gender equality and training of trainers in relation to upskilling; the validation of non-formal and informal learning; and the integration of all three steps of the Recommendation into a single programme.

Both EU and national level stakeholders (national authorities responsible for education and employment policies, social partners) consulted shared the view that the Recommendation has a **good degree of coherence with other related EU policies** and that there is no or very limited duplication or overlap, and good complementarity. However, there was a difference in views between EU level stakeholders and national organisations implementing upskilling activities: 30% (12 out of 40) of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations did not know or did not wish to provide an answer when asked about complementarity and synergies between the Recommendation and other EU policies. 'Do not know' was also the most common response to the question in the public consultation about the complementarity and synergies between the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation and other selected EU policies.

Lastly, consulted stakeholders across all categories largely agreed that the Recommendation has a high level of **coherence with relevant EU funding mechanisms**, albeit to varying degrees depending on the type of instrument. In responses to the public consultation and the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, the European Social Fund (57%, 25 out of 44, and 79%, 30 out of 38 respectively) and Erasmus+ (46%, 21 out of 46, and 55%, 21 out of 38 respectively) received the largest number of positive responses with regards to their contribution to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation.

5.5. EU added value

The perception of EU added value resulting from the Recommendation was positive overall among the range of stakeholders consulted.

The public consultation, the surveys and the interviews show that the Recommendation has likely contributed to an **increased provision of validation and recognition of skills**. Stakeholders across all consultation activities recognised that the Recommendation fostered cooperation between key actors, by highlighting the importance of involving them at all levels and in different stages of policy design and implementation. Views of organisations implementing upskilling activities were less positive, however, in relation to the extent to which the Recommendation has led to greater convergence between approaches adopted at Member State level: less than half (37% or 14 out of 38) of respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations indicated that the Recommendation has led to greater similarities across Member States.

There was clear consensus amongst all stakeholders (EU level stakeholders, national authorities responsible for education and employment policies, social partners) consulted that the key added value of the **Recommendation was increasing awareness** of the

importance of recognising the heterogeneity of the target group and their different skills needs, and by **encouraging knowledge-sharing and mutual learning** across Member States. Moreover, consulted stakeholders agreed that **EU funding** provides significant EU added value, as it ensures the continuation of existing upskilling measures.

The majority of interviewed stakeholders across all categories (EU level stakeholders, national authorities responsible for education and employment policies, social partners) generally agreed that that the objectives of the Recommendation **could not have been achieved to the same extent without the EU level intervention**. This view was confirmed by respondents to the survey of coordinating and implementing organisations, as well as by stakeholders from national authorities interviewed. However, the outcomes of the stakeholder consultations identified some key areas where additional EU action/support will be needed, and that would increase EU added value. These include **building new and stronger partnerships** among Member States by involving key actors in existing mutual learning activities; providing a **framework for monitoring and evaluating** the implementation of upskilling measures; **improving outreach measures** to target vulnerable groups more effectively; and **further tailoring and adapting** the Recommendation to the specific policy context and institutional frameworks of each country.

Annex 6 – Public consultation report: The analysis of the public consultation results

1. Executive Summary

This report analyses the responses to the public consultation held as part of the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults. The online public consultation was launched by the European Commission on 16 December 2021 and ran until 17 March 2022. The public consultation received **60 responses**. Respondents were from 19 EU Member States and four non-EU countries. Ten position papers were also received in response to the public consultation.

More than half of respondents to the consultation represent an **organisation** (35 out of 60, 58%). The largest group of respondents is that of **public authorities** involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, skills and/or employment policies (12 out of 56, 21%). The second largest group of respondents are **organisations representing low-skilled adults/** specific target groups such as NGOs (10 out of 56, 18%). **Individuals** represent one quarter of all responses (15 respondents out of 60, 25%) including EU and non-EU citizens. Four potential adult learners and one adult learner answered the consultation. A high degree of caution should be taken in interpreting and using the results of this consultation, particularly due to the low response rates.

1.1. Effectiveness

In terms of **implementation of the specific features** of the Recommendation, the provision of skills assessments was the feature most frequently considered as implemented by respondents (29 out of 48, 60%). In contrast, validation and recognition of skills acquired was the feature seen as the least implemented (19 out of 48, 40%)

When asked about the **effectiveness of each of the features** of the Recommendation, respondents were most likely to assess that the provision of a tailored offer was very effective or mostly effective (31 out of 48, 65%). Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression and support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning were the features most frequently assessed as mostly ineffective or not effective at all (13 out of 48, 27%).

Regarding **target groups of the Recommendation**, long-term unemployed adults were most frequently seen as the target group that had been able to better access adult learning measures since 2016 to a very large and fairly large extent (25 out of 46, 54%). By contrast, nationals with a migrant background, older workers and third country nationals were the target groups most frequently seen as not having had better access to adult learning measures at all, or only to a small extent (25 out of respectively 47 and 46, 53%, 54%). In terms of **sectors** targeted by the Recommendation, 61% of respondents (25 out of 41) indicated that skills needs of sectors have been targeted. Specific sectors targeted include tourism (four out of 13, 31%), construction (four out of 13, 31%), agriculture (three out of 13, 23%) and the services industry (two out of 13, 15%).

Stakeholder involvement in the features of the Recommendation was deemed the highest in validation and recognition of skills acquired with 51% of respondents considering that this was delivered to a fairly or very large extent in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. By contrast, 23 out of 46 respondents (50%) stated that guidance and/or mentoring was delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders to a small extent or not at all.

1.2. Efficiency

When asked about the **benefits** of Upskilling Pathways, gaining access to employment was most frequently selected as resulting to a large or very large extent from the Recommendation (25 out of 43, 58%). ‘Supporting the skills needed for green and digital transition’ and ‘gaining improved participation in society’ were the two benefits most frequently assessed as resulting to a small extent or not at all from the Recommendation (19 out of 43 for each benefit, 44%). The respondents most frequently indicating that the Recommendation contributed to these benefits to a small extent or not at all were those representing **public authorities**.

In terms of **costs**, the ‘costs of designing, delivering, and monitoring measures’ were most frequently reported as incurred by the Recommendation to a fairly large or very large extent (16 out of 43, 37%). ‘Financial incentives paid to employers to upskill employees’ were the least incurred costs according to respondents (six out of 43, 14%). Other costs that were reported were large expenditure for teacher salaries, high costs incurred by trainees, and consulting costs to conduct evaluations.

In terms of **EU funding**, the European Social Fund (25 out of 44, 57%) and Erasmus+ (21 out of 46, 46%) were most frequently selected as having contributed to a fairly large or a very large extent to achieving the Recommendation’s objectives. The Just Transition Fund and Invest EU were the programmes described as having contributed the least to achieving the Recommendation’s objectives.

1.3. Relevance

A large majority of respondents indicated that providing learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults in the EU is **very relevant today** (41 out of 47, 87%). ‘Support to address potential obstacles to their participation in training’, ‘support in getting a learning offer tailored to their needs’ and ‘awareness-raising on employment and further learning opportunities following the training’ were the services most frequently described as very useful by potential adult learners. **Adults with low levels of basic skills** were the target group seen as most relevant (33 out of 45, 73%). Nationals with migrant background was the target group most frequently selected as somewhat irrelevant (five out of 45, 11%).

In terms of **synergies with EU policies**, very low numbers of respondents (between one and two) found the Recommendation ‘not at all’ complementary with any of the eight EU policies. The European Pillar of Social Rights and the 2020 European Skills Agenda were the EU level policies most frequently seen as complemented to a fairly or very large extent by the Recommendation (25 out of 46, 54%, for each policy). However, the 2020 European Skills Agenda was also the policy which the greatest share of respondents (20 out of 45) saw as **overlapping** to a fairly large or very large extent with the Recommendation.

In terms of **synergies with national policies**, more than half of the respondents (25 out of 44, 57%) considered that Upskilling Pathways measures were to a fairly large or very large extent coherent with their national policies.

1.4. EU added value

The validation and recognition of skills acquired is the feature most frequently perceived as influenced by the Recommendation to a very large or fairly large extent (22 out of 45, 49%). Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners progression and motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits are the features most frequently perceived as having not been influenced at all by the Recommendation (three out of respectively 45 and 44, 7%). Respondents held the view that EU added value has been

created through knowledge sharing between different actors as well as evidence-based recommendations. A majority of respondents agreed that EU policy guidance will still be required to provide opportunities for low-skilled adults to develop their skills in the future (39 out of 45, 87%)

2. Introduction

2.1. The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

This report analyses the responses to a public consultation held as an integral part of the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults. It has been prepared by Ecorys on behalf of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, adopted in 2016, aims to ensure that everyone in society has a comprehensive set of skills, knowledge, and competences to achieve their full potential, play an active part in society and progress on the labour market. The Recommendation sets out a three-step approach to offering low-skilled adults access to upskilling pathways, through a skills assessment, a tailored and flexible learning offer, and validation and recognition of skills and competences. Key components of this approach include outreach, guidance and support measures for learners, as well as effective coordination between the relevant public and private actors in education and training, employment, and social policy.

2.2. The Public Consultation

The online public consultation was launched by the European Commission on 16 December 2021 and ran until 17 March 2022. The questionnaire used to implement the survey was distributed using the online EU Survey tool. The findings presented in this report are based on a final extraction of public consultation replies dated 18 March 2022. The questionnaire was available in 23 EU official languages and in electronic format only. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed questions, and all answers are collected in a single dataset.

The public consultation was structured differently for three different profiles of respondents, defined as follows:

- All organisations and citizens
- Current or recent adult learners (recent: within the last 4 years a participant in an adult learning measure)
- Adults not currently participating in an adult learning measure but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications

Throughout the questionnaire, respondents are asked to express their views on the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value of upskilling pathways measures. Excluding the profiling and closing questions, the different groups of respondents were asked the following number of questions:

- 17 questions targeted all organisations and citizens
- 6 questions targeted current or recent adult learners
- 5 questions targeted adults not currently participating in an adult learning measure but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications

All respondents were asked to respond to questions that included both a closed and an open component.

A high degree of caution should be taken in interpreting and using the results of this consultation particularly due to the low response rates (outlined in section 3 of this report). By nature, a public consultation cannot and should not be considered statistically representative of the target population and thus any extrapolations should be avoided.

3. Methodology for analysing the results

Respondents' views were examined through a combination of closed questions and open-ended questions. Closed questions provided respondents with either different pre-set categorical answers from which to choose (e.g. the extent to which the features of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways have been implemented in their country or at the EU level, the contribution of adult learning measures to specific benefits at the national and EU level), or asked them to rate the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and relevance of the adult learning measures implemented in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways.

The analysis of results was carried out using both quantitative (to analyse the frequencies of the closed answers) and qualitative methods (for the open questions, in order to analyse complex concepts as well as to substantiate and interpret the quantitative data with relevant insights). In addition, the research team categorised the responses through a range of relevant typologies (type of respondent, types of organisations).

3.1. Preparation of the dataset

As a first step for analysis the replies to the public consultation were downloaded from the EU Survey Tool and a new excel database for analysis was created. This consisted of cleaning the dataset, creating classifications for answers received and checking for coherence and completeness. In the first place, multiple responses by the same respondents were checked. No single respondent (identified by their name and email address) submitted more than one response.

Due to the relatively low number of responses received, the recoding of variables in order to disaggregate the analysis and allow differentiation between all response options was not possible. The research team analysed relevant differences between sub-groups of on the basis of disaggregation by type of organisation and groups of respondents where this was possible. However, when results are disaggregated, inferences should be made with caution with regards to the results.

3.2. Quantitative analysis (closed questions)

The quantitative data analysis included an analysis of frequency distribution for each of the variables related to the closed-ended questions. Depending on the particular variable, all of the data values were represented. Frequency distributions were also depicted as graphs (histograms) as applicable. Cross-tabulations between specific variables and characteristics of respondents (e.g. type of stakeholder categories, type of respondent, type of adult learner) were also conducted, where possible, though the low number of responses has significantly limited the possibilities for this. The responses to the closed questions of the questionnaire were analysed using Excel and R. The statistical significance of the differences observed could not be further tested due to the low number of responses received.

3.3. Qualitative analysis (open questions)

As a first step, the answers related to open-ended questions were translated by the research team. With respect to qualitative data analysis, information was classified by related variable (number of question) and analysed to identify additional relevant information and trends. The information was used to enrich the analysis carried out on quantitative data. Such information is reflected in the report through the inclusion of examples which help to illustrate key issues or trends at EU and national level identified in the quantitative analysis.

3.4. Interpretation of results

The questionnaire was structured in a way that all the respondents had to fill in the descriptive section covering background information related to themselves, while the questions in the main sections differed according to the stakeholder category to which the respondent belongs.

Each question was analysed separately in order to ensure a consistent analysis of the responses. The report is structured by the evaluation criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value) and includes a short introduction and rationale, the presentation of results (frequency of responses) in terms of figures or tables, and qualitative analysis for open-ended questions including, where possible, a breakdown of responses according to the most relevant dimensions (such as stakeholder category, type of respondent).

4. Analysis of respondents

Overview

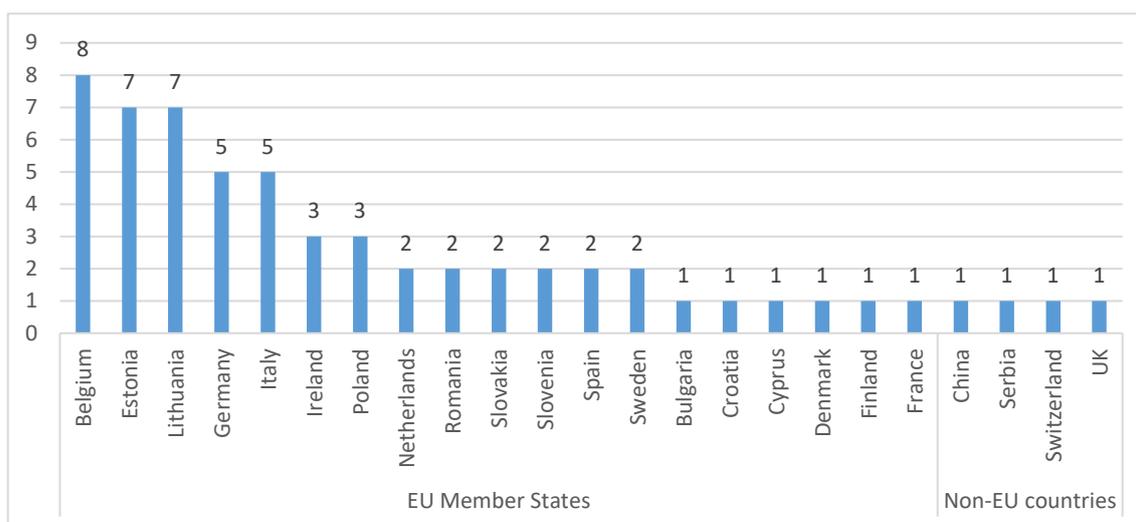
- The public consultation received 60 responses.
- Respondents were from 19 EU Member States and four non-EU countries.
- The responses show a somewhat unbalanced geographical distribution, with five out of 23 countries (22%) covering over half of responses (32 out of 60, 53%). These are: Belgium, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany and Italy.
- Nine position papers were also submitted in response to the public consultation.

Respondents by main stakeholder groups

- More than half of respondents represent an organisation (35 out of 60, 58%).
- Amongst these, the largest group was that of public authorities or bodies which are involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies (12 out of 56, 21%). The second largest group of respondents were organisations representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups such as NGOs, networks or platforms (10 out of 56, 18%).
- Individuals represent one quarter of all responses (15 respondents out of 60, 25%) including EU and non-EU citizens.
- Four potential adult learners and one adult learner answered the consultation.

The total number of respondents to the public consultation was 60. When selecting their country of origin, or the country of their organisation, respondents indicated 19 EU Member States and four non-EU countries. The country with the highest number of respondents was Belgium, with a total of eight respondents⁵⁶², followed by Estonia and Lithuania with a total of seven, and Germany and Italy with a total of five each. Several countries had only one respondent, including those indicating non-EU countries, namely, China, Serbia, Switzerland and the UK. The full breakdown of respondents by country of origin is indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 24 Breakdown of respondents by country of origin (n=60)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

4.1. Respondents by main stakeholder groups

Respondents were asked several questions to determine their profile. They were firstly asked to select in which capacity they were responding to the public consultation as per the main stakeholder groups of EU evaluations, namely Business association, Company/business organisation, EU citizen, Non-EU citizen, Non-governmental organisation (NGO), Public authority, Trade union or Other.

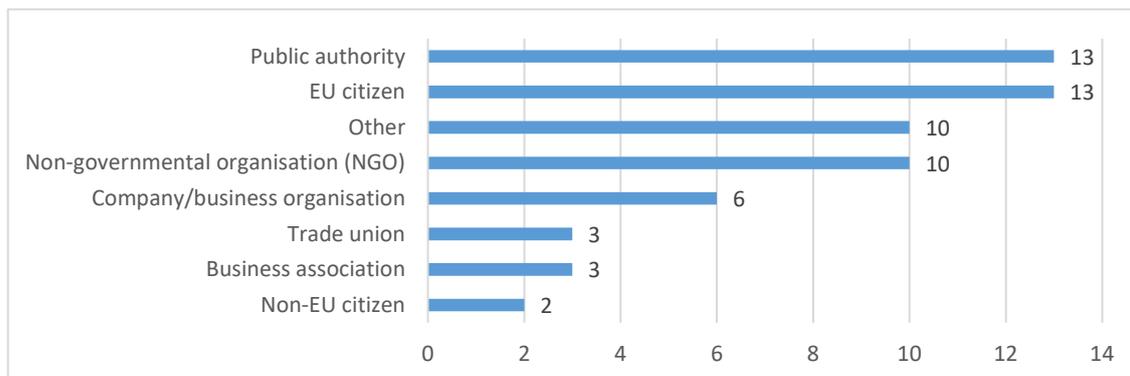
Based on this breakdown of respondents by main stakeholder groups, 35 respondents represent an **organisation** (Public authorities, NGOs, Companies or business organisations and Trade unions), while 15 respondents represent **individuals**, namely either EU or non-EU citizens. The remaining ten respondents gave their answer on behalf of **other** types of groups than those listed. When asked to specify further, these respondents indicated that they were responding as the following: ‘international organisation’, ‘other public authority or body involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies’, ‘EU level institution or policymaker’, ‘Ministry or other Government body responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies’ and ‘education and training provider’.

Figure 2 shows that the largest groups of respondents were public authorities (13) and individuals who are EU-citizens (13). The second largest group were respondents from non-governmental organisations (10) and those who indicated that they belonged to a group not

⁵⁶² The overrepresentation of Belgium may reflect the fact that many EU-level organisations are based in Brussels, Belgium.

listed as a main stakeholder group in the questionnaire (i.e. Other) (10). The remaining respondents represented Business organisations (6), Trade unions (3), Business associations (3) and Non-EU citizens (2).

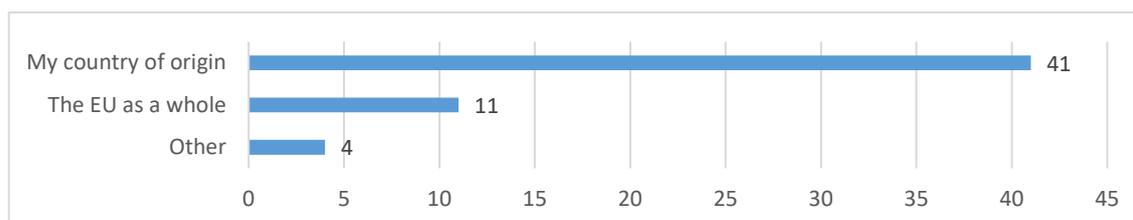
Figure 225 Breakdown of respondents by main stakeholder groups (“I am giving my contribution as”) (n=60)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

All respondents were asked whether they were responding to the consultation in reference to their country of origin or to the EU as a whole. As shown in , the majority of respondents (41 out of 60, 68%) indicated that they were responding to the questionnaire in reference to their **country of origin**, followed by 11 respondents (18%) that indicated they were responding in reference to the **EU as a whole**. The remaining respondents indicated that they were referring to neither their country of origin nor the EU as a whole. Respondents that indicated ‘**Other**’ referred to their organisation or several EU Member States. Among respondents who indicated ‘Other’, one respondent referred to a group of four countries (France, Romania, Hungary and Italy), one referred to ‘EU partner countries’ and two referred to their specific organisations.

Figure 326 Distribution of respondents by the reference of their response (“I am responding to this questionnaire in reference to”) (n=56)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

4.2. Type of responding organisations

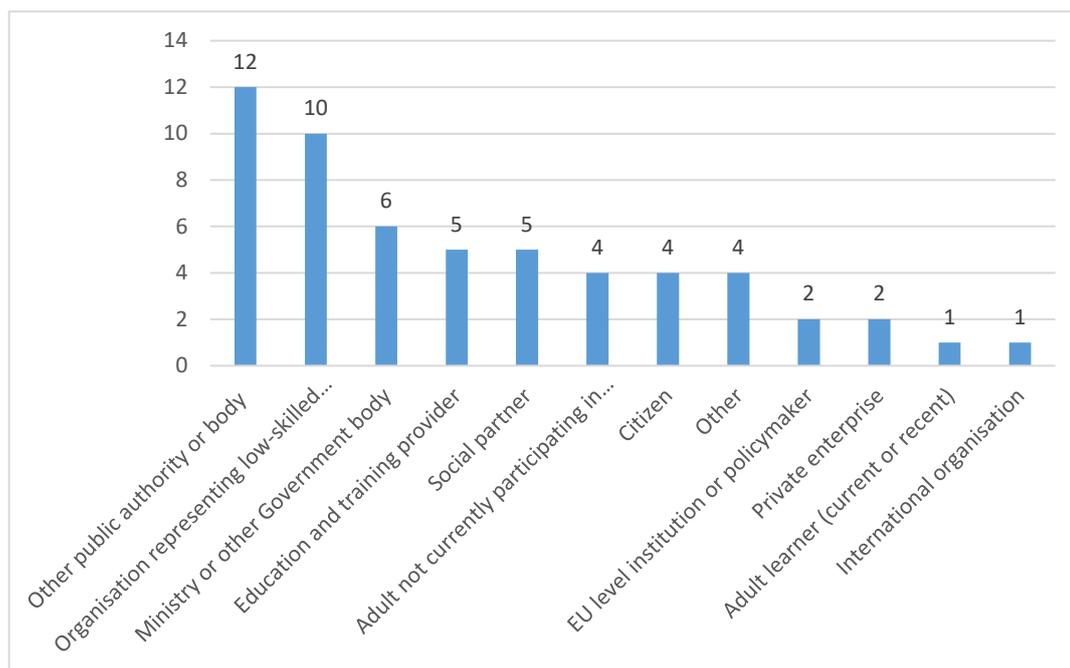
To better understand the profile of respondents in relation to upskilling pathways, respondents were asked to further **specify the capacity in which they are replying to the questionnaire**. Respondents were able to select from the following key stakeholder groups relevant to the Recommendation:

- Adult learner (current or recent within the last 4 years);
- Adult not currently participating in an adult learning measure related to this evaluation but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications;

- Citizen;
- Education and training provider;
- EU level institution or policymaker; International organisation;
- Ministry or other Government body responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies;
- Organisation representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups (NGOs, networks or platforms);
- Other public authority or body involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies;
- Private enterprise;
- Social partner;
- Other

In total, 56 respondents gave their answer to this question. The largest group was that of **public authorities** or bodies which are involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies (12 out of 56, 21%). The second largest group of respondents were **organisations representing low-skilled adults** and/or specific target groups such as NGOs, networks or platforms (10 out of 56, 18%). This was followed by respondents from **Ministries or other government bodies** responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies (six out of 56, 11%), **social partners**, such as trade unions or employer organisations (five out of 56, 9%) and **education and training providers** (five out of 56, 9%). The remaining respondents said they were responding as citizens (four out of 56, 7%), potential adult learners (four out of 56, 7%), private enterprises (two out of 56, 4%), EU level institutions or policymakers (two out of 56, 4%), international organisations (one out of 56, 2%) and adult learners (one out of 56, 2%).

Figure 427 Can you specify further the capacity in which you are replying to this questionnaire? (n=56)

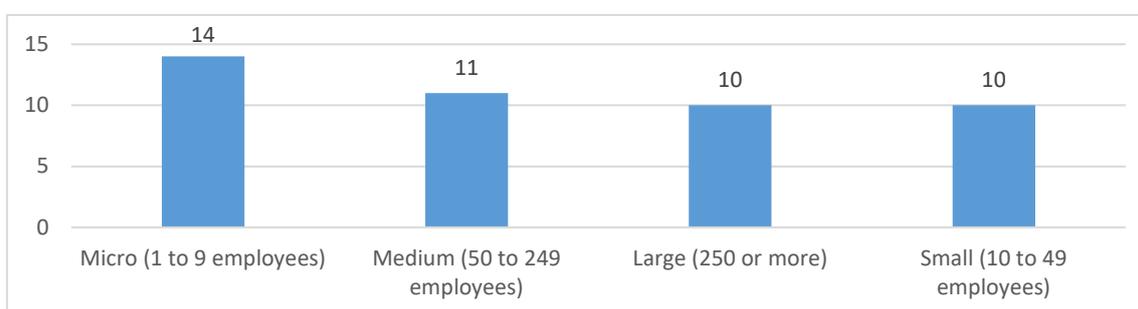


Source: Ecorys, 2022

4.3. Size of responding organisations

Respondents that indicated they were responding on behalf of organisations and respondents that indicated 'other' were asked to specify the size of their organisation. In total, 45 respondents provided an answer. Most respondents reported that their organisation was a **micro-organisation** with 1 to 9 employees (14 respondents out of 45, 31%). This was followed by **medium size organisations** with 50 to 249 employees (11 respondents out of 45, 24%). There were 10 respondents out of 45 (22%) each from both **large organisations** with 250 or more employees and from **small organisations** with 10 to 49 employees.

Figure 28 Breakdown of responding organisations by size (n=45)

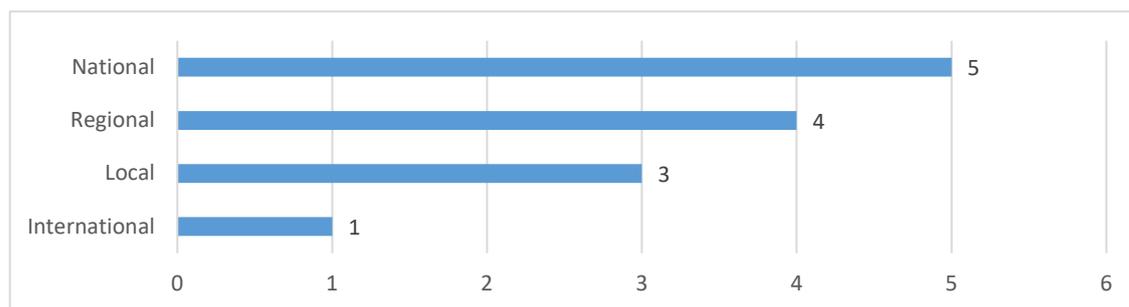


Source: Ecorys, 2022

4.4. Scope of public authorities

Respondents from public authorities were also asked to report on the scope of their authorities' activities. Out of 13 respondents representing public authorities, five (38%) indicated that their organisations have a **national scope**, followed by four (31%) that indicated they have a **regional scope** and three (23%) that have a **local scope**. Only one respondent (8%) indicated their public authority was **international**.

Figure 629 Scope of organisations in which respondents work, in the subgroup of respondents who indicated their organisation was a public authority (n=13)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

4.5. Type of responding individuals

Nine out of 56 respondents indicated they were responding to the public consultation in their individual capacities. This breaks down as follows: four **citizens** (out of 56, 7% of all respondents) and four **potential adult learners** (out of 56, 7% of all respondents) not currently participating in an adult learning measure related to this evaluation but wishing to gain new skills or qualifications and one **adult learner** (out of 56, 2% of all respondents) who participated in adult learning related to this evaluation within the past 4 years. Both the responding adult learners and adults wishing to gain new skills (in total five respondents) indicated that their labour market status was **employed**. Further disaggregation of the data is not possible due to the very small sample size.

4.6. Effectiveness

Effectiveness describes the extent to which the actions taken in response to the Recommendation by Member States were effectively implemented (e.g., to enable key target groups to better access adult learning measures), how they were implemented, and the extent to which this has contributed to helping low-skilled adults take part in upskilling initiatives. Under this section, the questionnaire aims to gain insights into the degree of implementation of the Recommendation in the Member States, the target groups and economic sectors targeted in implementation and organisations' and adult learners' point of view on the results obtained, services provided /accessed and overall usefulness. The perspective of the organisations is then explored on the extent to which the features of adult learning measures were delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders and the provision of outreach and guidance services to facilitate the implementation. Finally, the section explores adult learners' perspectives on the effectiveness of measures in enabling them to develop skills, knowledge, and competences.

Key findings

Implementation of features of the Recommendation

- Provision of skills assessment was the feature of the Recommendation most frequently considered as implemented by respondents (29 respondents out of 48, 60%)
- Validation and recognition of skills acquired was the feature seen as the least implemented (19 respondents out of 48, 40%)

Effectiveness of features of the Recommendation

- Provision of a tailored offer was the feature most frequently assessed as very effective or mostly effective (31 respondents out of 48, 65%).
- Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression and support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning were the features most frequently assessed as mostly ineffective or not effective at all (13 respondents out of 48, 27%).

Target groups of the Recommendation

- Long-term unemployed adults were most frequently seen as the target group that had been able to better access adult learning measures since 2016 to a very large and fairly large extent (25 respondents out of 46, 54%).
- By contrast, nationals with a migrant background, older workers and third country nationals were the target groups most frequently seen as not having had better access to adult learning measures at all, or only to a small extent (25 respondents out of respectively 47 and 46 (53%, 54%),

Sectors

- 61% of respondents (25 out of a total of 41) indicated that skills needs of sectors have been targeted. 16 respondents (39%) provided a negative response.
- Specific sectors targeted include: tourism (four respondents out of 13, 31%), construction (four out of 13, 31%), agriculture (three out of 13, 23%), , and the services industry (two out of 13, 15%).

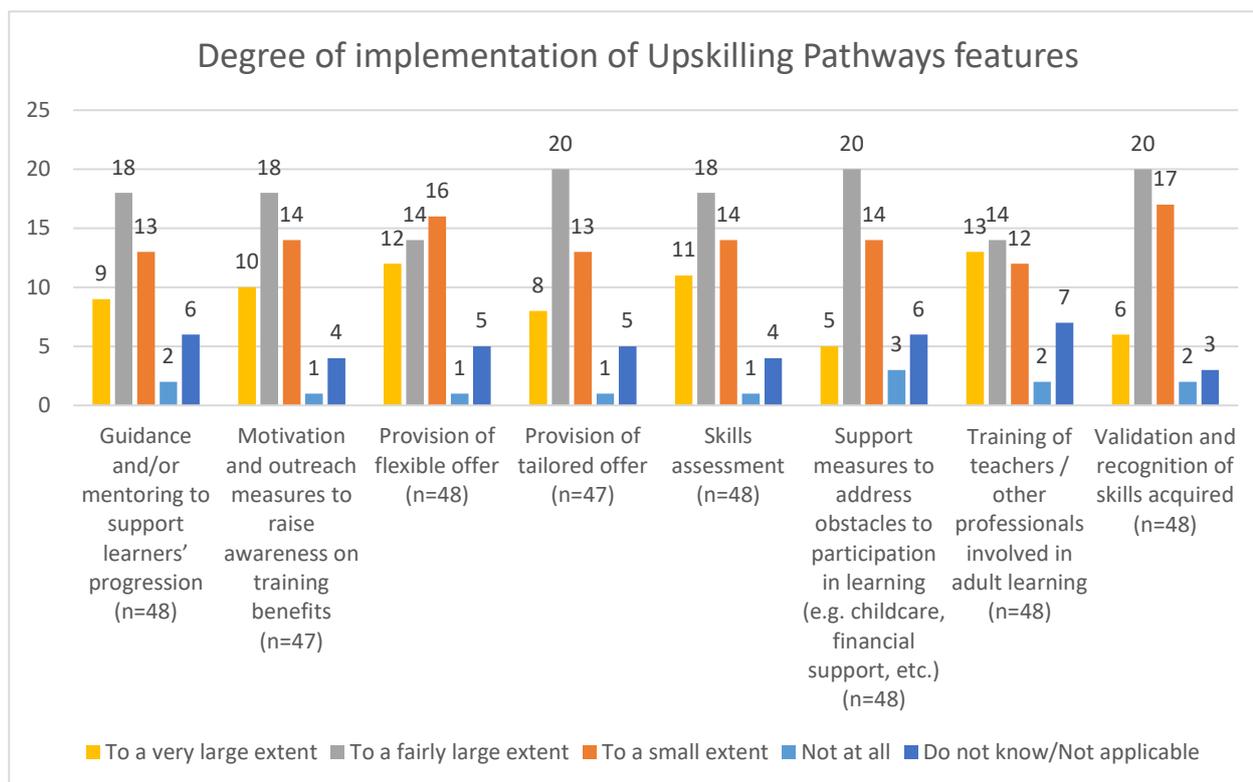
Stakeholder involvement

- Validation and recognition of skills acquired was the measure most frequently viewed as delivered to a fairly large or very large extent in cooperation with relevant stakeholders (23 respondents out of 45, 51%).
- 23 out of 46 respondents (50%) stated that guidance and/or mentoring was delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders to a small extent or not at all.

4.7. Degree of implementation of the Recommendation

The public consultation asked respondents the extent to which the features of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways have been implemented at the national and EU level. Respondents could select multiple options. below presents the results of the answers to this question.

Figure 730 To what extent have the following features of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways been implemented in your country/the EU?



Source: Ecorys, 2022

Overall, respondents found that the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways had been implemented to 'a fairly large' or 'very large' extent in their country or in the EU (216 responses out of 382, 57%).

The provision of skills assessment was the feature most frequently considered as implemented, with 29 respondents out of 48 (60%) indicating it had been implemented to a very large or fairly large extent in their country or in the EU. Other measures most frequently considered as implemented were 'motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits' and the 'provision of a tailored offer', with 28 respondents out of 47 for each (60%) reporting that they were implemented to a fairly or very large extent.

The validation and recognition of skills acquired was the feature most frequently considered as least implemented, as 19 respondents out of 48 (40%) indicated it had been implemented to a small extent or not at all. The other features most frequently considered as implemented to a small extent or not at all were the 'provision of a flexible offer' and 'support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning' (for both, 17 respondents out of 48, 35%).

The responses to this question were then disaggregated to facilitate the analysis between different sub-groups (e.g. type of organisation and groups of respondents). However, inferences should be made with caution with regards to the results due to the very small number of responses to the public consultation.

Key trends when analysing the degree of implementation by group of respondents include the following:

- EU citizens consider that the features of the Council Recommendation were implemented to a fairly or a large extent, in particular the provision of a tailored offer 6

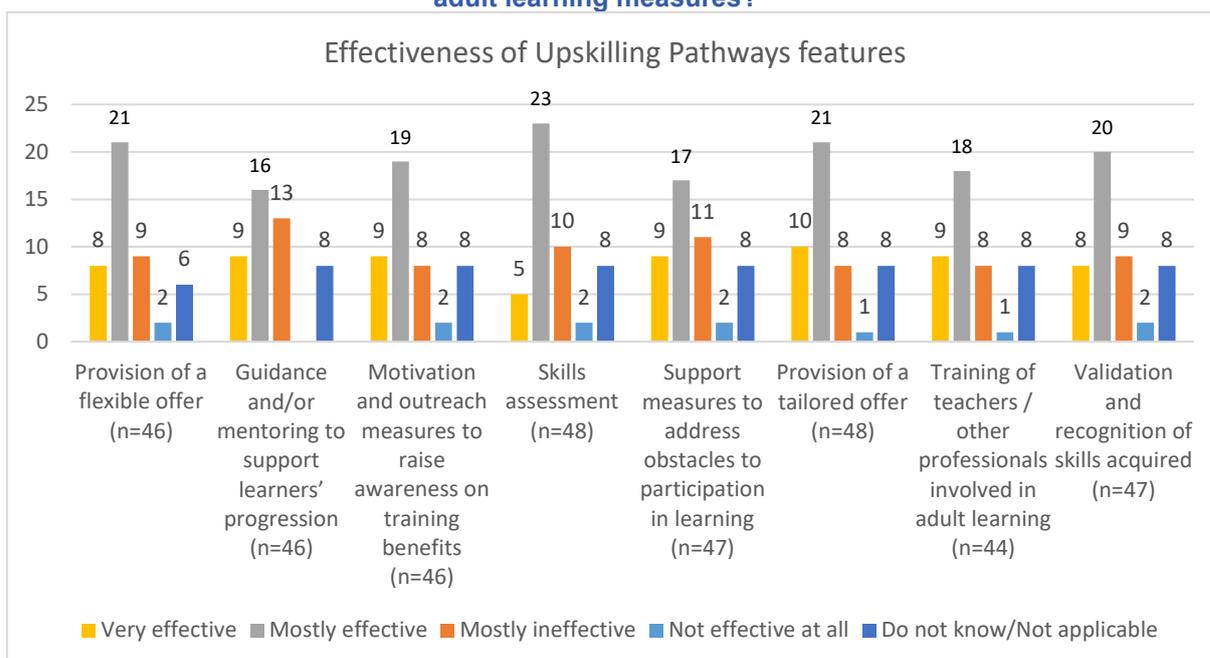
out of 47), skills assessment (7 out of 48) and validation and recognition of skills (6 out of 48);

- Public authorities indicate that all features were implemented to a very large or fairly large extent (more than seven responses across all indicated features of adult learning measures).
- In comparison, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which includes organisations representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups suggested that the features were implemented to a small extent. More than four respondents from this stakeholder group selected this option when assessing the degree of implementation across all features.
- However, the statistical significance of the differences could not be further tested due to the very low number of responses.

Respondents to the consultation were then asked to assess the effectiveness of the features of the Council Recommendation in helping low-skilled adults take part in adult learning measures. The **provision of a tailored offer** was the feature most frequently assessed as very or mostly effective in supporting low-skilled adults (31 respondents out of 48, 65%). Nine respondents out of 48 (19%) saw this feature as mostly ineffective or not effective at all. The **provision of a flexible offer** was also frequently considered as very or mostly effective in supporting low-skilled adults (29 respondents out of 46, 63%).

By contrast, **guidance and/or mentoring** to support learners' progression and **support measures** to address obstacles to participation in learning were the features most frequently assessed as mostly ineffective or not effective at all, with respectively 13 respondents out of 46 (28%) and 13 respondents out of 47 (28%) selecting this. However, these features still had a significant number of respondents selecting the 'very effective' or 'mostly effective' options (respectively 25 out of 46, 54%, and 26 out of 47, 55%).

Figure 831 How effective have these features been in helping low-skilled adults take part in adult learning measures?



27 respondents from 14 countries commented on their answer and provided examples. A respondent working from an education and training provider in Ireland said that there was

no recent research or evaluation on adults with literacy needs to answer how effective these features have been for them. A respondent from a civil society organisation which covers France, Romania, Hungary, and Italy explained specific issues faced by those countries. In France, for example, the main issue is about funding as it is hard for Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) to fund training for disadvantaged people that are employed, given that these people do not stay in the company for a long time. This respondent suggested reviewing the rules on European financing which cap public grants at 70%. A respondent from Hungary argued that there is no support from the public sector to provide vulnerable groups with training skills. A respondent representing an international organisation explained that more was needed in terms of providing support and addressing obstacles to participation as well as to tailoring the learning offer for vulnerable adults, including those who are socially excluded (e.g., due to homelessness) and women who might be discouraged to access training in certain sectors (e.g., using equipment or machinery).

4.8. Target groups and sectors

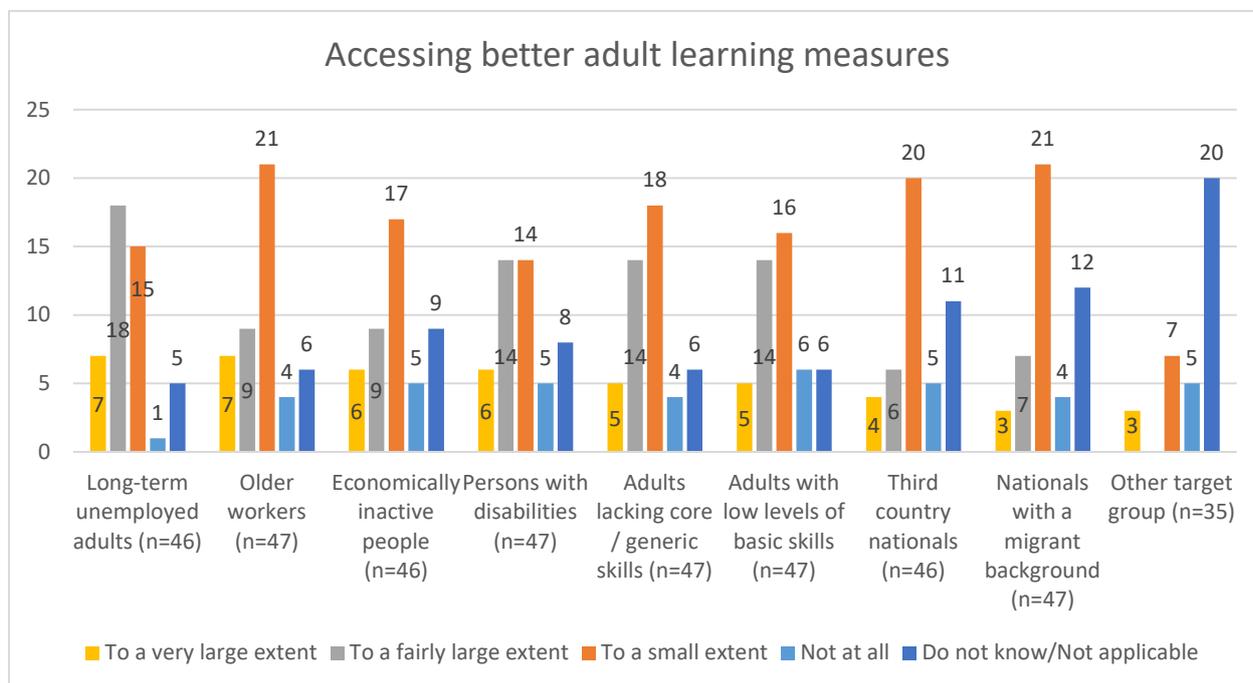
Respondents to the public consultation were asked to assess the extent to which specific target groups were able to better access the adult learning measures over the past five years. For each of the target groups (nine in total), respondents had to rate the effectiveness of the measures in improving access to upskilling initiatives.

Long-term unemployed adults were most frequently seen as the target group that had been able to better access adult learning measures to a very large and fairly large extent since 2016 (25 respondents out of 46, 54%). In comparison, 16 respondents out of 46 (35%) found that this target group's access to adult learning measures had been improved to a small extent or not at all.

Nationals with a migrant background, older workers and third country nationals were the target groups most frequently seen as having had improved access to adult learning measures to a small extent or not at all. For each of these groups, 25 respondents out of 47 (53%, for nationals with a migrant background and older workers) and out of 46 (54%, for third country nationals) indicated this.

For **adults lacking core/generic skills, adults with low levels of basic skills and persons with disabilities**, results were mixed. 22 respondents out of 47 (47%) viewed adults lacking core/generic skills and adults with low levels of basic skills as having had better access to adult learning measures to a small extent or not at all, compared with 19 out of 47 (40%) who saw their access improved to a fairly large or very large extent.

Figure 932 To what extent have the following target groups in your country/the EU been able to better access adult learning measures (as specified in the previous question)



Respondents had the opportunity to indicate **other priority groups** that were targeted in the implementation of the Council Recommendation. The analysis of the open-ended responses shows that **travellers, Roma and women** (especially mothers and the unemployed) were another target group prioritised at the national and EU level. Around one third of respondents (12 out of 35, 34%) considered that since 2016 these target groups were able to better access learning measures to a small extent or not at all, while 20 out of 35 (57%) selected 'Do not know/Not applicable'.

The questionnaire inquired further whether the skills needs in specific economic sectors have been targeted in the implementation of the Council Recommendation in Member States as well as at the EU level. More than half of the respondents (25 out of a total of 41, 61%) indicated that the **skills needs have been targeted in implementation**, while only 16 respondents (39%) provided a negative response. When asked to state which economic sectors have been targeted, respondents reported the tourism industry (four respondents out of 13, 31%), construction (four out of 13, 31%), agriculture (three out of 13, 23%), and the services industry (two out of 13, 15%). One respondent also gave the example of healthcare in Germany.

4.9. Stakeholder involvement

Respondents were asked to comment on the extent to which the features of adult learning measures in the last five years have been delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. The question included the eight features described in the previous sections. The scale of answers was: Not at all; To a small extent; To a fairly large extent; To a very large extent. The fifth available answer was 'Do not know'.

The analysis of closed ended responses shows a **mixed picture** in terms of the involvement of relevant stakeholders, as seen in . Among all features of adult learning measures, the **validation and recognition of skills** acquired was most frequently viewed as delivered to a fairly large or very large extent in cooperation with relevant stakeholders (23 respondents

out of 45, 51%). However, the numbers of respondents selecting 'to a small extent' or 'not at all' is only marginally different at 18 respondents out of 45 (40%). Four respondents (8%) selected 'do not know'.

Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits was the second most frequently viewed feature as implemented with the involvement of relevant stakeholders to a large or very large extent (22 respondents out of 46, 48%). However, the number of respondents selecting 'to a small extent' or 'not at all' is only marginally different at 20 respondents out of 46 (43%).

According to respondents, the features that were least implemented with the involvement of stakeholders were the **provision of a flexible offer, guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression, support measures** to address obstacles to participation in learning and the **training of teachers/other professionals** involved in adult learning. 23 out of 46 (50%) stated that guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression was delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders to a small extent or not at all, 22 respondents out of 46 (48%) stated the same for the provision of a flexible offer, 21 out of 46 (46%) for support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning and 19 out of 45 (42%) for the training of teachers/others professionals involved in adult learning.

Table A6_1 40: Degree of stakeholder involvement (aggregated data)

Feature	Delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders to a small extent or not at all	Delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders to a fairly large or very large extent	Do not know
Validation and recognition of skills acquired (n=45)	18	23	4
Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits (n=46)	20	22	4
Skills assessment (n=46)	20	21	5
Provision of a tailored offer (n=44)	19	20	5
Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (n=46)	21	20	5
Provision of a flexible offer (n=46)	22	19	5
Training of teachers / other professionals involved in adult learning (n=45)	19	18	8
Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression	23	18	5
Total	162	161	41

Note: Shaded cells represent the greatest value in each row. Source: Ecorys, 2022.

The open-ended question provided an opportunity for respondents to specify the stakeholders consulted and to provide relevant examples. The responses included the following types of stakeholders: education and training boards, NGOs working on adult literacy, training providers, networks of work integration and social enterprises, employers, public employment services, universities, schools, local authorities and national adult literacy agencies. **Positive examples** of cooperation were reported in Estonia where the development of a continuing education and retraining policy is taking place in cooperation with special organisations and professional associations of employers and employees. Similarly, in Ireland, the further education and training authority consulted many relevant

organisations on learning measures when developing the new 10-year strategy. Involvement of stakeholders was also identified as an important aspect of upskilling measures by respondents that submitted a position paper. In particular, the International Labour Organisations, Public Libraries 2030 and the European Association for the Education of Adults highlighted the key role that local community actors can play in creating effective upskilling opportunities.

4.10. Outreach and guidance

To assess the effectiveness of the actions taken in response to the Recommendation, the public consultation invited respondents to indicate to what extent outreach and guidance services have been provided to help implement adult learning measures. The question received a total of 47 responses.

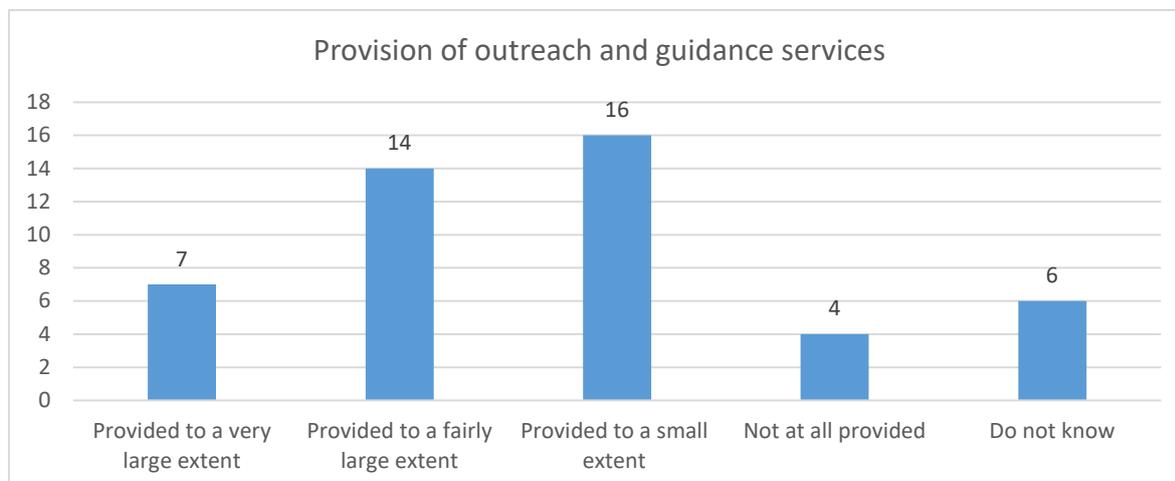
As illustrates, the largest group of respondents indicated that **outreach and guidance services** were provided to a small extent (16 out of total number of 47 responses (34%). 14 respondents (30%) considered that these were delivered to a fairly large extent and seven (15%) to a very large extent. Furthermore, six participants (13%) reported that they did not know and four (9%) considered that these services were not at all provided.

When prompted to explain their responses, respondents provided **specific examples** of outreach and guidance services implemented at the national level.

- In Belgium a wide range of stakeholders provide guidance services and training, including psychological guidance. The system aims to enable training providers to act more coherently through joint communication and deliver a programme for the deployment of a guidance system.
- In Estonia, career counselling has been provided to all unemployed people as well as jobseekers through the Unemployment Insurance Fund
- In Ireland, a dedicated Adult Education Guidance Service is available in each of the 16 Education and Training Boards across the country.
- Adult education centres established by the municipalities in Slovenia have employed counsellors for guidance in adult learning and are cooperating with different stakeholders to reach vulnerable groups of adults.
- Respondents from NGOs across different countries indicated that more catered guidance is needed, particularly for those with complex needs.

The position paper submitted in response to the public consultation by Eurodiaconia highlighted that ensuring the social and economic inclusion of vulnerable groups requires active outreach measures which are currently not being systematically offered.

Figure 10 33 To what extent have outreach and guidance services been provided to help implement adult learning measures in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways? (n=47)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

4.11. Experience of adult learners and potential adult learners

The consultation addressed a set of specific questions to the respondents who indicated that they were adult learners, that is, participants in an adult learning measure either at the time of responding to the consultation or within the last four years.

To assess adults' access to adult learning measures, this group of respondents was asked whether they considered that they have better access to measures which allow them to develop their skills, knowledge and competences. A total of five responses were received. Out of these, three respondents (60%) considered that they have a lot more or quite a lot more access to such measures, while two (40%) indicated they have little access.

When prompted to identify the services offered as part of the adult learning measures in which they participated, the adult learner respondents reported being provided an **assessment of their existing skills and skills needs** (guidance, support or mentoring and validation and recognition of the skills gained), which they found **slightly useful**. One respondent indicated being offered a learning offer which was considered very useful. Furthermore, one respondent reported not being offered other measures to overcome potential obstacles to participation in the programme.

The final section of the questionnaire asked adult learners to rate the overall usefulness of the measures in which they participated. Only one response was recorded which found the measures quite useful.

5. Efficiency

This section describes the survey results related to efficiency of the implementation of the Recommendation. Respondents were asked about costs and benefits incurred by actors implementing upskilling measures relevant to the Recommendation. The respondents were also asked which EU funding programmes have contributed to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation and the degree of this contribution.

Key findings

Benefits of Upskilling Pathways

- Gaining access to employment' was the benefit most frequently assessed as resulting to a large or very large extent from the Recommendation (25 respondents out of 43, 58%).
- 'Supporting the skills needed for green and digital transition' and 'gaining improved participation in society' were the two benefits most frequently assessed as resulting to a small extent or not at all from the Recommendation (19 respondents out of 43 for each benefit, 44%). The respondents most frequently indicating that the Recommendation contributed to these benefits to a small extent or not at all were those representing public authorities.
- For the one adult learner that responded to the public consultation, 'gaining a recognised qualification', 'gaining a promotion in their current workplace', 'gaining a higher paid job', 'developing their personal portfolio of skills and competences', and 'gaining more confidence' were the main benefits gained from participating in an adult learning measure (one response for each benefit).
- Potential adult learners most frequently hoped to gain 'a recognised qualification', 'a promotion in a current workplace' and to develop 'their personal portfolio of skills and competences' (three responses out of 15 for each benefit, 20%).

Costs of Upskilling Pathways

- The 'costs of designing, delivering, and monitoring measures' were the costs most frequently reported as incurred by the Recommendation to a fairly large or very large extent (16 respondents out of 43, 37%)
- 'Financial incentives paid to employers to upskill employees' were the least incurred costs according to respondents (six out of 43, 14%)
- Other costs that were reported were large expenditure for teacher salaries, high costs incurred by trainees, and consulting costs to conduct evaluations.

Contribution of EU funding programmes

- The European Social Fund (25 respondents out of 44, 57%) and Erasmus+ (21 respondents out of 46, 46%) were most frequently selected as having contributed to a fairly large or a very large extent to achieving the Recommendation's objectives
- The Just Transition Fund and Invest EU were the programmes described as having contributed the least to achieving the Recommendation's objectives, as four respondents out of 44 (9%) for each programme indicated that they have not contributed at all.

5.1. Benefits of Upskilling pathways

The public consultation asked respondents to answer the following question about the benefits associated with implementation of the Recommendation: 'In your opinion, to what extent have adult learning measures in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

contributed to the following benefits in your country/the EU?' The question asked to rate the extent to which the Recommendation has contributed to 17 benefits, ranging from a very large extent to not at all.

As shown in , the largest group of respondents (25 respondents out of 43, 58%) indicated that the Recommendation contributed to 'Gaining access to employment' to a fairly large or very large extent. This was followed by 'gaining access to further education or training', 'gaining a qualification' (both 23 out of 43, 53%), 'contributing to fewer skills shortages' (22 out of 43, 51%) and 'gaining more confidence' (21 out of 43, 49%).

By contrast, 17 out of 43 (40%) respondents indicated that the Recommendation contributed to 'gaining access to further education or training' to a small extent or not at all. 16 out of 43 (37%) responded the same for 'gaining a qualification' 12 out of 43 (28%) for 'gaining more confidence' 11 respondents out of 43 'gaining access to employment' (26%) and ten out of 43 (23%) for 'contributing to fewer skills shortages'. The respondents most frequently indicating that the Recommendation contributed to these benefits to a small extent or not at all were those representing **public authorities**.

In contrast, 'supporting the skills needed for green and digital transition' and 'gaining improved participation in society' were the two benefits most frequently assessed as influenced by the Recommendation to a small extent or not at all (19 respondents out of 43 for each benefit, 44%).

Table A6_241 Contribution of the adult learning measures in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways to benefits

Benefit	They have contributed to a small extent or not at all	They have contributed to a fairly large or very large extent	Do not know
Gaining access to employment (n=43)	11	25	7
Gaining more confidence (n=43)	12	24	7
Gaining a qualification (n=43)	16	23	4
Gaining access to further education or training (n=43)	17	22	4
Fewer skills shortages (n=43)	10	22	11
Gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills (n=43)	15	21	7
Improving cohesion of society and equal opportunities (n=43)	17	19	7
Gaining improved participation in society (n=43)	19	18	6
Reducing skills mismatches in the labour market (n=43)	17	18	8
More motivated staff (n=43)	14	18	11
Gaining improved wellbeing and health (n=43)	18	17	8
Additional funding for training (n=43)	17	17	9
Higher levels of productivity (n=43)	16	14	13
Supporting the skills needed for green and digital transition (n=43)	19	13	11
Lowered costs for welfare payments (n=43)	18	12	13
Increased income tax and VAT (n=43)	18	12	13
Gaining a promotion in current workplace (n=42)	17	12	13
Other benefits (n=21)	2	3	16

Note: Shaded cells represent the greatest value in each row. Source: Ecorys, 2022.

The consultation addressed the following question to the respondents who indicated that they were **adult learners**: ‘What are the main benefits you got from participating in an adult learning measure?’. A total of five responses were received, each indicating one of the following benefits: ‘gaining a recognised qualification’, ‘gaining a promotion in their current workplace’, ‘gaining a higher paid job’, ‘developing their personal portfolio of skills and competences’, and ‘gaining more confidence’.

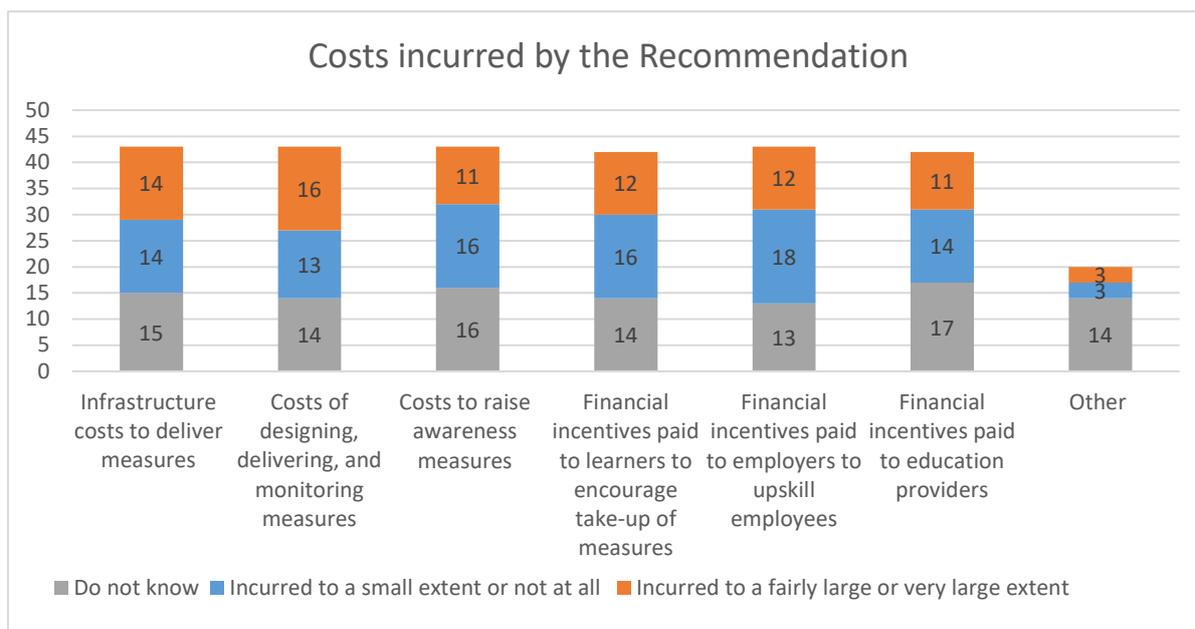
Similarly, the sub-group of **potential adult learners** was also asked ‘What are the main benefits you hope you would get from participating in an adult learning measure?’. The most selected benefits were ‘gaining a recognised qualification’ (three out of 15 total, 20%), ‘gaining a promotion in a current workplace’ (three out 15, 20%), and ‘developing their personal portfolio of skills and competences’ (three out of 15, 20%).

5.2. Costs of upskilling pathways

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which six potential costs associated with the implementation of the Recommendation have been incurred in its implementation.

Across all types of costs, the highest percentage of respondents indicated that they **did not know** the extent of the costs incurred (on average 15 out of 43 respondents per type of cost, 35%) (see). The costs most often selected by respondents as having been incurred to a fairly or a very large extent were ‘costs of designing, delivering, and monitoring measures’ (16 respondents out of 43, 37%), and ‘infrastructure costs to deliver measures’ (14 respondents out of 43, 33%). ‘Financial incentives paid to employers to upskill employees’ were the least incurred costs according to respondents (six out of 43, 14%). Further analysis by type of respondent is not statistically significant due to a very small sample size.

Figure 11 34In your opinion, to what extent has implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways incurred the following costs? (n=43, one option allowed, aggregated data)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

An open-ended question provided an opportunity for respondents to the public consultation to specify any other types of costs incurred in implementation. **Other costs** that were reported in response to this were large expenditure for teacher salaries, high costs incurred by trainees, and consulting costs to conduct evaluations.

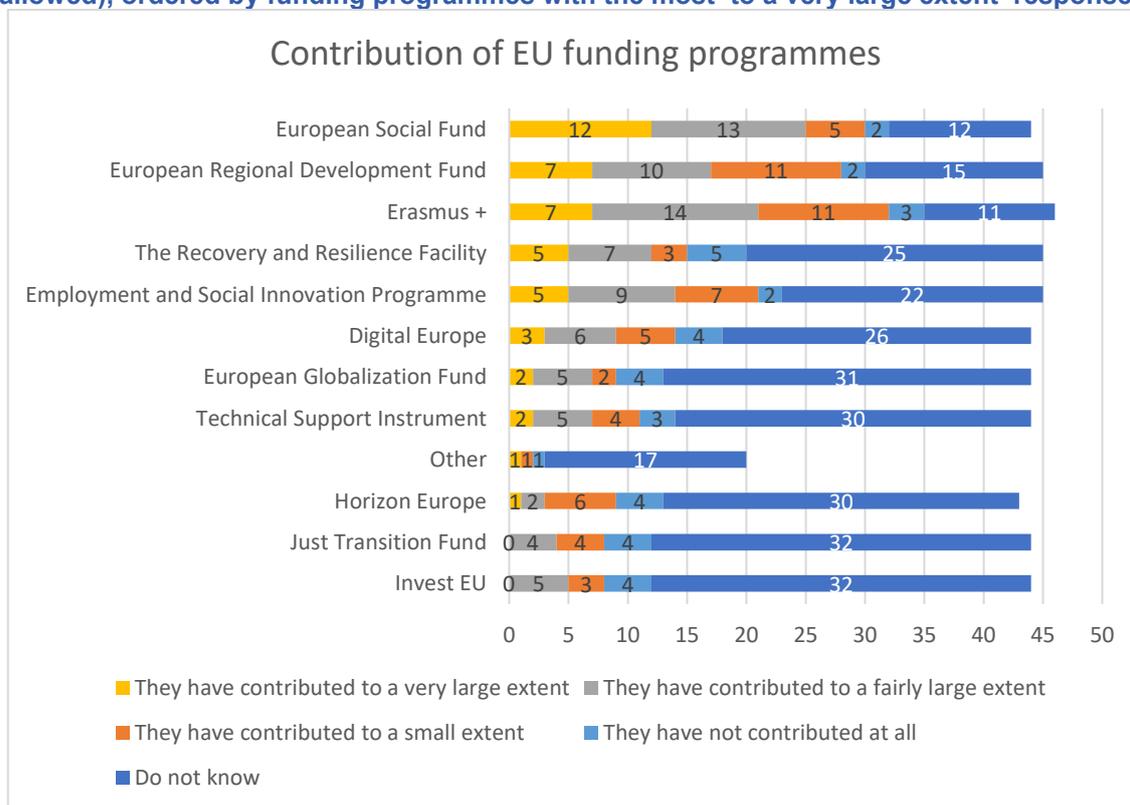
Only one adult learner respondent answered the question ‘Were there any financial costs for you of participating in the adult learning measure?’. Their response was positive but no information on the type of costs incurred was provided.

5.3. Contribution of EU funding programmes

The public consultation aimed to explore stakeholders’ views on the contribution of EU funding to the implementation of the Recommendation. Respondents were asked ‘To what extent have the following EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objective of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills?’ 11 EU funding programmes were compared.

When comparing respondents’ answers on the degree of contribution of each EU funding programme (see), the European Social Fund and Erasmus+ were selected most often as having contributed to a fairly large or a very large extent, with 25 respondents out of 44 (57%) and 21 respondents out of 46 (46%) respectively. In contrast, respondents indicated that the Just Transition Fund and Invest EU programmes have contributed the least to achieving the objectives of the Recommendation, with four respondents out of 44 (9%) indicating that they have not contributed at all.

Figure 1235 To what extent have the following EU funding programmes contributed to achieving the objective of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways to provide adults with a low level of skills opportunities to improve their skills? (n=46, one option allowed), ordered by funding programmes with the most ‘to a very large extent’ responses.



Source: Ecorys, 2022

6. Relevance

This section describes the extent to which providing learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults in the EU, as proposed by the Recommendation, is relevant to needs of the target group and more broadly to socio-economic needs across the EU. Moreover, it examines respondents' views on the relevance of the target groups of the Recommendation as well as the types of support (skills assessment, learning offer, validation and recognition) for adults wishing to participate in upskilling pathways programmes.

Key findings

Relevance of the Recommendation

- A large majority of respondents indicated that providing learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults in the EU is very relevant today (41 respondents out of 47, 87%)
- Specifically, 'support to address potential obstacles to their participation in training', 'support in getting a learning offer tailored to their needs' and 'awareness-raising on the employment and further learning opportunities following the training' were the services most frequently described as very useful by potential adult learners (three out of four respondents for each service, 75%).

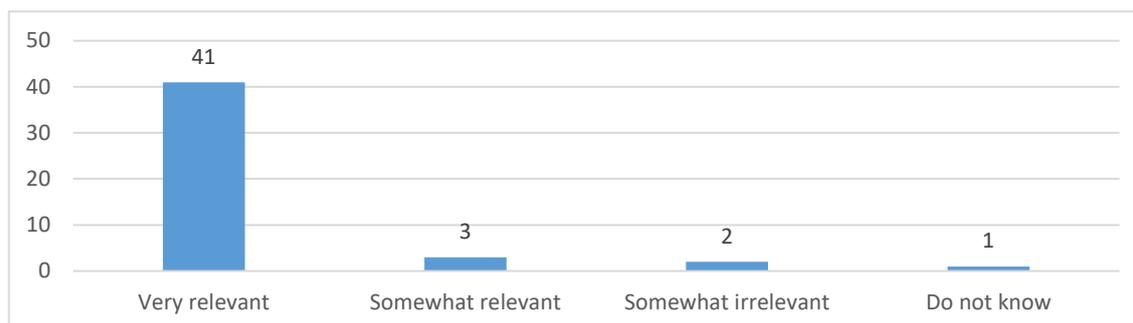
Relevance of the target groups

- Adults with low levels of basic skills were the target group found to be the most relevant (33 respondents out of 45, 73%).
- Nationals with migrant background was the target group most frequently selected as somewhat irrelevant in the context of upskilling pathways (five respondents out of 45, 11%).

6.1. Relevance of the Recommendation

Respondents were asked the following question: "To what extent is it still relevant today to provide learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults in the EU". As seen in out of the 47 respondents to this question, 41 (87%) indicated that providing learning opportunities is still very relevant today. This was followed by a significantly lower number of respondents considering such opportunities somewhat relevant (three out of 47, 6%) somewhat irrelevant (two out of 47, 4%) and one respondent (2%) that did not know. The two respondents indicating the topic was somewhat irrelevant were representing an education and training provider organisation and a public authority involved in adult learning.

Figure 1336 To what extent is it still relevant today to provide learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults in the EU? (n=47)



Source: *Ecorys, 2022*

In an optional open question, respondents were also asked to specify why they found the provision of learning opportunities and guidance support to low-skilled adults relevant or irrelevant. Respondents who found the objective very relevant highlighted that the importance of the issue has grown since the Recommendation was adopted. Four respondents (from Ministries/other government bodies and organisations representing the low-skilled) cited the impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic** as a reason for this increased relevance, specifically, the widened digital skills gap and limited or interrupted access to education of several vulnerable groups. This was also highlighted in the position papers submitted in response to the public consultation. Another two respondents highlighted the **urgent need to train and direct low-skilled adults** towards basic training (reading, writing and digital skills) in order to prevent existing social problems, such as the cycle of poverty, skills gaps and discrimination. The demand for new skills and shortage of skilled labour in relation to the **EU's green and digital transition** and technological developments were also mentioned by two respondents (one from an international organisation, another from a social partner).

One of the two respondents that indicated that the topic of upskilling was somewhat irrelevant explained their answer. This representative from an education and training provider explained that counselling of adult learners needs to be very targeted as there are significant differences in needs based on the labour market.

Respondents who are **potential adult learners** (four) were also asked to rate the relevance of the services offered by the Recommendation. Three out of four respondents (75%) found 'Support to address potential obstacles to their participation in training', 'Support in getting a learning offer tailored to their needs' and 'Awareness-raising on the employment and further learning opportunities following the training' very useful. In contrast, the service related to validating and formally recognising skills was only found very useful by one respondent (25%), while half of the respondents thought this was somewhat useful (50%).

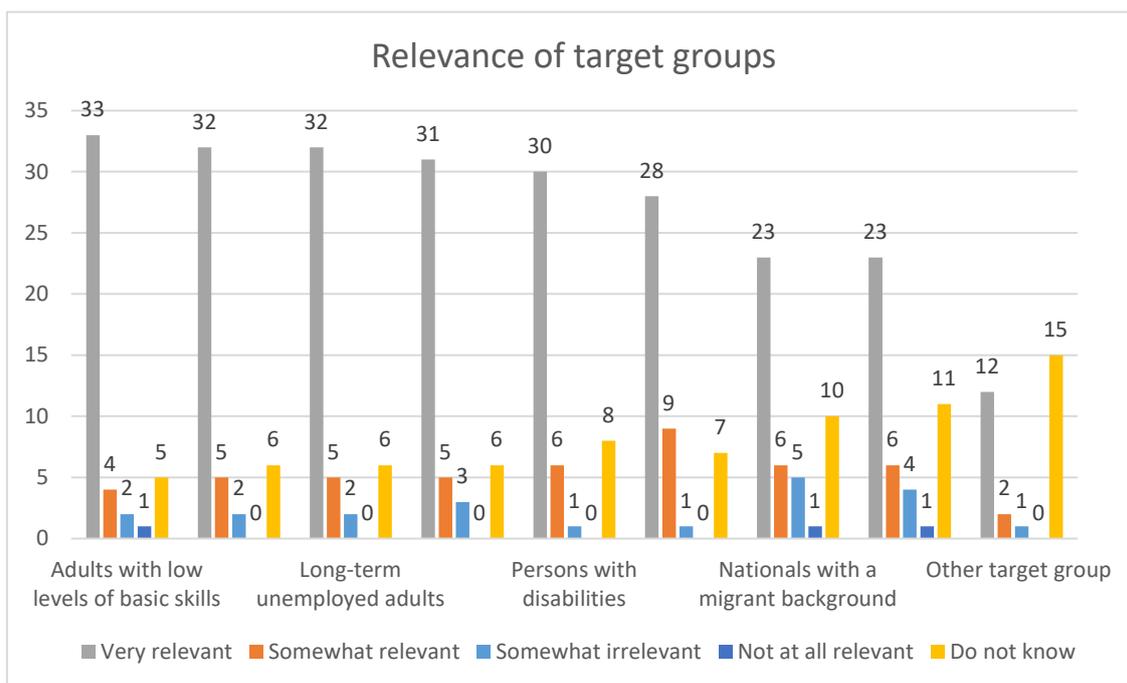
6.2. Relevance of the target groups

The public consultation asked respondents about the extent to which different target groups addressed by the Recommendation are still relevant today.

shows that nearly all target groups of the Recommendation listed were considered to be very relevant by respondents. Target groups found to be the most relevant were adults with low levels of basic skills (33 respondents out of 45, 73%), older workers above 55 years old (32 respondents out of 45, 71%) and long-term unemployed adults (32 respondents out of 45, 71%). These target groups were closely followed by adults lacking core/generic skills (31 respondents out of 45, 69%), persons with disabilities (30 respondents out of 45, 67%) and economically inactive people (28 respondents out of 45, 62%). Nationals with migrant

background (five respondents out of 45, 11%) and Third country nationals (four out of 45, 9%) were selected most frequently as target groups that were somewhat irrelevant in the context of upskilling pathways. One respondent per each group found adults of low levels of basic skills, Nationals with a migrant background and Third country nationals not at all relevant today. The position papers submitted in response to the public consultation also pointed out the relevance of the low-skilled target group, with some highlighting that young people were a relevant target as well.

Figure 1437 To what extent are the target groups addressed in the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways still relevant today? (n=45)



Other target groups indicated by respondents include Travellers (three), single parents (two) and Roma people (two). The remaining respondents that selected ‘other’ did not specify the group.

Respondents were also asked to further explain how they rated the degree of relevance of the target groups of the Recommendation today. Based on 11 responses to this question, all the above target groups continue to be relevant because of the context of **quickly evolving occupations** and the impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic** which affects vulnerable groups particularly negatively. Specific examples mentioned include:

- A respondent representing a small NGO from Belgium mentioned the difficulty of Roma people to access upskilling programs.
- A respondent working for a large international organisation highlighted the difficulties of nationals with migration or third country background who disproportionately experience lower education and employment outcomes in the EU compared to EU nationals due to lack of appropriate support, including qualification recognition or lack of reskilling measures.

Overall, respondents found all groups targeted by the actions of the Recommendation mostly very relevant, especially in the context of the importance of education in effectively addressing the economic and social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

7. Coherence

This section describes the results related to the ‘coherence’ component of the evaluation criteria. Respondents to the public consultation were asked to evaluate the synergies and overlaps between Upskilling Pathways actions and related policies at EU or national level.

Key findings

Synergies and overlaps with EU policies

- The European Pillar of Social Rights and the 2020 European Skills Agenda were the two EU level policies most frequently seen as complemented to a fairly large or very large extent by the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways (25 respondents out of 46, 54%, for each policy).
- However, the 2020 European Skills Agenda was also the EU policy which the greatest share of respondents (20 out of 45) saw as overlapping to a fairly large or very large extent with the Recommendation.
- Overall, low numbers of respondents (between one and two, 1.25 on average) found the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways ‘not at all’ complementary with any of the eight EU policies.

Synergies with national policies

- More than half of the respondents (25 out of 44, 57%) considered that Upskilling Pathways measures were to a fairly large or very large extent coherent with their national policies.
- Irish respondents were the national group who most frequently considered the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways as aligned with their national policies to a very large or fairly large extent (three respondents out of three, 100%)
- Italian respondents were the group who most frequently considered the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways measures as not aligned, or aligned to a small extent with national policies (two Italian respondents out of two, 100%)

7.1. Synergies and overlaps with EU policies

Respondents were asked both about the **complementarity** and the **overlap** between Upskilling Pathways actions and eight existing EU policies. These policies were:

- 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe
- 2020 European Skills Agenda,
- European Agenda for Adult Learning
- European Pillar of Social Rights
- Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning
- Recommendation on the long-term unemployed

- Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee.

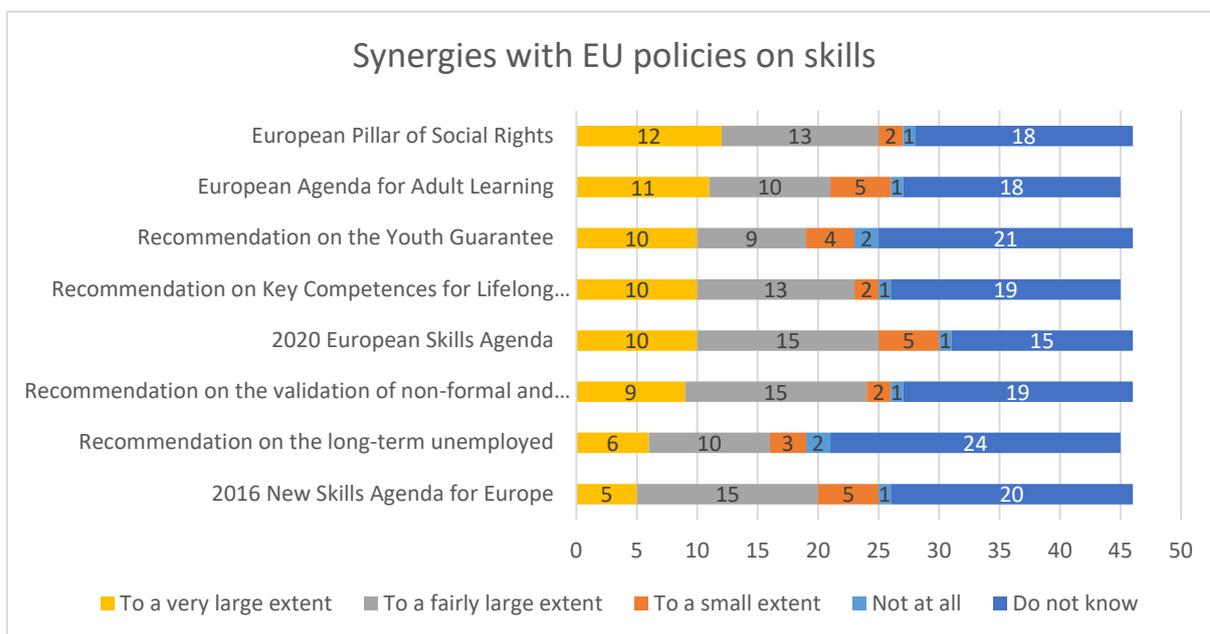
Respondents had to answer the following question: ‘To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways **complemented and created synergies** with the following EU policies on skills?’. shows the EU policies which respondents most frequently considered as complementary to a fairly large or a very large extent to the Recommendation were **the European Pillar of Social Rights** and the **2020 European Skills Agenda** (25 respondents out of 46, 54%, for each policy). This was followed by **Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning** (24 respondents out of 46, 52%) and the **Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning** (23 respondents out of 45, 51%). It must also be noted that the response that was given the most frequently across all policies was ‘Do not know’.

Overall, low numbers of respondents (between one and two, 1.25 on average) found the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways ‘not at all’ complementary with any of the eight EU policies. The Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee and the Recommendation on the long-term unemployed were the policies most often assessed as not at all complemented by the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways (2 respondents out of respectively 46 and 45, 4%).

Ten respondents out of 60 (17%) answered the open-ended question to provide further comments and examples as follows:

- One respondent from Ireland working for a small organisation representing low-skilled adults and/or specific target groups insisted that although policies complemented each other, it was important that they had a “holistic and learner-centred approach, focusing on critical thinking, non-formal education, civic engagement, solidarity and personal development rather than ‘skills’ and ‘employment’”.
- Another respondent highlighted that the Recommendation was found to have had ‘significant impact’ on the implementation of EU skills policies.
- Moreover, a Belgian civil servant provided a positive example of a project, the “Start Digital” project, which intends to “consolidate the synergies of [...] operators for the strengthening of basic digital skills for jobseekers and adult learners with little education”.

Figure 1538 To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways complemented and created synergies with the following EU policies on skills? (n=46, one option allowed), ordered by policies with the greatest number of ‘to very large extent’ responses.

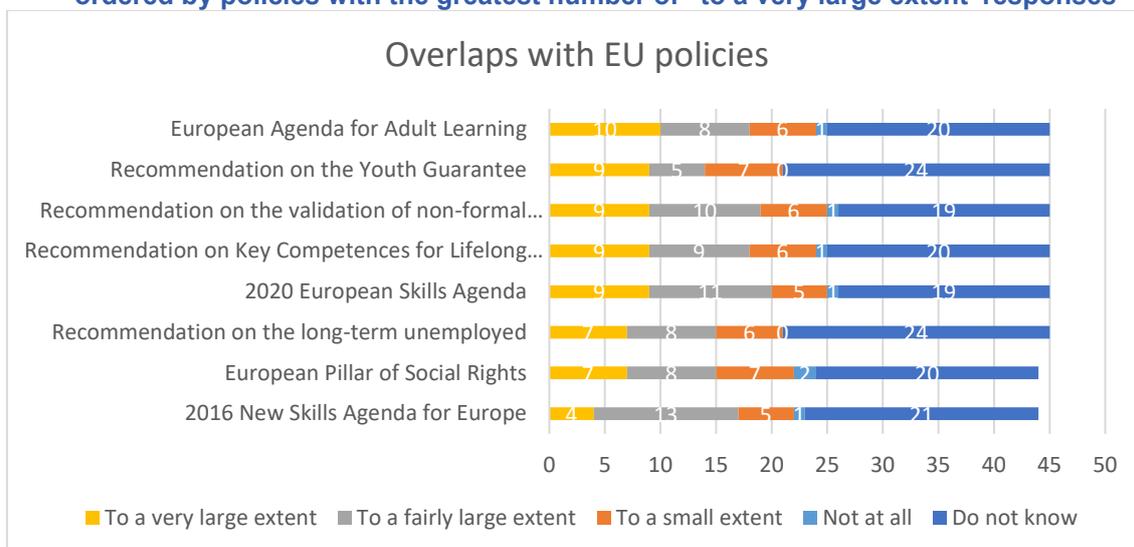


Source: Ecorys, 2022

Respondents were then asked, ‘To what extent have there been **overlaps** between the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and the following EU policies on skills?’. As seen in , the EU policy most frequently considered by respondents as overlapping to ‘a fairly large’ or ‘very large’ extent with the Recommendation was the **2020 European Skills Agenda** (20 respondents out of 45, 44%). This was followed by the **Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning** (19 respondents out of 45, 42%). Conversely, the **Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee** was the policy least frequently perceived as overlapping with the Upskilling Pathways actions to a fairly large or very large extent (14 respondents out of 45, 31%). The European Pillar of Social Rights was the policy most frequently perceived as not at all overlapping with the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways (two respondents out of 44, 5%).

Six respondents added further comments to their answers when prompted to in an open question. For example, according to a respondent representing a small NGO based in Belgium, the **European Skills Agenda** looks at the issue of skills more holistically than Upskilling Pathways and contains initiatives to address overarching remaining barriers, whilst the **Youth Guarantee** works in combination with the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways to ensure that everyone is able to fully participate in the labour market.

Figure 1639 To what extent have there been overlaps between the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and the following EU policies on skills? (n=45, one option allowed), ordered by policies with the greatest number of 'to a very large extent' responses



Source: Ecorys, 2022

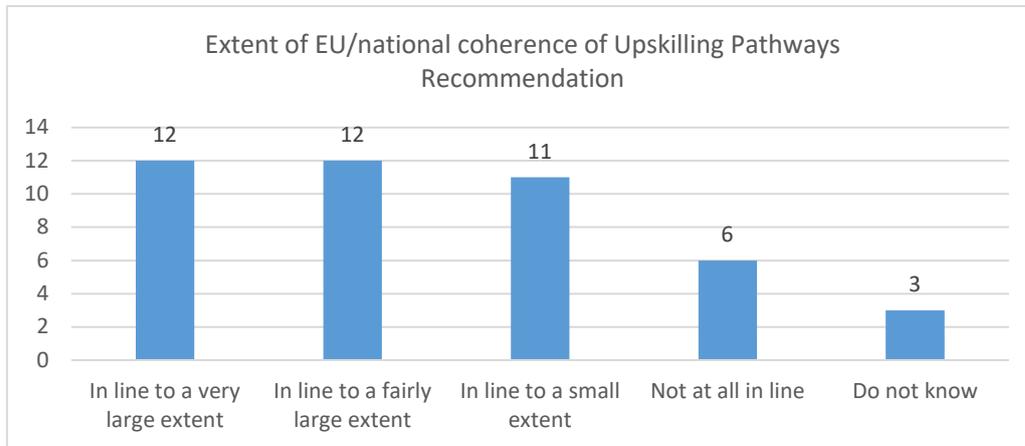
7.2. Synergies with national policies

Respondents to the public consultation were also asked about synergies with national policies through the following question: 'To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways been in line with education and training, and employment and social policies in your country?'

More than half of the respondents (25 out of 44, 57%) considered that Upskilling Pathways measures were coherent to a fairly large or very large extent with their national policies. When looking at the type of respondents that held this positive view, the largest groups were those from respondents representing '**Other public authorities** or bodies involved in adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies' (six out of 23 respondents, 26%), '**organisations representing low-skilled adults** and/or specific target groups (NGOs, networks or platforms)' (five out of 23 respondents, 22%) or '**ministries or other Government bodies** responsible for adult learning/training, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, skills and/or employment policies' (idem).

13 respondents commented on their answers to this question, providing a few national examples. One respondent said that a key adult education and training provider in Ireland had relied on the Recommendation for its policies and advocacy work. They believed that the Recommendation had influenced adult literacy policies of the Irish government, including in the Department of Further and Higher Education.

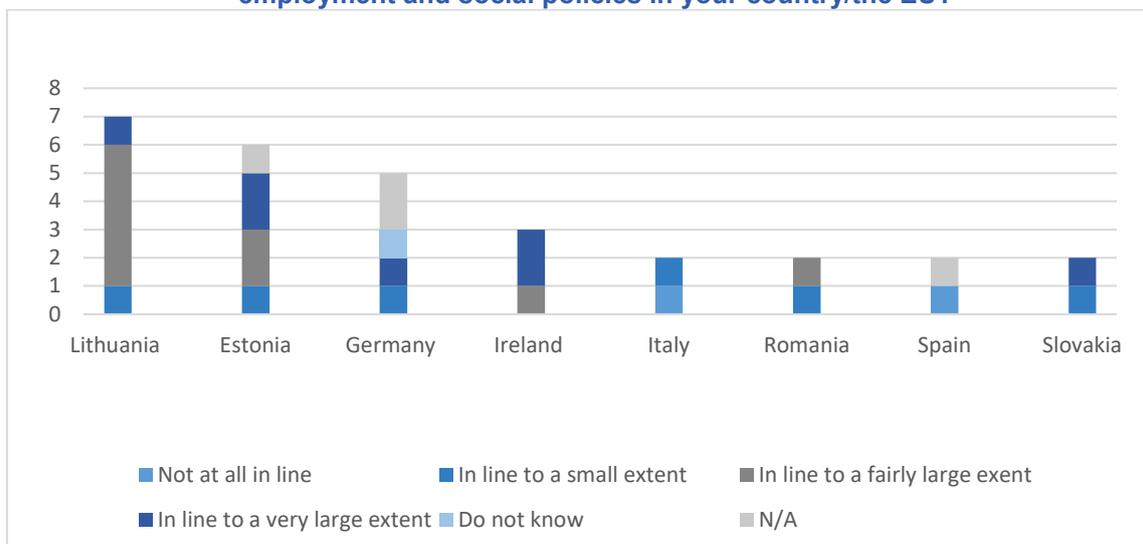
Figure 1740 To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways been in line with education and training, and employment and social policies in your country/the EU (n=44, one option allowed)



Source: Ecorys, 2022

Analysis by **country** has been undertaken for countries with a number of respondents greater than one, as seen in . Most respondents indicating Lithuania as their country of origin (five out of seven, 71%) saw Upskilling Pathways measures as in line to a fairly large extent with their own national policies on education and training, and employment and social policies. Similarly, all three respondents that indicated Ireland as their country of origin (100%) viewed adult learning measures related to the Recommendation as in line to a fairly large or a very large extent' with comparable Irish policies. Respondents from Estonia were also positive, with four respondents out of six (67%) viewing these policies aligned to either a fairly large or very large extent. Germany was the country in which the greatest number of respondents (two out of five, 40%) chose not to answer this question. Italian policies were seen as the least aligned with the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways measures. Indeed, among the two Italian respondents, one chose 'Not at all in line' and the other chose 'In line to a small extent'.

Figure 1841 To what extent have adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways been in line with education and training, and employment and social policies in your country/the EU?



Note: Country-specific responses with a number of respondents greater than one, n=41, only one option allowed. Source: Ecorys, 2022.

8. EU added value

This section describes the results related to EU added value. Respondents were asked about the extent to which the use and quality of the adult learning measures increased since the Recommendation as well as the extent to which the objectives and measures addressed by the Recommendation continue to require support at EU level.

Key findings

Value of EU action

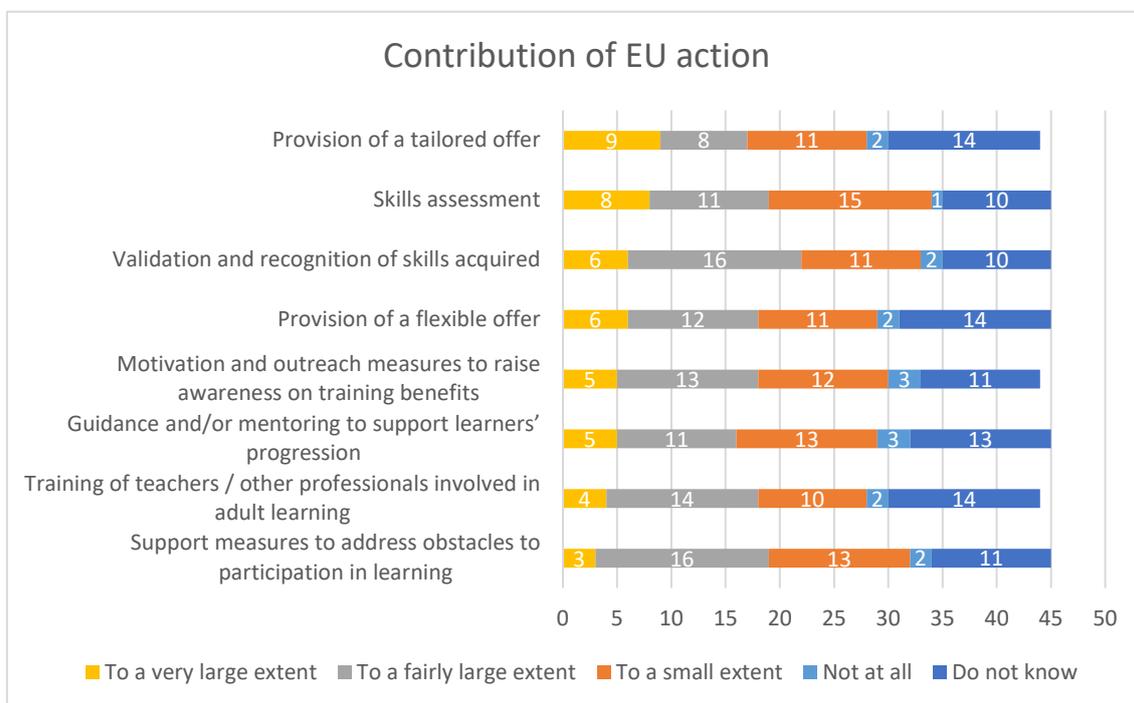
- The 'validation and recognition of skills acquired' is the feature most frequently perceived as influenced by the Recommendation to a very large or fairly large extent (22 respondents out of 45, 49%).
- 'Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression' and 'Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits' are the features most frequently perceived as having not been influenced at all by the Recommendation (three respondents out of respectively 45 and 44, 7%).
- Respondents held the view that EU added value has been created through knowledge sharing between different actors as well as evidence-based recommendations.
- A majority of respondents agreed that EU policy guidance will still be required to provide opportunities for low-skilled adults to develop their skills in the future (39 respondents out of 45, 87%)

8.1. Value of EU action

The public consultation asked respondents: 'To what extent has the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and EU action/support led to improved use and quality of the following features of adult learning measures as defined by the Recommendation, which would not have happened if Member States had acted alone?' As shows, the feature to which the Recommendation has most positively contributed is Validation and recognition of skills acquired, with 22 respondents out of 45 (49%) stating that EU action led to improved use and quality of this feature to fairly large/very large extent. This is followed by Skills Assessment (19 respondents out of 45, 42%) and Support measures to address obstacles to participation in learning (19 respondents out of 45, 42%). Features most frequently perceived as having not been influenced at all by the Recommendation are Guidance and/or mentoring to support learners' progression and Motivation and outreach measures to raise awareness on training benefits (three respondents out of respectively 45 and 44, 7%). In comparison, only one respondent out of 45 (2%) indicated that Skills assessment was not at all influenced by the Recommendation.

Respondents were also able to include other features that the Recommendation has supported in an open question. These answers indicated that the Recommendation brought added value through knowledge sharing between different actors as well as evidence-based recommendations. The one respondent that indicated that the Recommendation did not at all lead to improved use of any of the features explained that this is because the majority of the interventions highlighted by the Recommendation were already happening or would have happened anyway in the country (Ireland).

Figure 1942 To what extent has the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and EU action/support led to improved use and quality of the following features of adult learning measures as defined by the Recommendation, which would not have happened if Member States had acted alone? (n=45, one option allowed)

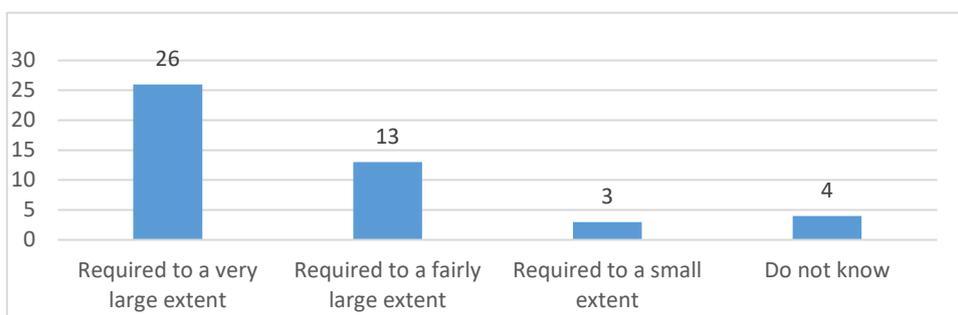


Source: Ecorys, 2022

8.2. Continued value of EU action

Respondents were also asked 'To what extent is EU policy guidance still required to provide opportunities for low-skilled adults to develop their skills?' A large majority of respondents (39 out of 45, 87%) stated that EU policy guidance is still required to a fairly large or very large extent (see). Three respondents answered that EU policy guidance is required to a small extent (3), whilst four responded that they did not know.

Figure 2043 To what extent is EU policy guidance still required to provide opportunities for low-skilled adults to develop their skills? (n=45, one option allowed)



Five respondents justified their answer to this question providing their reasoning which includes:

- the continued need to support low-skilled adults to gain qualifications and literacy/numeracy/digital skills;
- the importance of co-ordination to guarantee access for different groups;

- the evaluation needs across different EU countries;
- the need for policy guidance to ensure provision of high-quality measures and broad outreach.

9. Findings from position papers submitted⁵⁶³

1. Feedback from the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

The EAEA reports **varied degrees of implementation** of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation across countries. Countries like Slovakia, Finland and Austria that have integrated Upskilling Pathways into a broader lifelong learning strategy are most likely to reach the relevant target groups and build innovative upskilling programmes. **Involving other stakeholders** (e.g., labour market services, social partners) is key to effective upskilling pathways as they require a **holistic approach** that goes beyond the education sector. The EAEA gives 17 detailed recommendations for the broader and better implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. These concern the financing, governance, cooperation, inclusion and skills addressed during the implementation process.

2. Feedback from the Department of Employment and Vocational Training of Wallonia (DEFP), the Walloon Institute for Apprenticeship and SMEs (IFAPME), the Francophone Service for Occupations and Qualifications (SFMQ) and the Walloon Confederation for Construction (CCW)

In this position paper, three key Walloon stakeholders in the field of adult learning provide feedback to the consultation. They highlight the projects carried out to achieve the Recommendation's objectives such as the **'Start Digital' project**, part of the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), which aims to strengthen basic digital skills for job seekers and low-skilled adult learners. This complements **three other up- and reskilling projects** that are part of [Wallonia's 2021 Recovery Plan](#): 1) developing a strong partnership amongst training organisations 2) devising a harmonised professional certification 3) financing trainings for both basic skills, skills in fast-developing sectors and in French as a foreign language. These three projects amount to a total of 59 831 000 euros. In addition, authors outline the Walloon government's strategy for 2019-2024, which has a **strong adult learning component**. For example, the government pledges to give 'training cheques' for upskilling and reskilling of workers who want to improve their skills and/or aspire to a career change. Furthermore, it pledges to focus on older workers and exchange best practices with other regions. Wallonia also plans to strengthen the validation and valorisation of skills acquired during work.

3. Feedback from anonymous source

A position paper submitted in response to the public consultation, highlights that people having experienced homelessness are restricted in their access to lifelong learning due to negative self-perception and the inability to prioritise commitments. Thus, the respondent suggests that "support paths for homeless people are most effective when they are **holistic, needs-led and situated in a Housing First context**". To ensure positive and long-lasting

⁵⁶³ Among the nine position papers submitted, one was irrelevant to the Recommendation. It has thus not been taken on board in this analysis.

outcomes, teachers should be **compassionate** and have a **clear understanding of an individual's learning needs and life challenges**. Moreover, approaches to learning should **deviate from a standard curriculum restricted by time and with a focus on testing**. In particular, both formal and informal learning options should be available.

4. Feedback from Eurodiaconia

Eurodiaconia is a network of 54 churches and Christian organisations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Their policy paper, published in November 2021, outlines the **Covid-19 pandemic's negative impact on the employment situation of vulnerable groups** such as young people, women, the long-term unemployed, migrants and Roma. This is followed by an **overview of the various EU initiatives launched to create a more inclusive and social Europe**, including the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the Youth Guarantee, and the Effective Active Support to Employment (EASE) Recommendation as well as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Eurodiaconia argues that **particular attention must be paid to people in vulnerable situation** throughout the implementation of these initiatives.

Eurodiaconia **identifies the challenges** they face and concludes by giving **key policy recommendations** to promote access to quality employment as a pathway to social inclusion, empowerment, and full participation in society. Overall, ensuring the social and economic inclusion of vulnerable groups requires active **outreach** measures, **increased flexibility** in up- and reskilling programmes, a strong **antidiscrimination** approach, the development of a **“social labour market”** as well as a **rights-based and person-centred approach**. Eurodiaconia stresses the need for European policymakers to collect **disaggregated data** on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, health, and immigration status. Furthermore, they argue that an EU-wide Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme “must be put back on the highest political level”.

5. Feedback from the World Employment Confederation (Europe)

The World Employment Confederation Europe (WEC Europe)'s position paper gives the **private employment industry's** stance on upskilling pathways. The Confederation welcomes the public consultation and believes that EU policy initiatives in training and adult learning must be guided by the common, European challenges such as the **digital and green transition**, while at the same time reflecting and building on the different, national training and labour market models, respecting **diversity**, and **promoting mutual learning**.

According to the WEC Europe, special attention in national and European training and upskilling pathways should be devoted to the training of **young people, first-time labour market entrants** and the **low-skilled**. Whilst recalling the private employment sector's vital role in enabling labour market transitions, it stresses the importance of skills that are **demand-driven** and **tailored to the workers' needs**. For the WEC Europe, the benefits of the Council Recommendation lay mainly in **gaining qualifications, basic literacy and numeracy** as well as **further education and training**. The WEC Europe argues that **access to work experience** is also an important element of adult learning.

6. Feedback from the European Training Foundation (ETF)

The ETF's feedback to the public consultation focuses on **EU neighbouring countries**. It outlines several **systemic challenges** preventing access and participation in adult learning in the EU neighbouring countries, such as the structure of the economy (most companies

are small-sized), the limited share of knowledge-intensive sectors or economic activities requiring continuous upskilling, low labour market participation and the significant incidence of informal work. At the individual level, **participation obstacles** include affordability, time availability, proximity of lifelong learning services and motivation to pursue further training. Overall, the ETF stresses the importance to **include an international dimension** of the Recommendation in view of the growing interlinks between the EU and its partner countries. In the context of **EU investments**, the focus of the **policy dialogue** and **cooperation** with partner countries should be on **adult participation in education and training** as a way to support both social and economic development.

7. Feedback from Public Libraries 2030

Public Libraries 2030 outlines reasons why **public libraries are key in the EU's upskilling and reskilling efforts**. Public libraries can reach **vulnerable populations** and foster **social and digital inclusion** by making **information and training opportunities accessible for all**. In particular, public libraries offer digital infrastructure and digital upskilling opportunities within a nurturing and safe environment. Moreover, because of their position at the heart of their **community**, public libraries can act as a bridge between **various stakeholders** like policymakers, the private sector, civil society organisations and citizen initiatives. Such spaces of **non-formal education** should be recognised and supported by the EU. Hence, Public Libraries 2030 encourages the European Commission to **create further opportunities through funding and capacity building** for public libraries to reach the ambitious targets set out in Council Recommendations on Upskilling Pathways.

8. Feedback from the International Labour Organisation

The ILO paper highlights that technological changes, demographic shifts, globalization, environmental and climate change, and other global drivers are transforming societies and the world of work. The **COVID-19 pandemic** has exacerbated existing disparities. It outlines that increased investment in skills development and lifelong learning is not a cost but an investment in the future and that structural barriers for people to access education should be addressed to ensure equality within and between societies. The paper then outlines guiding principles for inclusive, responsive and resilient skills and lifelong learning systems. These include:

- Comprehensive and coordinated policies and strategies that expand opportunities for learning
- A whole-of-government approach to effective governance
- Innovative, transparent, equitable and sustainable financing mechanisms,
- Inclusive, gender-responsive, flexible and innovative learning options
- Renewed emphasis on the development of core skills, including social and emotional skills, cognitive skills, basic digital skills
- A dynamic approach that involves tripartite constituents through social dialogue
- Robust systems for the validation of skills and competencies, and the recognition of qualifications acquired through all forms of prior learning
- Effective quality assurance systems

- Outreach activities, community training and guidance to improve access to and participation in skills development and lifelong learning
- Access to skills and lifelong learning for all workers in insecure forms of work
- Lifelong career counselling, vocational guidance and post-training support
- Comprehensive digitalization strategies
- The integration of skills development with social protection and, where appropriate, paid educational leave
- The integration of education and training strategies with active labour market policies
- The provision of assistance to strengthen the capacity of social partners.

9. Feedback from Caritas Europa

Caritas Europa's analysis of the European Commission's **Social Economy Action Plan** (SE AP) gives recommendations to both Member States and the Commission to ensure its implementation. The paper elaborates on the concept of **social economy**, defined as 'the primacy of people as well as social and/or environmental purpose over profit, the reinvestment of most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interest of members/users ("collective interest") or society at large ("general interest") and democratic and/or participatory governance'. In this context, **upskilling and reskilling strategies** are key in the development of social economy entities. The need for employees' upskilling and reskilling is clearly stated in the SE AP. Furthermore, Caritas Europa argues for the **better promotion of EU funds** like ESF+ and Erasmus+ as they are very important tools to fund social innovation throughout the Union

10. Feedback from European Basic Skills Network

Two conference declarations from the European Basic Skills Network were submitted from 2021 and 2022. These highlight that adults from most vulnerable groups were left behind or were not reached during the pandemic. There is an urgent need for measures that can meet this challenge in the post-Covid era and in the event of future similar situations. Lessons learnt from positive experiences need to become the basis for future practice in particular **establishing different models of blended learning**. Empowering both teachers and learners to combine presential and online learning will both increase the flexibility adult learners need, increase their digital skills, and provide the sector with sustainable and resilient methods of delivery should a new disruption arise. The enormous need for basic education in the area of digitization in the population at large is currently both a challenge and a new option for reaching target groups. Special efforts must be made to design and implement sustainable models adapted to the needs of adults with very low levels of basic skills.

Annex 7 – Report on the expert meeting: The report from the expert meeting that took place on 24 February 2022

Meeting report

Welcome and Introduction

Vicki Donlevy from Ecorys introduced the meeting and welcomed the participants. She highlighted that the aim of the expert meeting is to present preliminary findings of the evaluation, to discuss two key themes (Collaborative roles; Implementation of the Three-step approach) and to reflect on enablers, challenges and priorities with regards to Upskilling Pathways at national and EU level. Vicki also gave a brief overview of the agenda and reminded that the outcomes of the meeting will feed into the final version of the study.

Policy Developments at EU level

Andreea Diana Spiridon from DG EMPL welcomed the participants of the meeting and presented an overview of key policy developments in the area of skills in the EU. She highlighted that skills policies are getting increased attention due to the ongoing structural changes in the labour market.

Andreea Diana then highlighted two recent proposals of the European Commission in the area of skills policies. First, the Individual Learning Account - these are virtual wallets, established by national authorities, for every person of working age. As part of the proposal, national authorities would ensure adequate annual provision of individual training entitlements to these accounts, with higher amounts for people most in need of training.

The second proposal establishes a common European approach to micro-credentials. The aim of the Commission's proposal is to establish a European approach that gives a common definition for micro-credentials, provides common standards, and improves recognition across borders.

Andreea Diana then gave a brief overview of the objectives of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways and its three main steps: (i) assessing skills; (ii) tailored learning offer; (iii) validation and recognition. She stressed that implementing Upskilling Pathways requires a holistic and cooperative policy approach. Finally, Andreea Diana invited the participants to contribute to the public consultation regarding the implementation of Upskilling Pathways in the Member States launched by the European Commission that is open until the 17 March and is available here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12637-Evaluation-of-the-Council-Recommendation-on-Upskilling-Pathways-public-consultation_en

Study overview

Marianna Georgallis from Ecorys presented a general study overview and preliminary findings. Ecorys has been so far working on mapping of the state of play of Member States and case studies. The study is currently in the interim stage.

The highlights of the preliminary findings by the assessing criteria include:

- Positive trend in access to and participation in Upskilling Pathways however the impact of the pandemic was felt in terms of participation and the challenge to upskill the low-skilled adults remains significant

- Clear indication of the contribution of EU funding allowing upskilling initiatives
- Objectives of Upskilling Pathways continue to be strongly relevant
- Good overall coherence of national and EU policies and funding instruments

Preliminary findings from Theme 1 & 2

Günter Hefler from 3s and Luca Mobilio from Ecorys presented the background to the two key themes: (I) Collaboration between stakeholders; and (II) Implementing the three-step approach. The main lessons from the Collaboration between stakeholders theme included:

- further strengthening of the role of local actors and civil society organisations is needed;
- employers and social partners are key to identify relevant sectors and ensure measures respond to the labour market needs;
- inter- and cross-institutional cooperation represents a good practice to be fostered.

Lessons learned for each step regarding the Implementation of the three step approach included:

- Step 1: skills assessment measures need to be meaningful to result to offers that fully match the needs of the learner;
- Step 2: lessons learnt from the pandemic can foster more tailored and flexible approaches to Upskilling Pathways;
- Step 3: investing in strengthening awareness as well as addressing costs of validation for learners have potential to improve the validation arrangements

Based on the preliminary findings, a potential fourth step to be added to the approach was also highlighted, namely, providing further career guidance and job matching.

THEME I: COOPERATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

1st Word cloud

AnneMarie Künn introduced the theme of Cooperation between stakeholders and asked the participants to engage in a Word cloud with the following question: What is the key success factor in ensuring collaboration when designing and implementing upskilling pathways?

The results of the Word cloud are presented below:



1st practice presentation – Tony Donohoe, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Ireland

Tony Donohoe presented the good practices of Ireland’s Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. Tony first introduced the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), its history and composition, whilst highlighting the importance of joint thinking and diversity of stakeholders (government departments, higher education authorities, trade unions, etc.) with regards to skills policy.

The speaker then proceeded to explain that the EGFSN is one of the bodies informing the work of the National Skills Council in Ireland. He also discussed the skills policy context in Ireland and emphasised the **changing trends** in the economy and labour market due to the impact of new technologies and decarbonisation. The speaker also presented the recent and upcoming studies of EGFSN highlighting the areas of design thinking, digital transformation, renewable energy, AI regulation, as well as particular challenges around the construction and housing crisis in Ireland.

Finally, the speaker emphasised the importance of Upskilling Pathways **connection to social partners and enterprise strategies**; having structures which are **dynamic and adaptable** to change, as well as the need to have **skills analysis at granular level**.

Breakout Groups: After the good practice presentation, the participants were divided into four different breakout groups and invited to discuss the following questions:

1. In your Member State, which stakeholders (public, private, third sector) at national, regional and local are involved in designing and implementing upskilling pathways and what is the nature/extent of their role?
2. How is effective coordination of these stakeholders at national and regional level ensured?
3. Do formal coordination or engagement mechanisms exist? If so, which coordination or engagement mechanisms are used?
4. Are there any examples of good or bad practice from which lessons can be learnt?

Feedback from the group discussions: The rapporteur from each group presented the results of their discussion in plenary:

Group 1 (representatives from CY, EL, ES, PL): The participants discussed that the two main actors involved in designing and implementing Upskilling Pathways in their countries were the Ministries of Education and the Ministries of Labour. In **ES**, the Social Dialogue

Roundtable for VET is represented by the Ministry of Education and VET, main trade unions (CCOO and UGT), CEOE (Spanish Confederation of Social Workers) and CEPYME (Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises). Other key stakeholders in ES are the General Council for Vocational Training (advisory and institutional participation body of public administrations and the Government's advisory body on vocational training); Educational and Labour Administrations (In ES the authority is transferred to the Autonomous Communities); Trade Unions; Employers' Associations ("Patronales"); and Organisations representing professions (Defense, Health, Transportation, Internal Affairs...).

Other key stakeholders in the group included public and private institutions (CY), HR Development Authority (CY), foundations (PL), universities (PL), employers (PL), PES (EL), and council for regional needs and for VET (EL). The group highlighted that the **employers' organisations** play an active part in giving direction to the initiative. In CY, **NGOs** are involved but usually do not have a formal role.

Regarding the coordination, in **ES** a permanent coordination is established by the Sectoral Conferences of Education and Vocational Training for the Employment of the National Qualifications System (where all the Autonomous Communities are represented), the State School Board and part of the General Council For Vocational Training holding regular meetings. This coordination is guaranteed by the Territorial Cooperation Programs (promoted by the State). They are discussed and agreed with the Autonomous Communities, as well as the criteria for the distribution of funds. The eligibility criteria for distribution of funds include:

- high school students
- compulsory secondary school students
- vocational students
- labour force
- qualification level of the workforce
- unemployment rate
- poverty rate
- others considered relevant and agreed with the Autonomous Communities to guarantee access for all citizens to vocational training and territorial balance in access to lifelong learning.

Coordination in **EL** is done by the **regional and central councils**, in **CY** by a **board** of directors. EL possesses a national mechanism for identifying needs involving government, ministries and social partners – 'Mechanism to identify Labour Market Needs'. CY noted a room for improvement for cooperation between engaged bodies, whilst PL reported a coherent and complementary integration of Upskilling Pathways into national policies.

In **ES**, [The Innovation and Knowledge Transfer Projects in the field of VET](#) is considered best practice. Each project consists of two VET centres from different Autonomous Communities and three companies, bodies and/or entities, up to a maximum of 5 members. These processes of technological innovation and applied research allow permanent updating, agile adaptation and proactive and anticipatory detection of changes and emerging needs in productive sectors, with special attention to those who are the highest

priority in the new economic model, such as those associated with digitisation, ecological transition, environmental sustainability, territorial innovation, health and attention to people.

Group 2 (representatives from AT, FI, IE, PL, NL): The group highlighted the **importance of involving stakeholders at all levels** and different stages (both implementation and design). In FI there was a reform of continuous learning in 2021. In IE, a new youth strategy is being implemented targeting literacy and numeracy, including **detailed consultation process** and support by various actors at all levels including NGOs and private organisations. In PL, experts in education as well as ministries were involved at several levels in the process of implementing the three-step approach. Considering the coordination, PL has created a **steering group** with different representatives of ministries, educational research institutions and other stakeholders. In AT, the strategies were developed in **collaboration between ministries, experts and social partners** – there is a regular network of coordination with relevant stakeholders, including regional governments. The collaboration at the implementation level in AT includes a consultation group that brings together different stakeholders. NL also established structures where several stakeholders collaborate including inter-ministerial working group and local level actors, which have a strong role. In NL specific information events (dialogue days) are organised to discuss upcoming policies and required action with relevant stakeholders. The group identified the key challenge to be defining the role of different actors and keeping all stakeholders well informed throughout the process.

Group 3 (representatives from IT, IE, LT, SI): The participants agreed that UP had a **valuable and catalytic role in supporting the policies in the skills** area in the Member States. **Social partners** in LT (both trade unions and employer organisations) are very involved in all stages the process. LT also has **Adult Education Coordinators** placed in each municipality (one in each municipality so 42 in total) and is currently developing training programmes for them, so that they are prepared to undertake their role. The social partners in IT are formally involved but lacking an active engagement. On the other hand, actors in the **third sector** are willing to participate but aren't always offered space to do so. It would be important to involve them more, particularly in the design of UP measures, as they can help with increasing participation in and uptake of upskilling and reskilling initiatives. Considering the coordination mechanism in IT, the regional municipalities have competence over adult education, so the coordination is up to them. While there were no ad hoc structures established following the UP Recommendation, the latter acted as a "policy catalyst" and revitalised existing bodies, e.g. Inter-institutional Tables for lifelong learning are now a key platform for coordination. They existed before the UP Recommendation but hadn't held any meetings for 2 or 3 years. The Inter-Institutional Tables for lifelong learning can be considered now a good practice. In SI, a New Plan for Adult Education was adopted and will be in place until 2030. It foresees inter-institutional cooperation with the involvement of several Ministries. Ministries will have to prepare Action Plans with yearly goals, to be assessed to improve their implementation. Different stakeholders will take part in these assessments. In SI, the COVID-19 pandemic fostered the partnership between education providers, trade unions and local employers, with the aim to provide better guidance and counselling, but also to foster validation of basic skills and competences to boost employability and react to this new crisis. While the partnership was supported by the Ministry of Education, it is mostly active at the local level. Generally, the group felt that the **NGOs** are key in the outreach to marginalised groups and thus need to be better integrated in the UP process. The group agreed that it is necessary to improve the cooperation between the **local and top-level actors** as well as to better include the learners themselves in the process.

Group 4 (representatives from HU, PL): The group emphasised the importance of **linking the sphere of education with the labour market**. It is a challenge to bridge the gap between different systems and overcome different starting points of individuals. The main

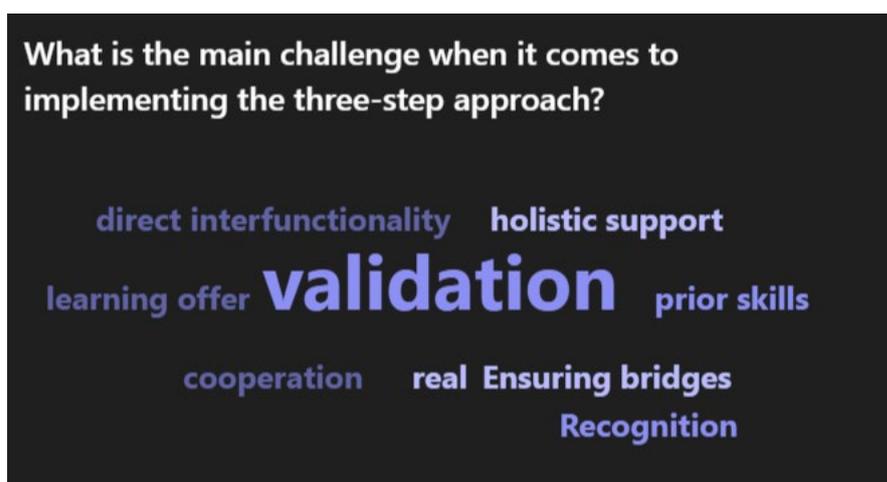
stakeholders for **HU** and **PL** involved were ministries, social partners and employers. In **HU**, **sectoral skills councils** were formed in 2019/2020 to bring together partners from industries, chambers of commerce, regional actors and representatives of vulnerable groups. These councils define the content of individual vocations and skills needs. HU noted that there is an increasing focus on low-skilled employees. PL highlighted it is a challenge to create the link with the labour market because of a tradition of a rather isolated formal education. The group discussed the importance of bottom-up approach and making sure to target the stakeholders at **local level**. There is a need to build foundation for Upskilling Pathways partnerships and **capacity at the local level**, e.g. schools to interact with local communities and other local stakeholders.

THEME II: THE THREE STEP APPROACH

2ND Word cloud

AnneMarie Künn introduced the theme of The Three-Step Approach and asked the participants to engage in the second Word cloud of the session with the following question: **What is the main challenge when it comes to implementing the three-step approach?**

The results of this Word cloud are presented below:



2ND Practice presentation – Maria Joao Alves, Qualifica Centres, Portugal

Maria Joao Alves presented the good practice experience of the Qualifica Programme in Portugal. First, she introduced the policy context in Portugal and challenges linked to basic skills and low completion of upper-secondary education. Then, she explained the main objectives, target groups and 2020 goals of the Qualifica programme. The programme is based on the Qualifica Centres which constitute **local networks** for information, guidance, certification as well as motivation for adults for lifelong learning. Maria emphasised the challenge of motivating individuals particularly with low skills for lifelong learning. She also underlined the importance of **diversity of stakeholders** involved in the creation and development of Qualifica Centres as the aim was to **increase local engagement** with the community to reach the key individuals.

The speaker then presented main results of the Qualifica programme from 2017 to present as well as its key tools, e.g. the web portal which enables locating the centres, and the Qualifica Passport which provides guidance to stakeholders. The main **strengths** of the programme include the increasing recognition of importance of raising skills levels, positive effects on the self-esteem and motivation of individuals as well as return on skills and employability. The main **challenges** identified included reducing reliance on EU funds,

improving the recognition of diplomas, increasing the engagement of stakeholders and raising awareness on the benefits of learning.

Breakout Groups. After the good practice presentation, the participants were divided into different breakout groups based on the three-step approach.

Feedback from the group discussions: The rapporteur from each group presented the results of their discussion in plenary:

Group 1 – Skills Assessment (representatives from EL, ES, IE, PL):

- What types of skills assessment measures are in place?
- Which stakeholders are involved in the skills assessments?
- Are there any examples of good (or bad) practices from which lessons can be learnt?

The skills assessment measures in place in respective Member States included:

- PL: upper secondary diplomas; external examination for non-formal education (linked with counselling);
- IE: national exams for upper secondary level and equivalent arrangements for individuals who did not complete upper secondary level education; a standard assessment tool for digital literacy is to be developed
- EL: VET institutes certificates; exams for upper secondary and higher education level; exams and accreditation of skills provided by life-long learning centres for non-formal education, counselling to the unemployed offering programmes for skills enhancement; dual system of education and on the job training for apprenticeship schools
- ES: entrance exams for VET, open exams for adults in lower secondary level and baccalaureate

In **ES**, For workers who have acquired their professional skills in the workplace and/or through non-formal and informal training, and have no qualifications, regional education authorities periodically make public calls or have permanent calls to assess and accredit the professional competences of these workers. After sitting specific exams or similar procedures, the workers can obtain an accreditation which is valid throughout the country and in which they receive guidance on how, after undergoing complementary training, they may be able to obtain a Vocational Training qualification or a Professional Certification. These processes are usually free or charged with a minimum fee in certain regions. This modality is aimed at the following recipients:

- Citizens who have abandoned their studies to enter the labour market and have learned their profession in their workplace.
- Citizens who have acquired professional competences carrying out volunteer work or as interns.
- Citizens who, throughout their lives, have carried out unpaid activities that have allowed them to acquire competences in the workplace and have been trained through non-formal means.

There are experts from the employment sector or teachers/trainers of VET who are evaluators during the exams. The technical rigor and impartiality of the assessment committees is guaranteed during the assessment and recognition of professional competences, and the results of the assessments are open to appeal. Adults in ES may also obtain a degree in Compulsory Secondary Education or Baccalaureate through open test calls organized by the Autonomous Communities.

In terms of **ES** stakeholders, the central Government lays the foundations for procedure explained above and then the Autonomous Communities make the call. The definition, planning and monitoring of the procedure is carried out with the participation of the most representative social stakeholders. Currently, there are more than ten Autonomous Communities with a permanent call for competence accreditation in ES.

Other participants in the group noted the **provision of counselling services** in link with skills assessment in PL and EL. In **PL**, the skills assessment is only linked to the European projects and not included on the national level. **IE** developed a **distance travelled tool** which targets the most disadvantaged individuals, particularly people with disabilities. **IE** also noted a challenge in a cap on the number of people for non-standard entry to studies, e.g. universities. Another challenge in **IE** public employment services is outreach, particularly for people with disabilities.

The group noted that the stakeholders involved in the skills assessment included public employment services, education system actors, life-long learning centres, employers, and NGOs. The participants highlighted that the skills assessment needs to be **linked in a holistic way** to the whole learning and employment process.

Group 2 – Tailored Learning Offer (representatives from AT, CY, ES, LV, PL, SI):

- To what extent have learning offers been adapted based on the needs identified by the skills assessment in your country context?
- To what extent have local, regional and national labour market needs been taken into account when establishing the learning offer?
- Are there any examples of good (or bad) practices from which lessons can be learnt?

With regard to the provision of learning, initiatives in **ES** are based on the government's strategic plans and programmes. For example, the [Observatory](#) provides information on the evolution of the demand and supply of professions, occupations and profiles in the labor market, also taking into account the professional classification systems arising from collective negotiation. There is also an external initiative provided by the members of the General Council for VET, enterprises, bodies and other entities; and a network of units responsible for vocational qualifications in the Autonomous Communities. All these initiatives are then taken by technological experts from the business sector and training experts from the education and VET system for employment who develop and update the qualifications. These qualifications are published in the Official Gazette (Boletín Oficial del Estado) and will be the basis for the possible future training offer. With the future Spanish Law on VET that will enter into force in March, the learning offer will be divided into 5 different levels (partial accreditation of competences, accreditation of competences, professional certificate, vocational training degrees and specialization courses). The examples of good practices from which lessons can be learned in ES were identified as the following:

- Modular training aimed at reskilling and upskilling of the employed and the unemployed, with special emphasis on training in emerging skills, which are rapidly evolving.

- The flexibility and accessibility of vocational training through the creation of "Aula Mentor", which aims to focus on municipalities with less access to vocational training, opening a window of opportunity for citizens who are able to train and accredit themselves in professional fields, contributing to population setting and the improvement of the local economy. The target group also includes rural women and vulnerable groups.
- Digital modular offer for the employed, essential to maintain their individual competitiveness as professionals and allow them to acquire more advanced skills.

In terms of the provision of learning offer tailored to the needs of individuals in **AT**, the Adult Education programme is highly individualised and there is **wide range of providers specialising in different target groups**. The programme is co-funded by ESF, is free to participate in and involves competence assessment. The learning offer is tailored not only in its form but also in its content. In terms of stakeholders involved, in AT a **steering group** consisting of social partners and other actors from diverse levels are vital in defining the curricula.

In **LV**, the provision of tailored learning is particularly advanced and modular learning is available. As in AT, in LV social partners are involved in adult education and their expertise contributes to shaping the curricula and making it relevant to labour market needs. LV noted a good experience in introducing modular VET programmes, where the VET centres offer complementary qualifications to adults. Skills assessment is also available in LV, however, it still needs to be introduced in the sector of education to give an opportunity for individuals to enter the educational path.

SI has expanded its guidance and counselling through a project whereby each guidance centre developed a network of regional partners, and an assessment tool for basic skills and competences. This assessment then supports the development of a tailored plan for professional needs for individuals. Participation is free of cost.

In **CY**, dedicated stakeholders from various structures produce a yearly assessment of labour market skills needs, the outcomes of which are communicated to the educational providers. This allows to tailor the learning offer to the needs of individuals and the labour market, e.g. by assessment of skills of individuals and providing guidance if participation to specific training is required. CY noted that the system functions well as educational providers are interested in adapting their curricula to keep them relevant to market needs.

In **PL**, an experimental project is underway testing different types of support to target groups. Integration of skills and validation system are part of the project. There is also a tool to predict the trends in types of occupation required in the coming years. This prediction is done every year and schools create classes in their curricula based on the results of this tool.

Group 3 - Validation and Recognition of Skills (representatives from ES, IT, PL, HU, IE):

- How are acquired skills recognized towards gaining a qualification?
- What mechanisms did you use to create linkages between upskilling pathways, validation arrangements and national qualification frameworks?
- Are there any examples of good (or bad) practices from which lessons can be learnt?

In **ES**, in addition to the accreditation of competences, there are other procedures of skills recognition, which are listed below:

- Entrance exams to Intermediate Vocational Training Cycles. This exam is equivalent to the Compulsory Secondary School Diploma in the labour sector, which means that if to access/apply for a job it is required a Compulsory Secondary School Diploma, this would be equivalent, but it would not be valid academically.
- Entrance exams to Advanced Vocational Training Cycles. This exam is equivalent to the Baccalaureate Diploma in the labour sector which means that if to access/apply for a job it is required a Baccalaureate diploma, this would be equivalent, but it would not be valid academically.
- Open exams to obtain the Technician and Advanced Technician VET qualifications. In the first case, students would have to complete the module of training in the work place and in the second one, they would have to complete the module of training in the work place and end-of-cycle Project. These exams offer an alternative way of obtaining Technician or Advanced Technician diplomas without the need to attend intermediate or advanced vocational training cycle courses either in person or remotely. They are aimed at people who already have significant training in a certain professional field but do not have the Vocational Training Diploma and who are able to plan their study individually without needing support.
- Open exams to obtain the qualification of Compulsory Secondary Education qualification.
- Open exams to obtain the Baccalaureate qualification.
- Specific exams for students with a Technician or Advanced Technician Vocational Training Qualification (diploma) or Music or Dance Technician Official Training qualification (diploma) to obtain the Baccalaureate qualification.
- Open exams for validating special system language education. The purpose of language education is to teach students the proper use of different languages, outside the ordinary stages of the education system, and is structured according to the European Framework of Reference for Languages.
- Open exams for special system artistic education (Music and Dance).
- Access to Undergraduate Degrees for over people over 25 years of age.
- Accreditation of work or professional experience related to an undergraduate degree course for people over 40 year of age.
- Access to official undergraduate degrees for over people over 45 years of age.
- Recognition of ECTS credits in Higher Education for work experience inherent to university undergraduate courses.

In **IT**, it is a constitutional right of every citizen to have their skills and competences recognised, however it is more complex in practice as validation and recognition are two distinct processes. Basic skills are easier to recognise and validate, but the recognition and validation of specific skills is under the responsibility of the Regions and can be more complicated. The challenge also lies in fostering cooperation: trade unions and companies have a key role to play but they are often only interested in more technical and specific

skills, rather than in the recognition of basic competences. In Italy, young VET learners sign so called “individual learning paths” but it’s unclear whether these lead to qualifications or are more related to ensuring a tailored learning offer. Currently no system of ‘micro qualifications’ is being used. Regions are not well equipped to respond to citizens' right to see their competences recognised.

In **IE**, it is important to increase the focus on vulnerable learners and to increase funding for micro credentials for individuals at the lower EQF levels. Validation rates for EQF levels 1-3 dropped by half in IE during the pandemic so the government is focusing on tackling this issue.

In **HU**, validation is still in its early stages and a new legislative instrument is being drafted. Informal learning centres are currently responsible for validation of informal learning. These centres are a reference point for the low qualified and the unemployed who may not know where to start – they allow for their basic skills to be recognised. It is also important to recognise that there is a difference between validation of training undertaken, and validation of skills for the labour market.

In **FI**, the validation system is modular. It doesn’t matter how the specific skills were acquired, as long as the stakeholders pass the tests and assessments. If they passed, they can get the qualification/certificate. The same system is applied to validation of prior learning. Both employers and VET providers take part in the assessment.

The participants also discussed examples of good practices. These included the **Chance project in PL**, where funds are invested in ‘validation advisors’ to provide information and explain the process to learners. This support encourages learners to participate in validation (which is not mandatory) and the participation rates are high. The Finnish validation system is also considered a good practice.

LOOKING FORWARD: POLICY PRIORITIES RELATED TO UPSKILLING PATHWAYS

Plenary brainstorm and discussion: The participants were invited to participate in a brainstorming plenary session and discuss the following questions:

1. What can be done at the EU level to better support the implementation of the Recommendation?
2. What steps should be taken at national and EU level to increase cooperation in UP?
3. What can be done at national and EU-level to ensure the implementation of three-step approach?

Based on the discussion of the participants, the following points emerged as useful steps towards better implementation of Upskilling Pathways:

- To have more funding support from the EU towards outreach activities of the target groups. More funding could be available for this first stage of bringing the target groups onboard and persuading them.
- To encourage the use of micro credentials for gaining qualification at lower EQF levels.
- To use the expertise and perspectives of adult learners (especially the marginalised learners) to inform the policy and practices. The adult learners themselves possess invaluable insights into how to best meet their needs.

- To better support community organising and the role of NGOs in responding to local issues. These actors are very important in outreach and (re)engaging learners.
- To value non-accredited provision as a first step back to education and to support community education providers in offering validation.
- To work on changing how basic skills are perceived and where they are taught. As these are provisions for adults, the places for basic skills development and assessment should be also at employment sites and not only schools. This requires work with employers, SMEs, etc. to support them in developing adult learning on basic skills.

Closing remarks

Vicki from Ecorys presented the next steps for the study and invited the participants to contribute to the public consultation regarding the Upskilling Pathways as well as to promote it in their networks. Sofie Doskarova from DG EMPL highlighted the importance of the input of the experts during the meeting and thanked the participants, high level advisors as well as the organisers.

Annex 8 – Report of the validation workshop

1. Meeting report

Welcome and Introduction from Ecorys: Vicki Donlevy from Ecorys introduced the meeting and welcomed the participants. She highlighted that the aim of the validation workshop is to present the key findings of the study supporting the evaluation of the 2016 Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, with a focus on the five evaluation criteria and discuss the lessons learned for future action at EU and national level. She encouraged participants to share their views so that we can validate and expand the key findings and conclusions for future policy action. The outcomes of the workshop will feed into the final report of the study.

Welcome from the European Commission: Andreea Diana Spiridon from DG EMPL welcomed the participants and provided a short overview of the policy context of the evaluation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. She highlighted that skills policies are getting increased attention due to demographic changes as well as the changing nature of work, and that upskilling is becoming increasingly important both for individuals to find fulfilling work and for businesses to keep growing.

She recalled that Member States at the Porto Social Summit in 2021 endorsed the target included in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan calling for least 60% of adults to participate in learning every year by 2030. The EU is working towards this ambitious goal through different means: The 2020 EU Skills Agenda includes a number of actions to foster a culture of lifelong learning in Europe. The 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework includes a range of instruments that can support upskilling (e.g. the European Social Fund+; the Recovery and Resilience Facility). Beyond existing policies and funding instruments, the EU is also making efforts to ensure learning becomes more inclusive and relevant, and to foster cross border learning through the proposals for two new Recommendations on Individual Learning Accounts and on European standards for Micro credentials, with both proposals set to be adopted by the Council on 16 June 2022. Lastly, Diana mentioned the Pact for Skills (PfS) initiative as a crucial space for cooperation at EU, national and local level to be fostered. In this broader policy context, the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation plays a crucial role as it aims to support adults to have access to learning opportunities to not only acquire basic skills but also progress to higher qualification levels. The evaluation of the Recommendation will provide an opportunity for the European Commission to take stock of the lessons learned so far to guide next steps at EU level.

Study overview: Vicki Donlevy from Ecorys presented a short overview of the study. The study aims to evaluate the extent to which the general and specific objectives of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation have been met, and assess the actions taken by Member States and the European Commission. The study covers all 27 EU Member States, assesses the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation between December 2016 (baseline) and end of December 2021.

Key findings and plenary discussion on effectiveness and efficiency: Marianna Georgallis from Ecorys presented the key findings from the study under effectiveness and efficiency, as summarised in the Input Paper shared with participants ahead of the meeting. The key findings included the following:

Effectiveness:

- While it is difficult to establish the degree to which the Recommendation contributed to positive trends, it is likely to have had an overall positive impact on the gradual increase in participation of low-skilled adults in training (until the Covid-19 pandemic).
- Most upskilling measures target the low-skilled in general, with a limited number of measures prioritising specific vulnerable groups (e.g. Roma, the long-term unemployed, migrants).
- The skills assessment remains the most implemented step, but efforts have been made to implement tailored, flexible learning offers and ensure validation. However, barriers remain.
- A wide range of stakeholders is involved in upskilling measures, but lack of cohesion between the partners, cumbersome administrative processes to formalise cooperation arrangements, and the fact that adult learning falls within the remit of both education and employment authorities, remain obstacles.
- There is widespread evidence of outreach to potential learners, but with challenges in implementation. Guidance services are more standardised and complete in countries where guidance is designed and delivered on the local level. Outreach and guidance services to employers is often inconsistent and piecemeal.
- While many upskilling measures are monitored by Member States and some have been the subject of evaluations, the degree to which the results have impacted the design and delivery of the measures is limited.

Efficiency:

- Costs associated with the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation include: costs for the design, delivery, and monitoring of courses; financial incentives; advertising costs; costs for learners
- Benefits associated with the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation include: benefits for learners (e.g. increased learning opportunities, increased skills/knowledge, gaining access to further education and/or employment, job promotion, improved health and wellbeing); benefits for employers (e.g. additional funding for training, fewer skills shortages, more motivated staff, higher employee productivity); benefits for society (e.g. instigating improvements/changes in adult learning provision which can, for example, lead to improving social cohesion).

Andrew McCoshan, High Level Expert for the study, moderated the plenary discussion. Participants were asked to whether they agreed with the findings, and to share their experiences and feedback with regards to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Recommendation.

A representative from Slovenia highlighted the findings overall correspond to her experience of the implementation of the Recommendation. She raised the following additional points to consider:

- The quality of upskilling measures is an important aspect to bear in mind.
- A key issue that hinders the work of all relevant actors involved in the implementation of the Recommendation is funding, as relying on ESF support rather than other sources of funding can be unstable.

- Adult learning must be systematically planned and all types of actors should cooperate strongly and systematically: for cooperation to work, commitment and trust are crucial.
- In terms of guidance and outreach, effective outreach approaches are hard to identify, particularly for those adults that are hard to reach. While Slovenian legislation foresees the provision of guidance as a public service, this tends not to reach those who need support the most. Around 30% of the population 16-64 literate (about 400.000 people) barely have minimum levels of literacy – this should be a primary target group of the guidance service, but currently they are being left out. While Upskilling Pathways has had some positive impact, this is not yet enough to ensure those who need it the most have access to adult learning opportunities.
- A good practice from Slovenia: as employers have a tendency not to apply for ESF funding as the procedure is seen as burdensome, ESF was used to provide funding to adult learning organisations at the local and regional level, who would then cooperate with companies to advise employers on how to improve their employees' skills.

A representative from the European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC) mentioned that the key findings from the study seem very balanced. She highlighted a few additional views:

- It's important to include a stronger focus on quality.
- The Recommendation can play a key role in tackling poverty and inequality, including by supporting low skilled workers, atypical workers, seasonal, temporary, and part-time workers and foster their integration in the labour market, beyond the focus on low skilled adults.
- More of a focus on the extent to which the Recommendation provides support to specific vulnerable groups (e.g. female and refugee workers) would be useful, as well as suggestions on what Member States should do to implement better targeted measures.
- The involvement of social partners in upskilling pathways is not as strong as it should be, and this is also reflected in evaluation and monitoring, which should see a greater involvement of both trade unions and employer representatives. Trade unions are playing an important role in providing guidance, including to companies.
- Upskilling pathways need to be supported with greater investment and social dialogue.

A representative from European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA): Agreeing with the overall findings of the study, they highlighted a number of additional issues.

- Funding for adult learning remains unstable and has stagnated or decreased in recent years, with an over reliance on EU funds.
- **Quality is a key issue.** Some Member States have included quality as an assessment criterion when publishing tenders for training providers to promote the idea that funding should be awarded to the best quality offer, rather than the "cheapest".
- When it comes to guidance and outreach, **a coordinated approach** is needed, in order for all relevant services to be involved.

- While there has been some progress, **lack of knowledge and experience still hinders progress**. To this end, more opportunities for peer learning and exchange of good practices would be beneficial.

A representative from the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL) also confirmed that the key findings from the study are in line with the experience of her organization and LLLP's member organisations.

A representative from the National Institute for Analysis of Public Policies (Italy):

- They mentioned that **the strength of the Recommendation lies in the three-step approach, and in the link between the three steps more specifically**. They underlined that it would be important to further highlight the extent to which the Recommendation played a role in fostering this holistic approach.
- In Italy, skills assessments (step 1) and flexible offers (step 2) are usually covered by upskilling measures, however validation is not always present.
- For the future, efforts need to focus on fostering the functional integration of all three steps.
- **Guidance and outreach** are two different types of service, involve different actors, have different objectives, and require different competences: guidance is reactive while outreach is proactive and aims to increase participation, especially of the low qualified, which are harder to reach.
- In order to increase outreach, **networks at the local level** need to be involved as they can disseminate available opportunities and make sure that measures tackle needs on the ground.
- Ensuring that training opportunities are delivered by **quality educators and teachers** is also essential to boost participation rates.

Key findings and plenary discussion on relevance and coherence: Vicki presented the key findings from the study under relevance and coherence. The key findings included the following:

Relevance:

- The objectives of the Recommendation are still highly relevant to labour market and wider societal needs. The COVID-19 crisis and acceleration of the green and digital transition have further increased the relevance of the Recommendation.
- The objectives of the Recommendation are still in line and relevant with EU policy context and forthcoming initiatives:
- Three step approach remains relevant as it provides useful structure and guidance for Member States to adapt to specific needs.
- Recommendation remains relevant to the needs of sectors as it can be implemented flexibly, as well as the needs of the priority target groups.
- Relevance can be improved by paying greater attention to emerging needs caused by the heightened use of online learning activities, and to the heterogeneity of priority

groups and aspects related to the intersectionality of multiple disadvantages for individuals.

Coherence:

- Good degree of coherence and complementarity between the objectives, target groups and measures defined in the Recommendation and education and training, employment and social policies and strategies at national & regional level.
- Good coherence/no duplication or overlap with relevant EU policies on employment and training, adult learning, and equality strategies; as well as EU funding mechanisms (especially ESF/ESF+, Erasmus+, EaSI, ERDF, SRSP and, since 2021, TSI, JTF and RRF).

Annemarie Künn, High Level Expert for the study, moderated the plenary discussion. Participants were asked to whether they agreed with the findings, and to share their experiences and feedback with regards to the relevance and coherence of the Recommendation.

A representative from Slovenia noted that the **Covid-19 pandemic** has had a negative impact on adult learning, leaving many behind. In Slovenia, the situation is slightly better as adult learning centres and other training providers have a set of targets to reach, and therefore they had to come up with ways to continue to deliver their trainings despite the pandemic. However, when looking at situation within companies, **many low skilled workers were left out from training opportunities.**

A representative from the National Adult Learning Organisation (Ireland) mentioned that, compared to 2019, participation in validation at EQF 1-3 in Ireland has been cut by half. This shows the huge impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges that stakeholders in this field are faced with.

A representative from DG EMPL noted that, while low skilled adults are the main target group of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, the current polarisation of the labour market triggered by digitalisation also affects workers that already possess a good level of skills. Therefore, it might be worth to investigate whether the Recommendation is relevant to tackle these new challenges.

A representative from Poland underlined that the relevance of the Recommendation is hard to assess, as it is affected by the specific country context. He stated that in Poland, for example, the **target audience of the Recommendation represents only 6% of the population.** The definition of “low skilled adults” is perhaps restrictive when it only takes into account educational attainment:

- Defining learners as “low skilled” can lead to stigmatisation, and affect motivation and participation rates.
- Defining key competences and basic skills presents difficulties linked to the fact that these may change depending on the national context.

A representative from the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), recalling the issue of definitions, mentioned that there have been efforts to develop a glossary, but the issue of different country contexts was not solved. They, however, agreed with the representative from Poland that **terminology can lead to stigma** and affect participation rates. They mentioned the case of Erasmus+ as an example as it provides mobility opportunities for low skilled adults, however the uptake tends to be low as adult learners do not want to be labelled as low skilled.

A representative from the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL) mentioned that the LLLP has been working with CEDEFOP to develop a glossary, to be published in the coming weeks.

Key findings and plenary discussion on EU added value and lessons learnt: Vicki and Marianna presented the key findings from the study under EU added value. The key findings included the following:

EU added value:

- The Recommendation has resulted in EU added value by providing a common framework: to inform national upskilling policies and encourage convergence across the EU; by promoting low skilled adults as a key target group; by ensuring more structured coordination, knowledge sharing and mutual learning among stakeholders; and by encouraging investment at EU and national level.
- Further steps could include increasing visibility of the Recommendation at national level; further acknowledging the diversity of the target group; and better involving civil society and regional and local stakeholders.

Moreover, the main lessons learned for the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation at EU and national level were presented. These include:

Lessons learned	
EU level	National/regional level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of examples of good practices • Development of a communicable overview of the benefits of upskilling • Increase in mutual learning around upskilling • Ongoing collaboration with authorities designing and managing EU funds to ensure continued support for UP • Clearer designation of responsibility on Upskilling Pathways to an EU agency • Create closer links to policy areas in other DGs, e.g. DG EAC, DG GROW, DG EMPL (social) • More cooperation with international organisations working on upskilling e.g. OECD • More joined-up guidance and presentation of EU policy relevant to upskilling for national actors • Development of clearer signposting to EU funds which can support upskilling • Ongoing clear high-level political messaging around the importance of upskilling for low-skilled, impact of the pandemic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing awareness of the need for specific measures or adaptation of existing measures for low-skilled adults • Improving outreach, with a focus on eliminating the barriers to participation • Tackling the stigmatisation of low-skilled adults • Greater effort to tailor approaches to the needs of specific vulnerable groups, recognise intersectionalities and integrate a more holistic gender and equality/diversity approach • Making skills assessments more meaningful • Greater focus on validation to increase the value of training (including by recognising transversal competences) • Continued focus on basic literacy and numeracy alongside digital skills • Increase monitoring and evaluation, integrating the voice of low-skilled adults • Continue to promote cooperation between key stakeholders

Andrew McCoshan, High Level Expert for the study, moderated the plenary discussion. Participants were asked whether they agreed with the findings and lessons learned, and to share their experiences and feedback with regards to the EU added value of the Recommendation, and next steps to be taken.

A representative from European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) mentioned the importance of including learners' voice not only in monitoring and evaluation processes, but also at an earlier stage, for example by using co-creation to design upskilling measures, as this would **increase ownership** and potentially help with tackling stigmatisation.

A representative from from EACEA asked both the participants and the research team what topics or specific themes would benefit from additional research from organisations such as Eurydice. The research team replied that, as the study showed that specific data on the implementation and impact of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation is lacking, it would be useful to further investigate how to **make use of existing EU level monitoring structures to better keep track of the Recommendation**. Further research could foster more knowledge sharing and mutual learning in relation to outreach practices and cooperation, and that more efforts should be made to gain a deeper understanding of the inherent diversity of the target group.

A representative from the National Institute for Analysis of Public Policies (Italy) mentioned that Italy has been making use of EU funds. More specifically, they are implementing two projects with funding from the **Technical Support Instrument**: one with the Ministry of Economic Development focusing on how to involve SMEs in delivering upskilling measures for their workers; and one in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, focusing on micro credentials for adult learners. For future implementation of the Recommendation, the importance of **investing in skills for life** should be stressed, such as critical thinking, as this can increase participation levels. Upskilling pathways tend to focus on EQF levels 3 and 4, which aim to increase employability but more attention should be given to skills related to personal development, such as self-confidence.

2. Written contributions

Participants to the validation workshop were given the opportunity to share written feedback on the key findings from the study, as summarised in the Input Paper shared ahead of the meeting. A total of three written contributions were submitted. These are summarised below.

2.1. Written contribution from the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL)

The LLLPs reported that the lack of systematic data collection on the impact of education policy outside formal education (e.g. adult education) hinders the design and implementation of evidence-based policies. Better data collection would support policy change both in the short and long term. On the one end, it would encourage short term re-adjustments, for example by providing evidence to support recommendations in the context of the European Semester process. On the other hand, better data would provide helpful information to evaluate the impact of policies in the medium-long term. To address the need for better data, the LLP argues that it is necessary to assess the state of play on data collection at Member State level, and to identify which policy areas could be better monitored on the basis on what is already being collected. Moreover, EU funding instruments could be used to support Member States to put in place monitoring mechanisms and to increase mutual learning opportunities (e.g. peer learning activities on education policy data monitoring). Furthermore, the LLLP highlighted that regular reporting on progress in the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation could be made compulsory.

2.2. Written contribution from Croatian Agency for VET and Adult Education

In its written contribution, the Croatian Agency for VET and Adult Education (hereafter 'the Agency') outline a series of measures that have been adopted in Croatia and that have had a positive impact on the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. These include the following:

- Adult education is included in the national qualification system.
- A new legislative framework on adult education opened up new possibilities for acquiring micro credentials, which enable learners to gain the competences they need in a shorter period of time.
- Croatia is in the process of introducing measures to ensure a better recognition of previous learning.

However, the Agency states that the participation rate of low skilled adults in upskilling pathways in Croatia is still low. This is mostly due to the complexity of administrative procedures to apply for funds; as well as the lack of programmes to acquire basic skills. To tackle these issues, the Agency suggests simplifying administrative procedures to access EU funding, as this would not only result in a better use of the funds, but it would also allow beneficiaries to invest more time in implementing quality upskilling measures. Furthermore, according to the Agency ensuring EU support for smaller projects, which can respond faster to new and challenges, would also be beneficial.

2.3. Written contribution from the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP)

In its written contribution, the MEFP provided an overview of key measures that have been put in place to foster the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. The MEFP has set up a new scheme to promote the upskilling and reskilling of citizens, the so-called Call for Reskilling and Upskilling of the Working. The Call allows companies and non-profit organisations to design training courses (30-60 hours) adapted to the specific needs of citizens that either have no qualifications, have a low level of qualification or those who need to update their qualification. While the training informal, it is linked to the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications, and therefore can allow for recognition and validation.

In terms of cooperation between stakeholders, the MEFP highlights that Spain has established a discussion table in which the Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations, plus the two main trade unions (the Unión General de los Trabajadores and the Workers' Commissions - CC.OO, discuss the implementation of all upskilling measures. Furthermore, the MEFP notes that guidance is a central element of the Spanish vocational training model, and it meant to accompany learners throughout their educational path, regardless of their age. This means that guidance is also provided to adult citizens who are already in the labour market and want to improve their skills.

Lastly, with regards to the relevance, coherence and added value of the Recommendation, the MEFP notes that Upskilling Pathways is still relevant to its target groups and to respond to current needs, that it is coherent with related national and EU policies, and that it provides a common framework for Member States to build more a more resilient and efficient labour market.

Annex 9 – Interrupted time series analysis

1. Descriptive analysis

This section will present descriptive analysis of key Eurostat indicators denoting potential outcomes of the Upskilling Pathways Initiative. These include the indicators presented in Table A9_1. This will include line graphs analysing time series trends in each indicator at the EU level and across the ten case study member states. Analysis will be further broken down by the groups listed in Table A9_1, and by level of implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative prior to its introduction in 2016.

The analysis has been undertaken for all EU27 Member States, but focuses on the ten case study Member States which include Austria (AT); Bulgaria (BG); Estonia (EE); France (FR); Germany (DE); Hungary (HU); Ireland (IE); Netherlands (NL); Spain (ES); Sweden (SE).

Table A9_1 Eurostat indicators for descriptive analysis

Indicator (Eurostat code)	Groups	Years	Frequency
Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%) (edat_lfse_03)	Age: 25-34; 25-64 ISCED: 0-2	2008-2020 (Annually) 2008-2021 (Quarterly)	Annually; Quarterly
Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex and educational attainment level (trng_lfse_03)	Age: 25-64 ISCED: 0-2; 3-4; 5-8	2008-2021	Annually
Unemployment by sex, age and educational attainment (une_educ_q)	Age: 25-64 ISCED: 0-2; 3-4; 5-8	2008-2021	Quarterly
Long-term unemployment (12 months and more) by sex, age, educational attainment level and NUTS 2 regions (lfst_r_lfu2ltu)	Age: 25-64 ISCED: 0-2; 3-4; 5-8	2008-2021	Annually
Inactive population by sex, age and educational attainment level (lfsq_igaed)	Age: 25-64 ISCED: 0-2; 3-4; 5-8	2008-2021	Quarterly
Individual's level of digital skills (isoc_sk_dskl_i)	Age: 25-64 Digital skills: No skills; Low skills Formal education level: Low; Medium; High	2015, 2016, 2017, 2019	Annually
Individual's level of digital skills (isoc_sk_dskl_i)	Age: All	2015, 2016, 2017, 2019	Annually

Indicator (Eurostat code)	Groups	Years	Frequency
	Digital skills: No skills; Low skills		
	Place of birth: Native-born; non-EU		

Before presenting analysis of the various Eurostat indicators, the table below presents an overview of the levels of implementation of Upskilling Pathways for all countries in the EU-27, before and after its introduction in 2016. The coefficients range from 0-1, where 0 indicates that no evidence of measures to implement the initiative was identified (or foreseen), while a coefficient of 1 indicates that measures that implement the initiative fully or to a large extent were identified. The table also presents these coefficients before and after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways.

All member states observed at least a moderate level of implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative following its introduction in 2016. Member states that saw implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative to a full or at least large extent include AT, DK, FR, NL, BE, EE, EL, SE and SI. Strong levels of implementation were also observed in BG, CY, DE, ES, FI and IE. Member states that introduced some noticeable measures and changes include IT, LT, LU, LV, PO and RO. Member states that appeared to implement Upskilling Pathways measures to some extent, or at least had initiated discussions around this include HU, SK, HR, MT, CZ.

In terms of changes before and after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, it is first important to note that none of the EU-27 saw a reduction in level of implementation from before the introduction of Upskilling Pathways to after. Thirteen member states did not see any change in implementation level, but all of these countries had in place measures to implement Upskilling Pathways prior to 2016. Seven member states (EE, SK, CZ, CY, DK, DE, IT) saw a modest increase in measures to implement the initiative, while a moderate increase was observed in a further three (EL, HR, MT). BE, PL, BG and LV saw a larger increase in measures to implement the initiative, all having started from a position of relatively lower levels of implementation prior to 2016.

Table A9_2 Overview of the levels of implementation of Upskilling Pathways for all countries in the EU-27, before and after its introduction in 2016

Country Code	Pre Upskilling Pathways (2016)	Post Upskilling Pathways (2020)	Change 2016-2020
BE	0.583	0.917	0.334
PL	0.417	0.750	0.333
BG	0.500	0.833	0.333
LV	0.500	0.750	0.250
EL	0.750	0.917	0.167
HR	0.417	0.583	0.166

Country Code	Pre Upskilling Pathways (2016)	Post Upskilling Pathways (2020)	Change 2016-2020
MT	0.417	0.583	0.166
EE	0.833	0.917	0.084
SK	0.583	0.667	0.084
CZ	0.417	0.500	0.083
CY	0.750	0.833	0.083
DK	0.917	1.000	0.083
DE	0.750	0.833	0.083
IT	0.667	0.750	0.083
AT	1.000	1.000	0.000
NL	1.000	1.000	0.000
FI	0.833	0.833	0.000
FR	1.000	1.000	0.000
HU	0.667	0.667	0.000
IE	0.833	0.833	0.000
LT	0.750	0.750	0.000
LU	0.750	0.750	0.000
PT	1.000	1.000	0.000
RO	0.750	0.750	0.000
SI	0.917	0.917	0.000
ES	0.833	0.833	0.000
SE	0.917	0.917	0.000

Data underpinning the descriptive analysis presented in the following sections, and the interrupted time series analysis shown further below, can be found in the Appendices section.

1.1. Educational attainment level

Looking first at EU level time series trends in proportion of those aged 25-34 and 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2 (Figure A9_1), the data shows a steadily annual decline in the proportion of these populations between 2008-2020. It is also noticeable that the proportion of those aged 25-34 in ISCED groups 0-2 is substantially lower than the wider age cohort 25-64, although this gap

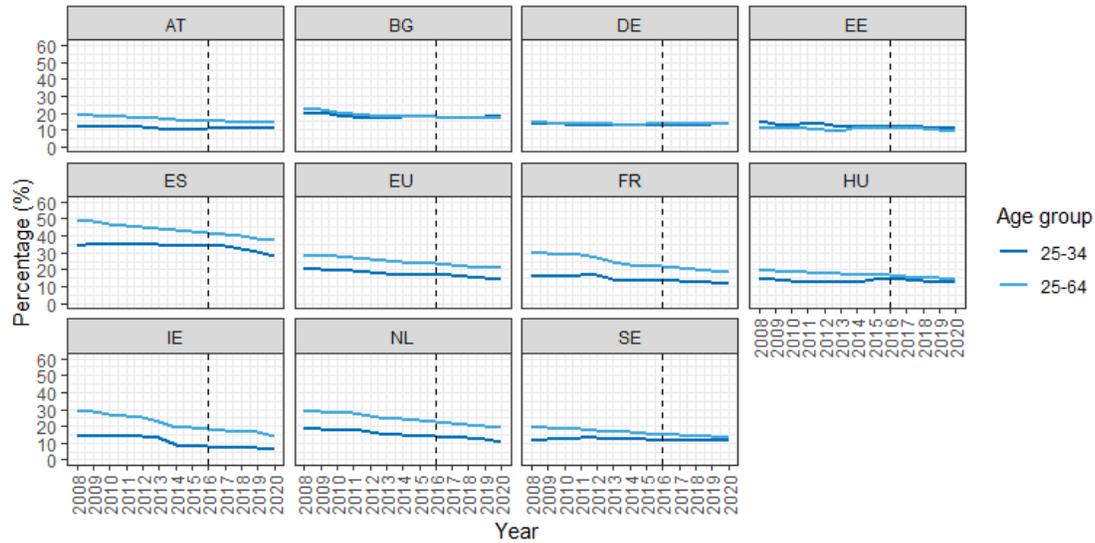
narrows slightly from 2014 onwards. Among those aged 25-34 specifically, the proportion of individuals in ISCED groups 0-2 fell from 20.3% in 2008 to 14.7% in 2020. Among those aged 25-64, the proportion fell from 28.9% in 2008 to 21.0% in 2020. There does not appear at a descriptive level to be any substantial change in trends (as denoted by the slopes) in the proportion of adults in ISCED groups 0-2 after the introduction of the Upskilling Pathways as compared to pre-2016 trends.

Figure A9_1 Proportion of adults in ISCED groups 0-2 in the EU-27 (Annual)



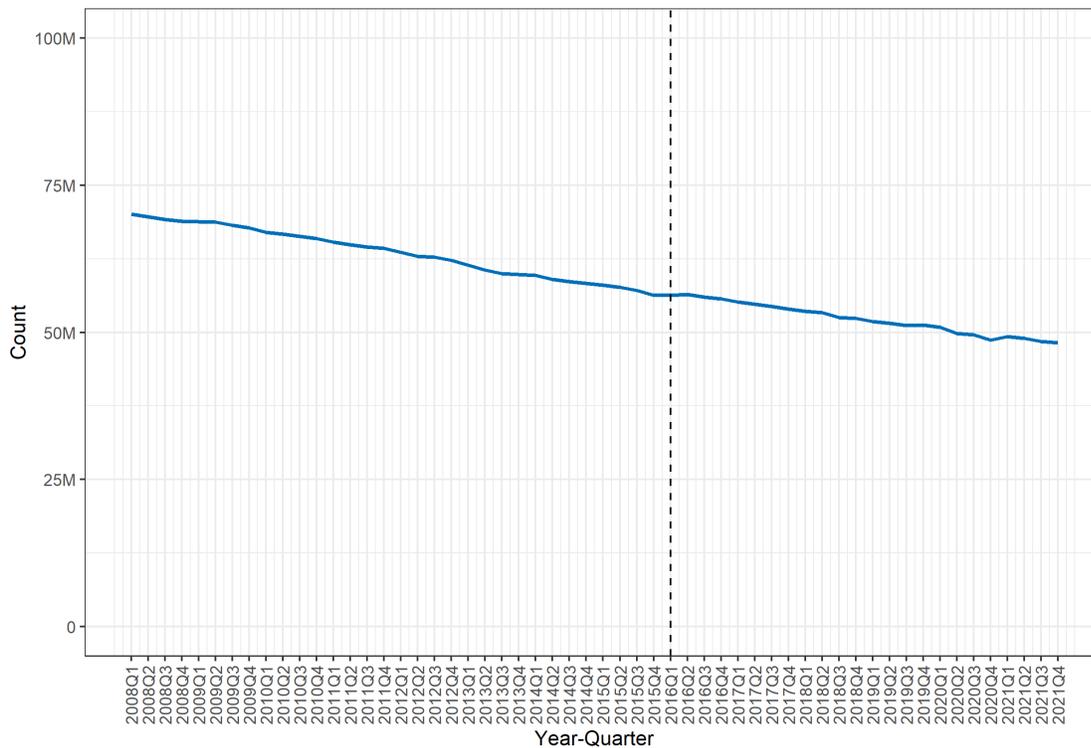
Figure A9_2 presents the same information, but for the ten case study member states (with the EU-27 trends included for reference). These graphs show that the predominant trend for these member states was a decrease of the proportion of adults in both age groups in ISCED groups 0-2 across the period 2008-2020. Noticeable decreases can be observed in ES (from 34.3% to 28.3% among 25-34; from 48.9% to 37.1% among 25-64), FR (from 17.3% to 11.9% among 25-34; from 30.5% to 18.5% among 25-64), IE (from 14.7% to 6.5% among 25-34; from 29.6% to 14.5% among 25-64) and NL (from 18.3% to 10.6% among 25-34; from 28.6% to 19.0% among 25-64). Trends remained relatively stable across this time period in BG, DE and EE. Importantly, an increase in the proportion of adults in ISCED groups 0-2 was not observed in any case study member state in this period.

Figure A9_44 Proportion of adults in ISCED groups 0-2 in the case study Member States (Annual)



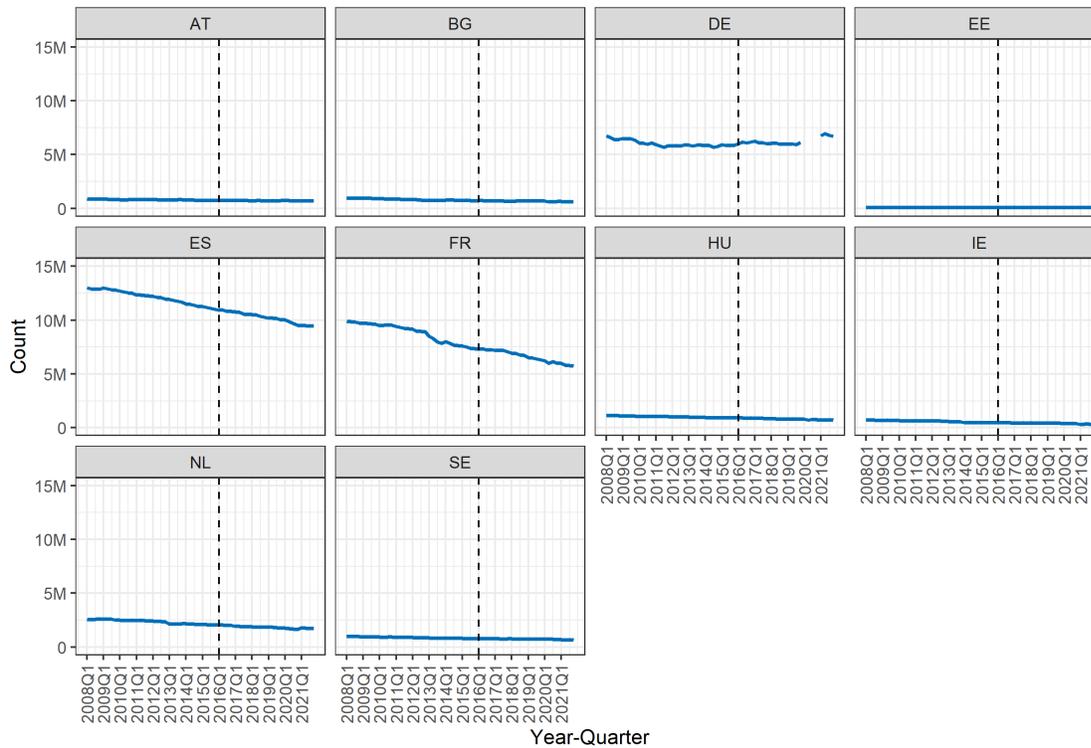
As a further level of detail to the analysis on educational attainment level (and to support the interrupted time series analysis), quarterly data on the total number of adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2 was identified. Figure A9_3 presents the EU level trends for this quarterly indicator. This figure also shows a steady decline in the number of adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2 between 2008-Q1 and 2021-Q4. Across this period, the total number of adults in these ISCED groups fell from 70,037,800 in 2008-Q1 to 48,245,600 in 2021-Q4, a reduction in population size of 45.2%. However, there was no descriptive evidence of any substantial change in trend following the introduction of the Upskilling Pathways initiative in 2016.

Figure A9_ 45 Number of adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2 in the EU-27 (Quarterly)



The equivalent information for each of the ten case study member states is presented in Figure A9_4. This Figure is slightly more difficult to interpret and compare across members as the indicator is not standardised, and influenced by population size. The key trend to observe here is that a noticeable decrease in the size of the population aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2 between 2008-Q1 and 2021-Q4 was observed in ES (from 12,984,200 to 9,430,600, a reduction of 37.7%) and FR (from 9,924,100 to 5,740,500, a reduction of 42.2%). In the other case study member states, trends in this population were relatively stable across this time period, with a minor decrease observed in the NL. The size of this population was low in AT, BG, EE, HU, IE and SE across this time period.

Figure A9_46 Number of adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2 in the case study member states (Quarterly)



1.2. Participation in education and training

This section focuses on time series trends in rates of participation in education and training (in the last 4 weeks) among 25-64 year-olds across ISCED groups 0-2, 3-4 and 5-8. Figure 5 presents these trends across the EU-27 by these three groups. It is first important to note that rates of participation were lowest throughout this period among those in ISCED groups 0-2, followed by groups 3-4, and then 5-8. Overall, there was no substantial change in rates between 2008-2020 for those in groups 0-2 (3.0% to 3.4%), 3-4 (7.3% to 7.0%) or 5-8 (15.2% to 15.9%). However, there were some interesting intermediary trends to note.

In terms of pre-Upskilling Pathways trends, the period 2008-2012 saw a relatively stable period for participation across these three groups. There was then a noticeable increase in participation rates between 2012 and 2013, particularly for those in ISCED group 5-8 (from 14.8% to 18.0%),⁵⁶⁴ followed by another stable period between 2013-2016. Following the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, trends were again stable between 2016-2019. However, there was a noticeable decrease in the proportion of adults aged 25-64 participating in education and training between 2019 and 2020, most substantially for those in ISCED 5-8 once again (from 18.7% to 15.9%).

⁵⁶⁴ The increase observed between 2012 and 2013 is largely due to an extensive revision of the questionnaire of the French Labour Force survey aimed to improve the measurement of adult learning, which impacted these trends for France as well as the EU-27 aggregate trends. For more information, see https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/trng_ifs_4w0_esms.htm

Figure A9_47 Rate of participation in education and training by ISCED groups in the EU-27

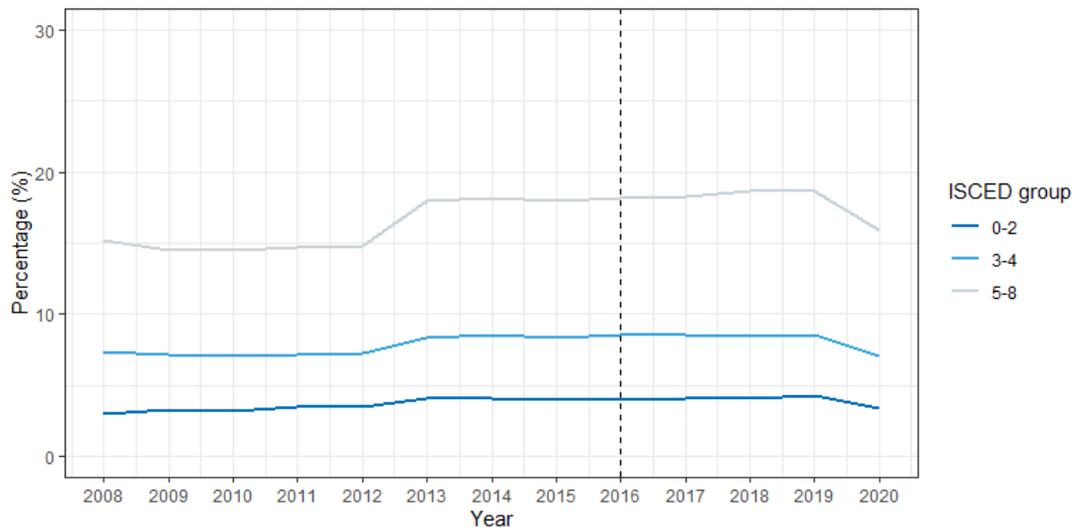
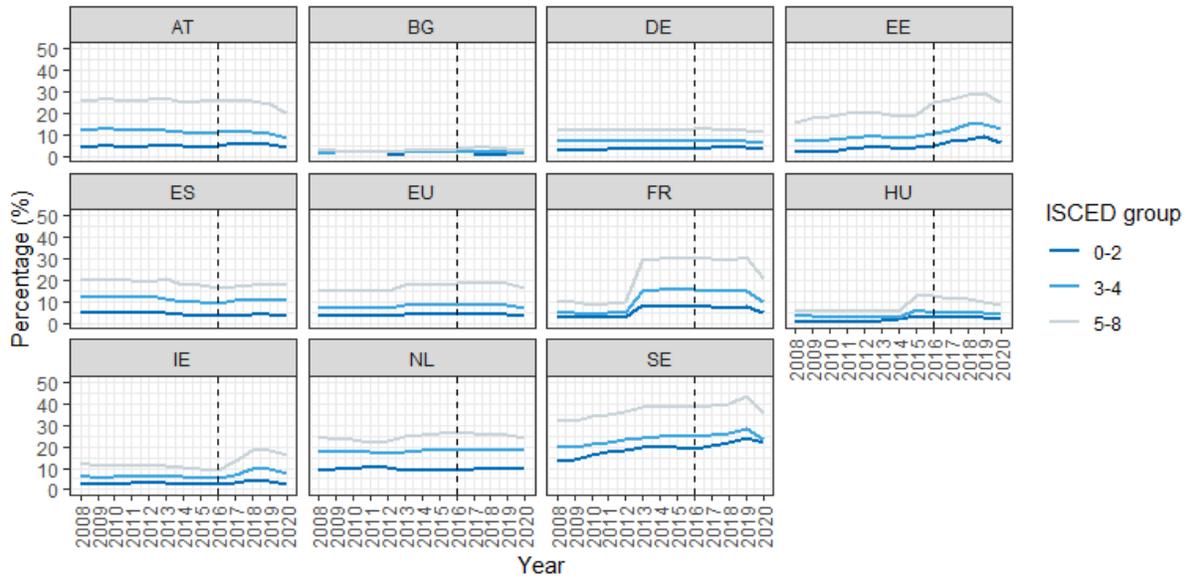


Figure A9_6 presents the equivalent data for each of the ten case study member states (with the EU-27 trends included for reference). As with the EU level trends, for most case studies rates of participation increase across ISCED groups 0-2, 3-4 and 5-8, although the difference between these groups is much smaller in BG, where rates of participation generally appear to be lower across this time period.

In terms of pre-Upskilling Pathways trends, some case study members (AT, BG, DE and IE) observed relatively stable trends between 2008-2016. There was a major increase in participation rates in FR between 2012 and 2013, particularly for ISCED group 5-8 (from 9.5% to 28.9%), while EE observed a noticeable increase in participation rates between 2015 and 2016, HU between 2014 and 2015, and SE observed steadily increasing rates of participation across all three ISCED groups across the period 2008-2016. Participation rates decreased slightly in ES and IE in the period 2008-2016, particularly from 2013. Immediately after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, rates of participation remain relatively stable in some case studies (AT, BG, DE, ES, HU, NL). However, in many case studies rates of participation fell at some point, particularly between 2019 and 2020 (AT, EE, FR, IE, SE). This is particularly noticeable in EE, IE and SE, where an initial increase in participation rates following the introduction of the initiative is followed by a sharp decrease between 2019 and 2020. For example, in SE participation rates peaked in 2019 at 23.7% (0-2), 28.6% (3-4) and 43.2% (5-8) and subsequently fell to 21.9%, 23.6% and 35.3% respectively. In some case studies, the decline in participation rates appeared to affect the ISCED group 5-8 more than those in groups 0-2 and 3-4 (AT, EE, FR, HU, SE).

Figure A9_ 48 Rate of participation in education and training by ISCED groups in the case study member states



1.3. Unemployment rates

This section focuses on time series trends in the proportion of adults aged 25-64 that are unemployed before and after the introduction of the Upskilling Pathways initiative. It should be noted that the time series trends are relatively ‘noisy’ due to the seasonality of unemployment trends, given that quarterly data is used. The figures presented in this section show that, within a given year, unemployment rates tend to peak in Q1 and fall steadily throughout the year.

Figure A9_7 presents the unemployment rate across the EU-27 by ISCED groups between 2008-Q1 and 2021-Q4. Unemployment rates in this period were noticeably higher among those in ISCED group 0-2, followed by groups 3-4 and 5-8 respectively. The seasonal effects appear to be less prominent among groups 3-4 and 5-8 also. Prior to the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, there was a noticeable increase in unemployment rates particularly among ISCED group 0-2 between 2008 and 2014 (from 10.9% in 2008-Q4 to 18.3% in 2014-Q4). This was also the case in the other two ISCED groups, albeit less pronounced (5.9% to 8.4% in ISCED groups 3-4, 3.9% to 6.3%). In the quarters between 2014 and 2016, this trend appeared to level out and reverse, with unemployment rates starting to fall across the three ISCED groups by the time of the introduction of the initiative.

Following the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, unemployment rates continued to fall, particularly for ISCED group 0-2. For example, there was a decrease in the participation rate from 15.9% in 2016-Q4 to 12.3% in 2019-Q4. A temporary increase in unemployment rates across the three ISCED groups was then observed up to 2021-Q1, followed by a decline in unemployment rates towards 2021-Q4.

Figure A9_49 Unemployment rate of adults (25-64) by ISCED groups in the EU-27 (Quarterly)

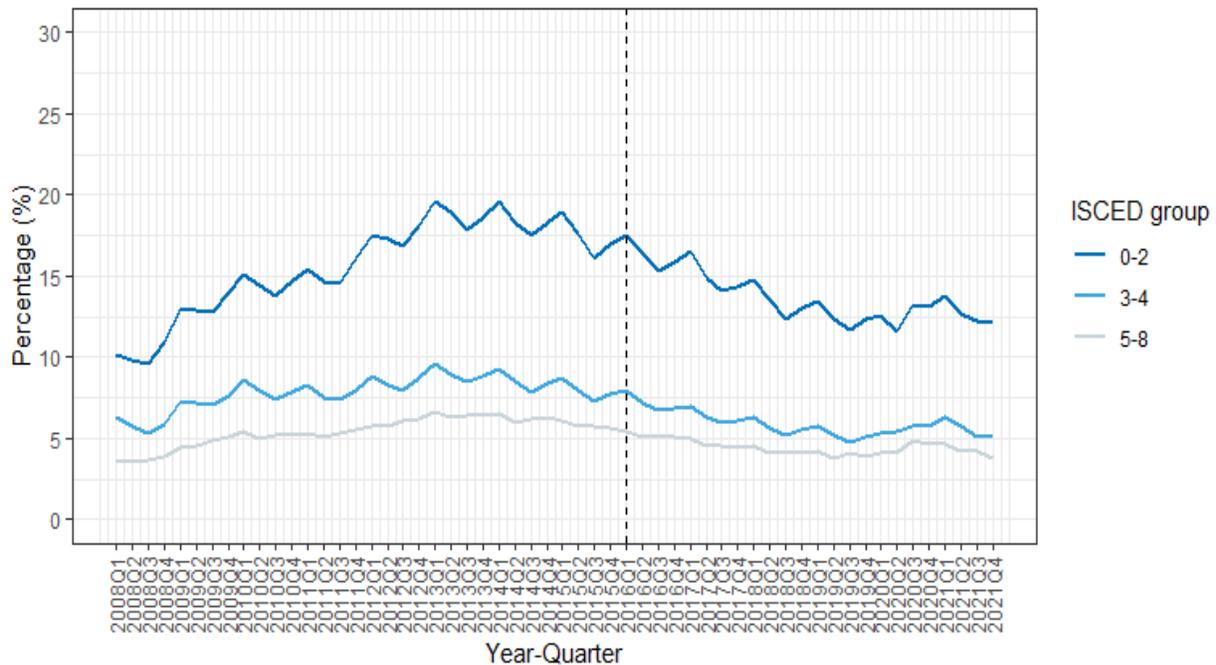
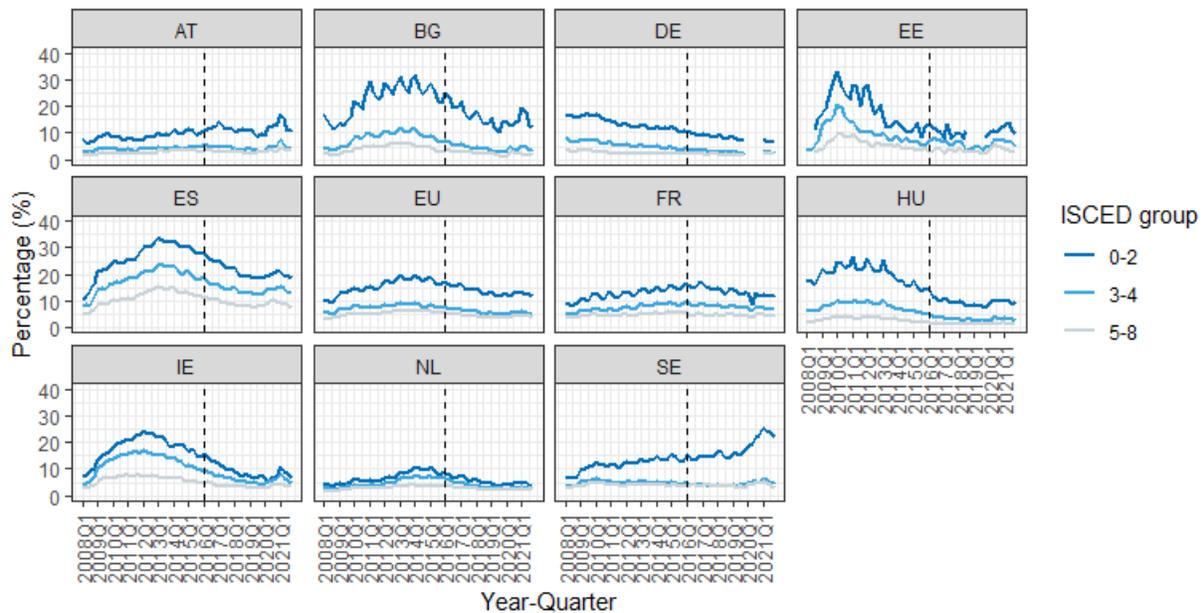


Figure A9_8 presents the equivalent information for the ten case study member states (with EU-27 data included for reference). It should be noted that there was some missing data in some quarters between 2018-2020 for DE and EE. As with the EU-27 trends, in every case study member state unemployment rates tended to be higher among those in ISCED group 0-2, followed by 3-4 and 5-8 respectively.

In the period prior to the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, some case studies (BG, ES, HU, IE, NL) observed an initial period where unemployment rates rose, roughly between 2008 and 2012-2014, followed by a stabilisation of this trend and subsequent decline in unemployment rates up to 2016. AT, FR and SE observed steadily rising unemployment rates among those in ISCED group 0-2, with stable unemployment rates among those in groups 3-4 and 5-8. In DE, unemployment rates steadily fell between 2008-2016, particularly for ISCED group 0-2.

Following the introduction of the initiative, a number of trends in unemployment rates can be observed. In line with overall trends in the EU-27, some case studies (BG, ES, HU, IE) observed a decline in unemployment rates in the quarters between 2016-2019, followed by a subsequent increase going into 2020 and 2021. Others (DE, FR, NL) observed a steady decline in unemployment rates across the post-intervention period. AT and SE observed a stable period followed by an increase in unemployment rates from 2019 onwards, particularly among those in ISCED group 0-2.

Figure A9_50 Unemployment rate of adults (25-64) by ISCED groups in the case study member states (Quarterly)



1.4. Long-term unemployment rates

This section will explore time series trends in long-term unemployment rates, defined as unemployment lasting 12 months or more. Figure A9_9 presents trends in long-term unemployment rates across the EU-27 by ISCED groups 0-2, 3-4 and 5-8. As with other trends analysed already, rates of long-term unemployment across the period 2008-2020 were higher among ISCED group 0-2, followed by groups 3-4 and 5-8.

In the pre-intervention period, rates of long-term unemployment increased across the EU-27, in the period between 2008-2014. This was particularly pronounced among ISCED group 0-2 (from 4.6% to 11.0%), although increases were also observed in the other two ISCED groups in this period (from 2.6% to 4.5% in groups 3-4; from 1.2% to 2.9% in groups 5-8). This trend stabilised and eventually long-term unemployment rates started falling across the three groups in the years up to 2016.

In the period following the introduction of the initiative in 2016, long-term unemployment rates continued to fall between 2016-2020, particularly for the ISCED group 0-2. Between 2016-2020, long-term unemployment rates fell from 9.5% to 5.8% for ISCED groups 0-2, from 3.7% to 2.1% in groups 3-4, and from 2.3% to 1.4% in groups 5-8.

Figure A9_ 51 Long-term unemployment rate of adults (25-64) by ISCED groups in the EU-27

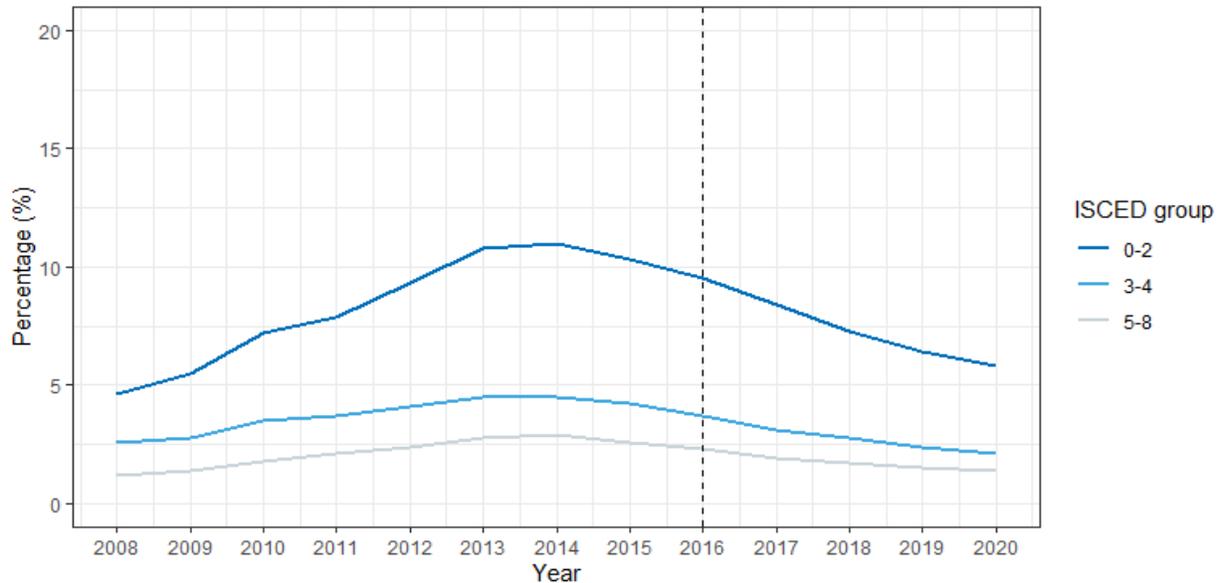
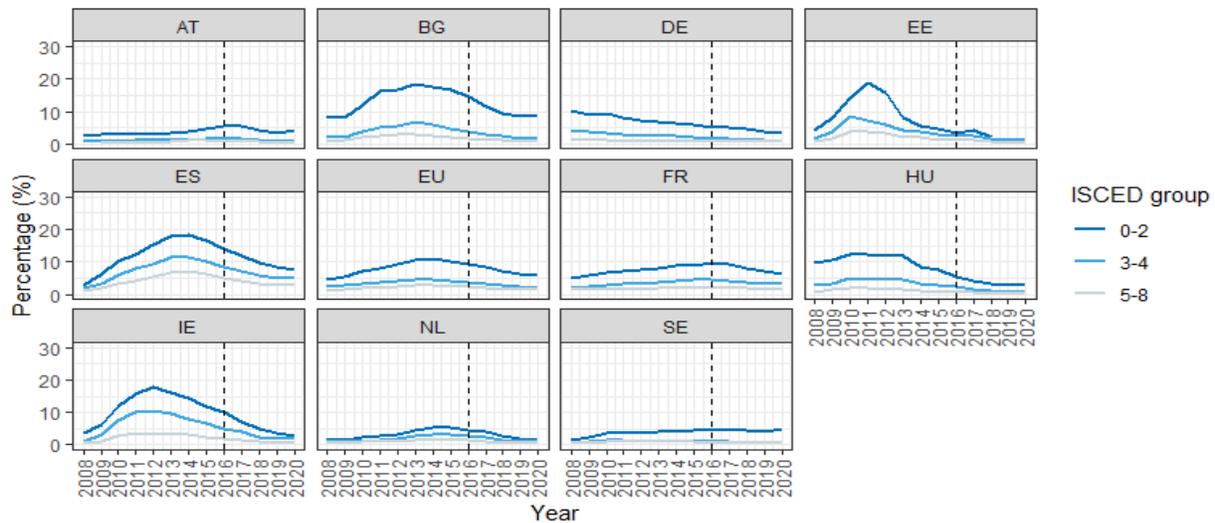


Figure A9_10 presents time series trends on long-term unemployment in the ten case studies (including EU-27 level data for reference). As per the EU-27 level trends, rates of long-term unemployment are higher among those in ISCED groups 0-2, as compared to those in groups 3-4 and 5-8. In some member states (BG, DE, EE, ES, HU, IE), the differences between long-term unemployment rates between those in ISCED groups 0-2 and the rest of the population is reduced between 2008-2020. It is also noticeable that in many of these member states (BG, EE, ES, HU, IE), long-term unemployment rates appear to peak across all ISCED groups around the period 2012-2014, and fall subsequently. In most member states, long-term unemployment rates fell between 2008-2020. For example, in HU, this fell from 9.7% to 3.4% for ISCED groups 0-2, from 3.0% to 0.8% for those in ISCED groups 3-4, and from 0.9% to 0.4% for those in groups 5-8. In a few cases, the rates appeared to rise overall in this period. For example, in ES the long-term unemployment rate rose from 2.8% to 7.7% among those in ISCED groups 0-2, from 1.8% to 4.8% among those in ISCED groups 3-4, and from 1.0% to 2.9% among those in groups 5-8.

Figure A9_52 Long-term unemployment rate of adults (25-64) by ISCED groups in the case studies



1.5. Inactivity

This section focusses on time series trends in the size of the inactive population before and after the introduction of the Upskilling Pathways initiative. Inactivity can be understood as being outside of the labour force, neither employed or unemployed.

Figure A9_11 presents time series trends in the inactive population across the EU-27 between 2008-Q1 and 2021-Q4. The size of the inactive population is substantially lower among those in the ISCED group 5-8. The size of the inactive population is similar among those in groups 0-2 and 3-4, with the population initially being larger for those in group 0-2 but subsequently being larger in group 3-4 from the end of 2010 onwards.

Overall, the size of the inactive population fell between 2008 and 2021 for those in ISCED groups 0-2 (from 25,732,100 in 2008-Q4 to 17,193,700 in 2021-Q4, a decrease of 33.2%) and 3-4 (from 24,568,500 to 20,218,100, a decrease of 17.7%) but increased among those in ISCED groups 5-8 (from 6,590,400 to 7,427,800, an increase of 12.7%).

Prior to the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, the size of the inactive population steadily fell among those in ISCED group 0-2 across the quarters between 2008-2016. There was also a decrease in group 3-4 in this period, although not to the same extent, which is why the size of this population eventually became larger than those in group 0-2. While the size of the inactive population among those in ISCED group 5-8 was substantially lower in this period, it steadily increased, albeit not substantially.

Following the introduction of the initiative in 2016, the size of the inactive population continued to fall in ISCED groups 0-2 and 3-4, and remained relatively stable in group 5-8. A temporary increase in the size of the inactive population across these three groups was observed in 2020-Q1, although this reverted relatively quickly. Another temporary increase was observed in 2021-Q1 among ISCED groups 0-2 and 3-4, although this reverted also.

Figure A9_53 Inactive population by ISCED groups in the EU-27 (Quarterly)

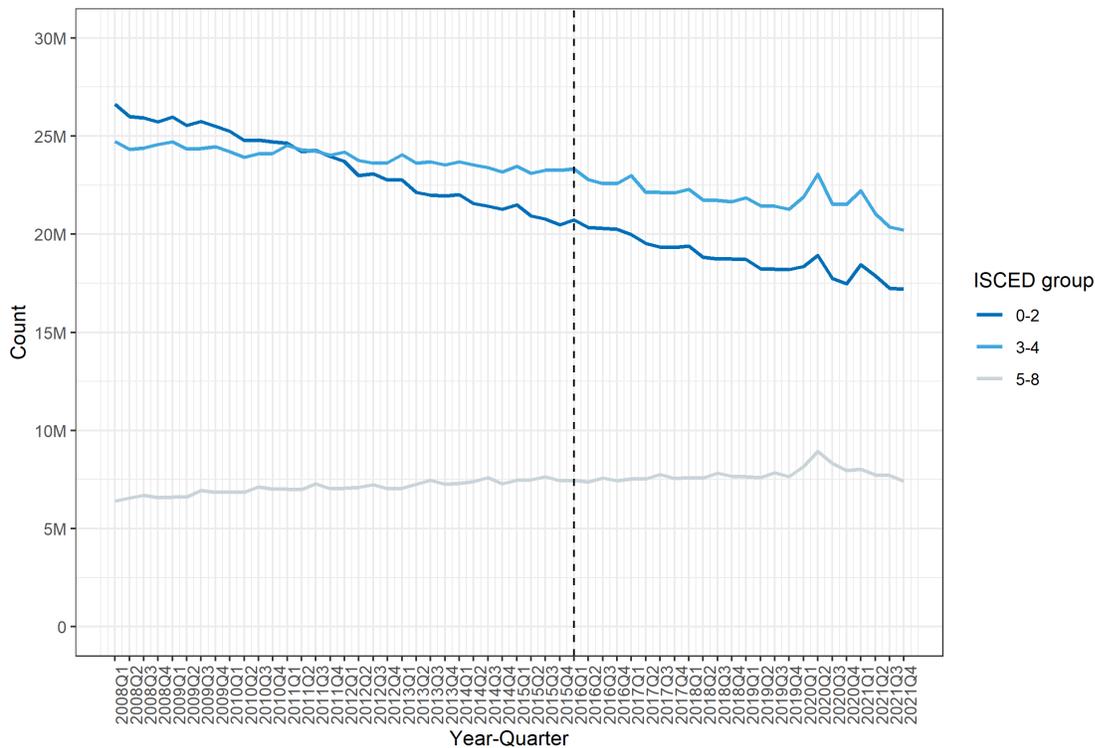


Figure A9_12 presents the equivalent information for the ten case study member states. It should be noted that there is missing data for DE here in some quarters between 2019-2020. For the some of these case studies (AT, BG, EE, IE, SE), the size of the inactive population was relatively small and remained stable throughout the quarters between 2008-2021. Relatively small inactive populations were also observed in HU and NL, although noticeable decreases in the size of the inactive populations were observed before and after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, particularly for ISCED groups 0-2 and 3-4.

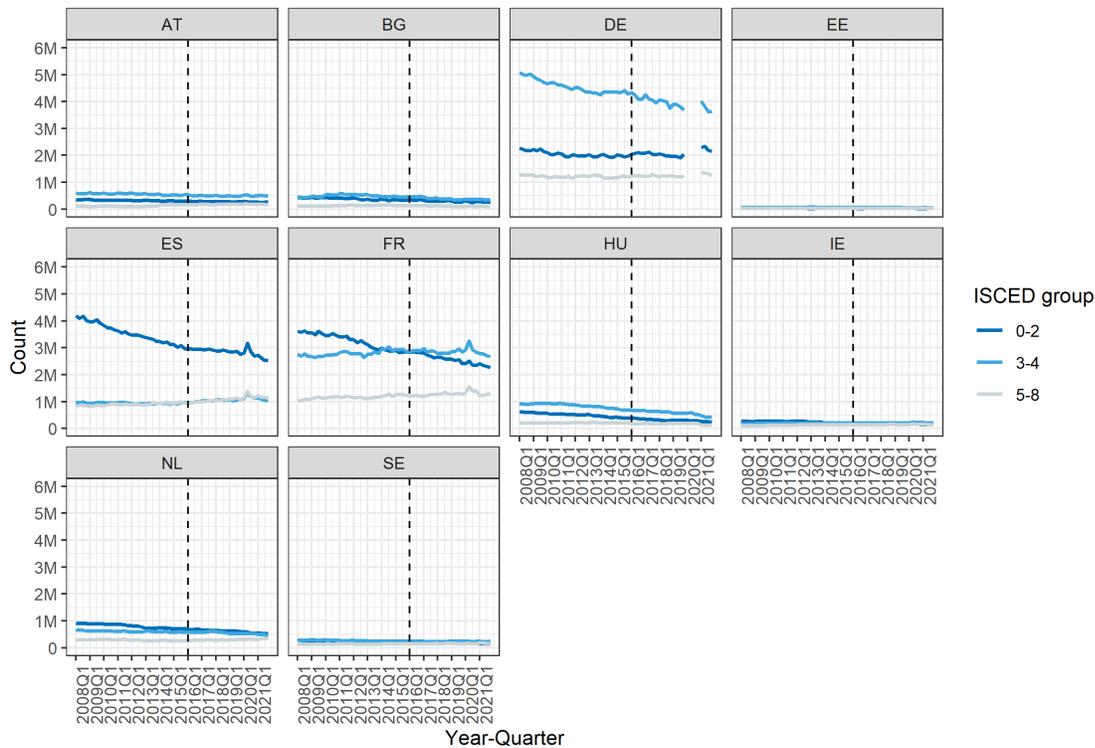
DE presents an interesting example with regards to the inactive population. Inactivity is particularly high among those in ISCED group 3-4. The size of this population fell steadily prior to the introduction of the initiative, and continued to do so after 2016. The size of the inactive population in ISCED groups 0-2 and 5-8 remained relatively stable across the study period.

In ES, the largest inactive population was found in ISCED group 0-2, although the size of this group fell steadily before and after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, from 4,007,900 in 2008-Q4 to 2,528,300 in 2021-Q4, a decrease of 36.9%. The size of the inactive population was smaller among those in ISCED groups 3-4 and 5-8, and remained relatively stable prior to 2016, increasing slightly afterwards. Across the three groups, a temporary increase in the size of the inactive population was observed in 2020-Q1, in line with trends across the EU-27.

In FR, the size of the inactive population largely followed trends observed at the EU-27 level. Among those in ISCED group 0-2, the size of the inactive population fell steadily throughout the quarters between 2008-2021 so that by 2014, the size of the inactive population was smaller than those in ISCED group 3-4. More specifically, the size of this population fell from 3,548,000 in 2008-Q4 to 2,255,500 in 2021-Q4, a decrease of 36.4%. Among those in group 3-4, the size of

the inactive population increased slightly prior to the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, particularly from 2013 onwards. Following the introduction of the initiative, the size of the inactive population remained relatively stable, with a temporary increase in 2020-Q1 quickly reverting. The size of the inactive population among those in ISCED group 5-8 increased slightly prior to 2016, and remained relatively stable after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, again with a temporary increase in 2020-Q1.

Figure A9_54 Inactive population by ISCED groups in the case study member states (Quarterly)



1.6. Digital skills

This section focuses on time series trends in the share of the population with low and no digital skills by level of formal education (low, medium, high) and place of birth (native born, non-EU). It is important to note that Eurostat data on this is only available between 2015-2019, with no data available for 2018. In the graphs presented in this section, data points between 2017 and 2019 are connected with a line to illustrate trends between these years. We present analysis of time series trends in the share of the population with low and no digital skills and those that could not have their skills assessed as they had not used a computer in the last 3 months as a combined group (by level of formal education and place of birth).

Figure A9_13 shows the share of those with low and no digital skills varies in the EU-27 by level of formal education. The share of the low-qualified population with low or no digital skills stood at 78% in 2016 compared to the share of the medium-qualified of 44% and the high qualified of 14%. This share reduced marginally between 2016 and 2019, to 74% for the low qualified and 41% for the medium qualified, and remained the same for the high qualified.

Figure A9_55 Share of the population with low or no digital skills by formal educational level in the EU-27

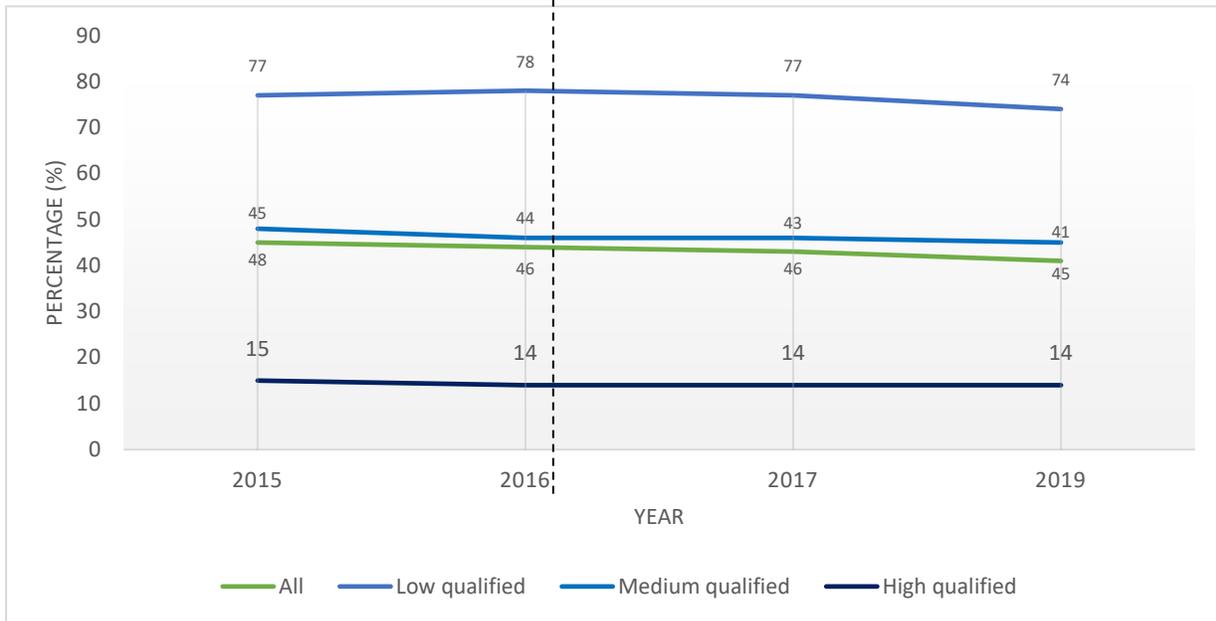
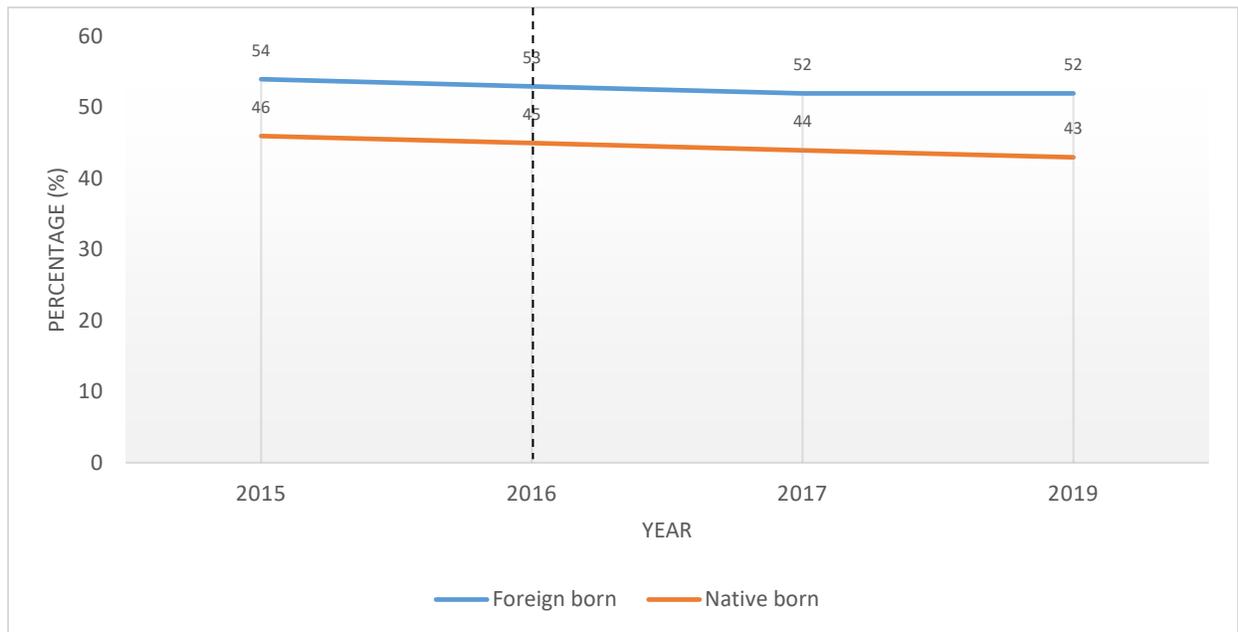


Figure A9_14 presents information on the share of the population with low or no digital skills by place of birth across the EU-27 between 2015-2019. The share of the population with low or no digital skills is higher among the foreign born population as compared to the native born population, but has marginally decreased for both groups since 2015. The share of those with low or no digital skills decreased from 46%% to 43%% among the native born population, and from 54% to 52% among the foreign born population.

Figure A9_56 Share of the population with low or no digital skills by place of birth



2. Interrupted time series analysis

In this section we present results from the interrupted time series analysis (ITSA). ITSA is a commonly-used quasi-experimental evaluation design that is implemented in the absence of a control or comparison group. It involves analysis of time series data before and after the introduction of an intervention, programme or policy. The approach is underpinned by the assumption that time series trends in the outcome variable in the pre-intervention period would have continued unchanged in the post-intervention period in the absence of the intervention, programme or policy. This hypothetical scenario with the absence of the intervention and the unchanged trends in the outcome variable is modelled as part of the design and forms the counterfactual scenario.⁵⁶⁵ This counterfactual provides a comparison for the trends actually observed in the post-intervention period. In the context of this analysis, the counterfactual is the modelled post-intervention trends in the outcome variables if the Recommendation had not been introduced in 2016 (i.e., the modelled trends that assume that pre-Upskilling Pathway trends in the outcome variables would have continued after 2016), and the intervention scenario is the time series trends in the outcome variables actually observed after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways in 2016. In its simplest form, ITSA is undertaken by estimating a regression model that produces three time-based coefficients:

⁵⁶⁵ Bernal JL, Cummins S, Gasparrini A. Interrupted time series regression for the evaluation of public health interventions: a tutorial. *Int J Epidemiol.* 2017 Feb 1;46(1):348-355. doi: 10.1093/ije/dyw098. Erratum in: *Int J Epidemiol.* 2020 Aug 1;49(4):1414. PMID: 27283160; PMCID: PMC5407170.

- **Pre-intervention slope**, which quantifies the observed time series trends in the outcome variable before the introduction of the intervention;
- **Level change**, which provides an estimate of the change in outcome level that can be attributed to the intervention, between the time points just before and after the introduction of the intervention, and adjusting for pre-intervention trends. This can be thought of as the more immediate effect of the intervention;
- **Slope change**, which provides an estimate of the difference between the pre-intervention and post-intervention slopes. This can be thought of as the **sustained effect** of an intervention, which is possibly more important than the level change for Upskilling Pathways as any implementation measure would likely take some time to produce observable changes in outcomes.

The key coefficients are the level change and slope change, which can be interpreted as the causal effects of the intervention. In the context of this analysis, these coefficients theoretically present the causal effects of the introduction on the Upskilling Pathways initiative on the post-intervention time series trends in the Eurostat indicators used as outcome variables for which the ITSA could be implemented. Given that ITSA requires at least eight data points before and after the introduction of an intervention, implementing this technique was only possible where quarterly data was available for outcome variables. As shown in Table A9_1, only three Eurostat indicators were available on a quarterly basis: number of adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2; unemployment rate among adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2, and; number of inactive adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2. Therefore, the ITSA only included these three indicators. Those in ISCED groups 0-2 were isolated for this analysis as it was hypothesized that these groups would see the strongest impacts of Upskilling Pathways.

Using quarterly data presents a challenge to implementing the standard approach for ITSA, which relies on trends in the outcome variable being linear. Quarterly data presents the issues of seasonality (i.e., regular and predictable changes in the time series trends that recur each year in the time series) and autocorrelation (i.e., presence of a high degree of similarity between present and past values in the observed time series) here. To minimise the influence of seasonality and autocorrelation on the impact estimates, we implemented the ITSA using autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) models, which accounts for time series data that is non-linear when estimating the treatment effect.⁵⁶⁶

It is important to highlight at this point that, while ITSA is a recognized quasi-experimental design, the results presented in this section should be interpreted with caution. The lack of covariates in the final analytical models open the possibility that confounding factors may at least partly explain any ‘interruption’ to time series trends in the outcome variables identified after the introduction of the intervention (Upskilling Pathways). Another limitation relates to the fact that data for adults aged 25-64 was used for the three outcome variables included in the ITSA. Using this age group means that the results are more sensitive to the broader age structures across the EU-27. However, quarterly data for those aged 25-34 for the selected indicators could not be identified within publicly-available Eurostat repositories.

⁵⁶⁶ Schaffer, A.L., Dobbins, T.A. & Pearson, S.A. Interrupted time series analysis using autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) models: a guide for evaluating large-scale health interventions. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 21, 58 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-021-01235-8>

The table below presents the results of the ITSA for each of the three indicators. Also included in the table is a coefficient for the pre-2016 level of implementation of Upskilling Pathways measures. The coefficients range from 0-1, where 0 indicates that no evidence of measures to implement the initiative was identified (or foreseen), while a coefficient of 1 indicates that measures that implement the initiative fully or to a large extent were identified. The coefficients are derived from the analysis of implementation of upskilling measures by step, as presented in the main report Sections 2.2 and 3.2. The table presents these coefficients before and after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways and the change between pre (2016) and post (2020). It is important to note that, for countries identified as having the maximum level of implementation in the pre-2016 period, we would not expect to observe any causal effects of Upskilling Pathways but we present the modelling results nonetheless for comprehensiveness.

For each indicator, the ITSA outputs the level change and the slope change. These coefficients are presented for each Eurostat indicator in the table below. Significant results ($\alpha=.05$) are marked with an asterisk, and countries with a high degree of change in implementation level between the pre-2016 and post-2016 period are highlighted in green for reference.

Table A9_3 Results of the ITSA

Country	Pre-2016 degree of implementation	Post-2016 degree of implementation	Change in degree of implementation (post-pre)	Inactivity		Unemployment		Adults in low education	
				Level-change	Slope-change	Level-change	Slope-change	Level-change	Slope-change
EU-27				238506.81	37544.85	0	0	198115.16	168060.64
Austria	1	1	0	13528.6*	885.15	0.01	0*	19689.25	1949.96
Belgium	0.58	0.92	0.33	12098.32	-3058.64	0	0*	-10426.83	-8969.95*
Bulgaria	0.5	0.83	0.33	17269.82	-1554.06	0	0.01	-7965.6	1517.09
Croatia	0.42	0.58	0.17	30792.7*	-392.82	-0.03	-0.01	35135.73*	-1133.24
Cyprus	0.75	0.83	0.08	-1224.96	-256.92	0	-0.01*	-1962.82	-322.64
Czechia	0.42	0.5	0.08	-8670.29*	-2721.02	-0.02*	-0.01*	-3163.04	-6676.93
Denmark	0.92	1	0.08	-7850.39	860.27*	-0.02	0	5344.98	2559.06
Estonia	0.83	0.92	0.08	-3150.02	-62.32			2245.39	-220.65
Finland	0.83	0.83	0	-529.85	541.88	-0.01	0	13381.44	2356.66*
France	1	1	0	39082.03	-688.23	0	0*	-60248.59	18025.48
Germany	0.75	0.83	0.08	45677.36	7213.01	-0.01*	0	220142.73	-20138.61
Greece	0.75	0.92	0.17	7069.13	1860.65	0.01	0	52982.31	-3423.94
Hungary	0.67	0.67	0	14401.48	1310.78	-0.02	0	15211.92	-2237.88
Ireland	0.83	0.83	0	7080.61	2024.22	0.01	0	10800.24	6474.27

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Italy	0.67	0.75	0.08	-21900.13	9153.07	0.01	0	326187.49*	57837
Latvia	0.5	0.75	0.25	-5769.89	718.52	0	-0.01	2292.79	1179.43
Lithuania	0.75	0.75	0	-2019.05	516.35			-12081.3	993.8
Luxembourg	0.75	0.75	0	-5269.01	433.18			-7440.22	923.28
Malta	0.42	0.58	0.17	-1865.36	-115.87	-0.01*	0*	-639.82	602.87
Netherlands	1	1	0	4098.42	-3427.28	-0.01	0	36646.28	-4382.26
Poland	0.42	0.75	0.33	6988.3	-1119.28	-0.01	0	-47703.17	2918.55
Portugal	1	1	0	21547.57	-4952.87	0	0	6436.43	11695.93
Romania	0.75	0.75	0	-43420.17	-19646.15*	0	0*	-101714.71	-35216.58*
Slovenia	0.92	0.92	0	-1110.13	-137.82	0.02	0	-1821.29	1429.77
Slovakia	0.58	0.67	0.08	-5271.19	1374.64	0	0	-14655.19	875.82
Spain	0.83	0.83	0	-15098.24	26356.89*	0	0	-5050.17	8665
Sweden	0.92	0.92	0	2193.64	472.39	0.01	0	-4976.11	4625.94*

Looking at the number of adults aged 25-64 in ISCED groups 0-2, significant level change results are observed in **Croatia** (increase in number of adults in ISCED groups 0-2) and Italy (increase). For both countries, the slope change is not significant. However, the slope change coefficients show significant results in **Belgium, Finland, Romania and Sweden**. A negative slope coefficient for Belgium indicates that the rate of decrease in the size of this population was more rapid or steep than the ITS model predicted. In the case of Romania, the ITS model actually predicted an increase in the post-intervention size of the inactive population, while the observed trends show a steady decline in the size of this population (hence the negative coefficient). A positive coefficient is observed for Finland and Sweden as the rate of decrease in the size of the population was not as rapid or steep as the ITS model predicted.

Focusing on unemployment rates among those in ISCED groups 0-2, significant results across the level and slope change were observed in **Czechia and Malta**. Czechia saw a 2-percentage point reduction in unemployment rates immediately after Upskilling Pathways, and a negative slope change coefficient indicates that the rate of decrease was faster or steeper than the ITS model predicted. Malta observed a 1-percentage point reduction in unemployment rates immediately after Upskilling Pathways, and no difference in the rate of decrease as predicted by the ITS model. A significant level change was also identified in **Germany** (1-percentage point reduction), while significant slope changes were identified in **Cyprus, France and Romania**. There was no difference between the predicted and observed slopes for France and Romania, but the ITS model predicted a modest increase in the unemployment rate for Cyprus, while the observed trend was one of a decrease (hence the negative coefficient).

Finally, looking at the results for the Eurostat indicator on the size of the inactive population, the ITSA indicates that for most member states, Upskilling Pathways did not have any significant impact on this outcome. A significant level change was identified in **Austria** (increase in level, or size of the inactive population), **Croatia** (increase) and **Czechia** (decrease). This indicates that, for Austria and Croatia, a significant increase in the size of the inactive population was observed immediately after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, while a significant decrease was observed in Czechia. Focusing on the slope change coefficients for this outcome, once again the results were not significant for most member states. Significant results were observed for **Denmark** (positive slope change), **Romania** (negative slope change) and **Spain** (positive slope change). This indicates that, following the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, the rate of decrease in the size of the inactive population in Denmark and Spain was slower or less steep than predicted by the ITS model (given that Denmark and Spain both observed a decreasing size of the inactive population in this period) given the positive coefficient, and faster or steeper than predicted in Romania, given the negative coefficient.

Table A9_4 provides a summary of the results of the ITSA by categorising Member States into one of four groups across the three indicators used for the analysis:

- **Group 1:** Member States that show a significant improvement in the slope change *and* an improvement in relevant policy measures in place (as indicated by a change in degree of implementation coefficient above 0) after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways.
- **Group 2:** Member States that show a significant improvement in the slope change *but* no improvement in relevant policy measures in place after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways.
- **Group 3:** Member states that show no significant improvement (or even a worsening) in the slope change *and* no improvement in relevant policy measures in place after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways.
- **Group 4:** Member States that show no significant improvement (or even a worsening) in the slope change *but* no improvement in relevant policy measures in place after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways.

If the hypothesis that Upskilling Pathways produces improved outcomes across the three indicators used for the ITSA is true, then we would anticipate that many / most Member States would fall into Groups 1 and 3. Groups 2 and 4 are inconsistent with this hypothesis, as they indicate either significantly improved outcomes despite no improvement in relevant policy measures after the introduction of Upskilling Pathways, or no significant improvement in outcomes despite improvement in the relevant policy measures in place post-Upskilling Pathways. We focus on using slope change coefficients to categorise Member States (rather than level change) given that we anticipate that the impacts of Upskilling Pathways on these outcomes would likely manifest over a longer period of time, rather than immediately after its introduction.

Table A9_4 Categorisation of Member States based on ITSA results

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Inactivity		RO	AT; FI; FR; HU; IE; LT; LU; NL; PT; SI; ES; SE	BE; BG; HR; CY; CZ; DK; EE; DE; EL; IT; LV; MT; PL; SK
Unemployment	CY; CZ		AT; FI; FR; HU; IE; NL; PT; RO; SI; ES; SE	BE; BG; HR; DK; DE; EL; IT; LV; MT; PL; SK
Adults in low education	BE	RO	AT; FI; FR; HU; IE; LT; LU; NL; PT; SI; ES; SE	BG; HR; CY; CZ; DK; EE; DE; EL; IT; LV; MT; PL; SK

Table A9_4 shows that, across the three indicators used for the ITSA, the majority of Member States fall into either Group 3 (consistent with the hypothesis) or Group 4 (not consistent with the hypothesis). The split of Member States in these groups is somewhat even across the three indicators. The number of Member States falling into Groups 1 (consistent with the hypothesis) or 2 (not consistent with the hypothesis) is very low across

all three indicators. Overall, **the ITSA has not yielded any clear evidence of macro-level impacts of Upskilling Pathways on the three outcome indicators used.**

Annex 10 – EU funding overview

1. Introduction

This annex contains an overview of some of the main sources of EU funding which have been used to support the implementation of upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults, including indications of funding amounts. Where available, it also includes some examples of projects funded by the different sources. Since, however, there is no specific fund dedicated to the implementation of the Recommendation, it is important to note that:

- This overview should not be considered an exhaustive list or sum of funding for upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. Funding from other EU and national sources (including other strands/sub-programmes of EU funding sources mentioned in this annex) has also been used to fund upskilling pathways;
- For several of the sources mentioned - e.g. ESF (IP 10.iii), ERDF (infrastructure for VET and adult learning), Erasmus+ grants - the amounts cited also include funding allocated to other forms of VET/adult education and wider target groups than low-skilled adults;
- Further information was not available within the scope and resources of this evaluation.

2. ESF Thematic Objective 10, Investment Priority iii, 2016-2020

Table A10_142 Overview of European Social Fund (ESF) allocations to Thematic Objective 10 - Investment priority iii (access to lifelong learning) for each Member State 2016 – 2020

Country	ESF IP10.iii		
	EU funding	National co-financing	Total
AT	EUR 357,491,555	EUR 708,892,325	EUR 1,066,383,880
BE	EUR 1,163,557,082	EUR 2,542,554,662	EUR 3,706,111,744
BG	EUR 494,543,676	EUR 580,976,369	EUR 1,075,520,045
CY	EUR 26,238,000	EUR 30,868,236	EUR 57,106,236
CZ	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
DE	EUR 2,774,885,640	EUR 5,013,843,764	EUR 7,788,729,404
DK	EUR 181,577,311	EUR 350,158,244	EUR 531,735,555
EE	EUR 446,422,606	EUR 525,203,066	EUR 971,625,672
EL	EUR 269,220,067	EUR 347,871,190	EUR 617,091,257
ES	EUR 13,607,940,032	EUR 20,117,327,215	EUR 33,725,267,247
FI	EUR 828,459,901	EUR 1,656,919,802	EUR 2,485,379,703
FR	EUR 7,296,940,420	EUR 12,807,981,297	EUR 20,104,921,717
HR	EUR 800,000,000	EUR 941,176,470	EUR 1,741,176,470
HU	EUR 2,428,119,233	EUR 2,951,970,681	EUR 5,380,089,914
IE	EUR 495,336,550	EUR 990,673,100	EUR 1,486,009,650
IT	EUR 1,236,243,966	EUR 2,019,419,202	EUR 3,255,663,168
LT	EUR 719,575,703	EUR 846,559,652	EUR 1,566,135,355
LU	EUR 19,456,225	EUR 38,912,450	EUR 58,368,675
LV	EUR 131,735,859	EUR 154,983,365	EUR 286,719,224
MT	EUR 60,000,000	EUR 75,000,000	EUR 135,000,000
NL	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
PL	EUR 2,191,980,116	EUR 2,582,922,126	EUR 4,774,902,242
PT	EUR 3,508,448,418	EUR 4,186,838,063	EUR 7,695,286,481
RO	EUR 1,151,530,819	EUR 1,354,742,138	EUR 2,506,272,957
SE	EUR 940,582,981	EUR 1,881,165,962	EUR 2,821,748,943
SI	EUR 897,024,779	EUR 1,121,280,975	EUR 2,018,305,754
SK	EUR 215,686,844	EUR 253,749,228	EUR 469,436,072
Total	EUR 42,242,997,783	EUR 64,081,989,582	EUR 106,324,987,365

Source: Cohesion Data Platform. Planned EU funding under ESF Thematic Objective 10 Investment Priority iii for the years 2016 to 2020 inclusive. Data available at: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2014-2020-Categorisation/ESIF-2014-2020-categorisation-ERDF-ESF-CF-planned-/3kkx-ekfq>

3. ERDF infrastructure for VET and adult learning 2016-2020

Table A10_2 Overview of amounts allocated under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to "infrastructure for VET and adult learning" 2016 - 2020

Country	ERDF (infrastructure for VET and adult learning)		
	EU funding	National co-financing	Total
AT			
BE	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
BG	EUR 100,075,590	EUR 250,188,981	EUR 350,264,571
CY	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
CZ	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
DE	EUR 169,907,135	EUR 267,048,076	EUR 436,955,211
DK	EUR 302,532,828	EUR 560,643,561	EUR 863,176,389
EE	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
EL	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
ES	EUR 82,293,114	EUR 106,493,176	EUR 188,786,290
FI	EUR 1,076,383,032	EUR 1,339,447,912	EUR 2,415,830,944
FR	EUR 18,553,272	EUR 37,106,544	EUR 55,659,816
HR	EUR 167,723,571	EUR 297,304,305	EUR 465,027,876
HU	EUR 315,000,000	EUR 370,588,235	EUR 685,588,235
IE	EUR 87,403,925	EUR 102,828,145	EUR 190,232,070
IT	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
LT	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
LU	EUR 259,987,350	EUR 305,867,470	EUR 565,854,820
LV	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
MT	EUR 344,771,520	EUR 405,613,553	EUR 750,385,073
NL	EUR 70,000,000	EUR 87,500,000	EUR 157,500,000
PL	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
PT	EUR 1,452,034,287	EUR 1,708,275,629	EUR 3,160,309,916
RO	EUR 154,889,478	EUR 203,854,877	EUR 358,744,355
SE	EUR 267,157,097	EUR 315,955,189	EUR 583,112,286
SI	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
SK	EUR 0	EUR 0	EUR 0
Total	EUR 519,212,596	EUR 647,436,910	EUR 1,166,649,506
	EUR 5,387,924,795	EUR 7,006,152,563	EUR 12,394,077,358

Source: Cohesion Data Platform. Planned EU funding under ERDF "infrastructure for VET and adult learning" for the years 2016 to 2020 inclusive. Data available at: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2014-2020-Categorisation/ESIF-2014-2020-categorisation-ERDF-ESF-CF-planned-/3kkx-ekfq>

Table A10_3 Examples of ERDF projects supporting upskilling pathways

Country	Title of project	EU funding	National co-financing	Total
NL	BRIDGE - Building the Right Investments for Delivering a Growing Economy	EUR 4,997,624.24	EUR 0.00	EUR 4,997,624.24
PT	Cursos TesP - Technical training and courses expanded in Bragança	EUR 8,000,000.00	EUR 2,000,000.00	EUR 10,000,000.00
DE	PANaMa – Perspectives on the job market with natural sciences and mathematics	EUR 1,010,139.00	EUR 0.00	EUR 1,010,139.00
NL	Lifelong learning programme in Amsterdam: towards a skills-oriented labour market	EUR 3,738,972.00	EUR 7,461,028.00	EUR 11,200,000.00
PL	Enhancing digital skills in Świętokrzyskie and Śląskie, Poland	EUR 1,255,543.00	EUR 228,245.00	EUR 1,483,788.00
PL	New vocational school in Poland gives workers a real-world experience	EUR 700,055.00	EUR 840,221.00	EUR 1,540,276.00
IE	WISE – Giving women in Donegal, Ireland, the skills and confidence to return to the labour market	EUR 299,759.00	EUR 299,759.00	EUR 599,518.00
NL	A win for refugees and Europe's ageing population	EUR 1,055,932.00	EUR 1,055,931.00	EUR 2,111,863.00

Source: Project examples provided by DG REGIO

4. EaSI

Table A10_4 Overview of specific projects funded by the EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2016 - 2020 (EU Member States only)

Call or Action Type	Country	Title of project	Year of call	Organisation awarded (if relevant)	Amount (if available) ⁵⁶⁷
Awareness-raising activities on "Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults"	EL	Building Alternative Skills Innovative Schemes - BASIC	2017	ORGANISMOS APASCHOLISIS ERGATIKOU DYNAMIKOU	EUR 353,567.10
Awareness-raising activities on "Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults"	NL	Support for Upskilling Pathways in the Netherlands	2017	KONINKRIJK DER NEDERLANDEN	EUR 271,363.50
Awareness-raising activities on "Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults"	IT	E.Q.U.A.L. Enhancing Qualification of Adult Learners through the implementation of Upskilling pathways	2017	ISTITUTO NAZIONALE PER L'ANALISI DELLE POLITICHE PUBBLICHE	EUR 270,438.00
Support for the deployment of skills assessments in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	SK	Blueprints for basic skills development in Slovakia	2018	STATNY INSTITUT ODBORNEHO VZDELAVANIA	EUR 308,080.00
Support for the deployment of skills assessments in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	FR	Du renforcement des compétences de base à l'ingénierie de parcours: l'ingénierie des dispositifs des compétences de base revisitée	2018	GIP FORMATION CONTINUE ET INSERTION PROFESSIONNELLE	EUR 413,184.00
Support for the deployment of skills assessments in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	IT	SKILL-ED Innovative resources for disadvantaged adults' skills assessment and inclusion	2018	AGENZIA REGIONALE PER LE POLITICHE ATTIVE DEL LAVORO UMBRIA	EUR 250,054.72
Supporting the development of tailored learning provision in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	IT	Application reference VAL.U.E. C.H.A.IN. competitiveness	2019	ISTITUTO NAZIONALE PER L'ANALISI DELLE POLITICHE PUBBLICHE	EUR 691,222.78
Supporting the development of tailored learning provision in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	EL	REFLEX (REcommending FLEXible learning for lowskilled adults)	2019	ORGANISMOS APASCHOLISIS ERGATIKOU DYNAMIKOU	EUR 378,676.17

⁵⁶⁷ Amounts are as awarded.

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Supporting the development of tailored learning provision in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	BE	Start Digital	2019	REGION WALLONNE	EUR 999,188.24
Supporting the development of tailored learning provision in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	DE	CODE-UP Germany: Career Orientation for Digital Employment through Upskilling Pathways in Germany	2019	INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE IRC DEUTSCHLAND GGMBH	EUR 290,658.56
Supporting the development of tailored learning provision in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	HR	Skills Power	2019	MANPOWER SAVJETOVANJE DOO ZA POSLOVNO SAVJETOVANJE	EUR 354,671.62
Supporting the development of tailored learning provision in the implementation of "Upskilling Pathways"	ES	Basic skills Learning Strategies for Employment Pathways	2019	SERVICIO NAVARRO EMPLEO DE	EUR 527,364.48
Total					EUR 5,108,469.17

Source: Data on EaSI funding provided by DG EMPL

5. Erasmus+

Table A10_5 Overview of Erasmus + grants for Key Action 1 (Learning Mobility of Individuals) and Key Action 2 (Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices) focused on adult education for each Member State from 2016 – 2020 (EU Member States only)

Country	Action Type	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total 2016-2020
AT	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 127,016.00	EUR 187,589.00	EUR 279,645.00	EUR 646,040.00	EUR 455,115.00	EUR 1,695,405.00
AT	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,305,673.00	EUR 1,585,109.00	EUR 1,979,775.00	EUR 2,503,209.00	EUR 2,718,627.00	EUR 10,092,393.00
AT	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 845,403.00	EUR 845,403.00
BE	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 120,855.00	EUR 180,385.00	EUR 107,345.00	EUR 79,225.00	EUR 335,340.00	EUR 823,150.00
BE	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
BE	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 483,664.00	EUR 249,001.00	EUR 683,155.00	EUR 2,097,141.00	EUR 1,111,610.00	EUR 4,624,571.00
BE	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 405,689.00	EUR 405,689.00
BE	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 281,455.00	EUR 185,460.00	EUR 215,168.00	EUR 327,014.00	EUR 410,028.00	EUR 1,419,125.00
BE	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 859,328.00	EUR 1,136,406.00	EUR 758,603.00	EUR 767,942.00	EUR 1,804,415.00	EUR 5,326,694.00
BE	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 470,530.00	EUR 470,530.00
BE	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 6,191.00	EUR 19,504.00	EUR 111,127.00	EUR 22,136.00	EUR 4,876.00	EUR 163,834.00
BG	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 120,770.00	EUR 168,440.00	EUR 313,795.00	EUR 390,536.00	EUR 404,710.00	EUR 1,398,251.00

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BG	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 729,841.00	EUR 1,067,936.00	EUR 1,702,605.00	EUR 1,891,210.00	EUR 1,973,231.00	EUR 7,364,823.00
BG	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 939,463.00	EUR 939,463.00
HR	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 59,837.00	EUR 81,851.00	EUR 114,361.00	EUR 222,015.00	EUR 263,641.00	EUR 741,705.00
HR	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
HR	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 465,009.00	EUR 688,789.00	EUR 890,860.00	EUR 1,252,507.00	EUR 1,301,448.00	EUR 4,598,613.00
HR	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 354,557.00	EUR 354,557.00
CY	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 29,925.00	EUR 37,995.00	EUR 52,054.00	EUR 91,195.00	EUR 124,760.00	EUR 335,929.00
CY	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 411,690.00	EUR 481,510.00	EUR 577,585.00	EUR 627,228.00	EUR 832,876.00	EUR 2,930,889.00
CY	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 356,117.00	EUR 356,117.00
CZ	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 188,989.00	EUR 219,927.00	EUR 532,760.00	EUR 591,417.00	EUR 626,769.00	EUR 2,159,862.00
CZ	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
CZ	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,231,816.00	EUR 1,775,933.00	EUR 2,008,140.00	EUR 2,923,214.00	EUR 3,142,379.00	EUR 11,081,482.00
CZ	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 954,177.50	EUR 954,177.50
DK	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 130,907.00	EUR 106,655.00	EUR 156,916.00	EUR 332,580.00	EUR 279,275.00	EUR 1,006,333.00

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DK	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
DK	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 660,366.00	EUR 1,191,266.00	EUR 1,119,187.00	EUR 2,521,064.00	EUR 2,006,573.00	EUR 7,498,456.00
DK	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 574,300.00	EUR 574,300.00
EE	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 54,820.00	EUR 110,024.00	EUR 126,643.00	EUR 196,867.00	EUR 236,870.00	EUR 725,224.00
EE	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 429,149.00	EUR 238,117.00	EUR 741,828.00	EUR 1,112,000.00	EUR 1,210,790.00	EUR 3,731,884.00
EE	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 466,755.00	EUR 466,755.00
FI	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 375,581.00	EUR 385,285.00	EUR 615,478.00	EUR 992,144.00	EUR 673,626.00	EUR 3,042,114.00
FI	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
FI	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 781,018.00	EUR 1,150,654.00	EUR 1,380,492.00	EUR 1,349,872.00	EUR 2,110,580.00	EUR 6,772,616.00
FI	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 537,447.00	EUR 537,447.00
FR	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 602,365.00	EUR 837,067.00	EUR 1,240,541.00	EUR 951,206.00	EUR 1,794,270.80	EUR 5,425,449.80
FR	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
FR	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 4,973,485.35	EUR 7,235,666.00	EUR 8,605,956.00	EUR 12,976,541.00	EUR 13,371,893.00	EUR 47,163,541.35

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FR	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 3,615,384.0 0	EUR 3,615,384.0 0
DE	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 1,684,2 93.00	EUR 2,080,546. 00	EUR 2,725,511. 00	EUR 4,366,245.0 0	EUR 3,177,243.0 0	EUR 14,033,838. 00
DE	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
DE	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 6,538,5 79.00	EUR 8,342,893. 00	EUR 10,357,93 8.50	EUR 14,133,586. 00	EUR 18,607,944. 75	EUR 57,980,941. 25
DE	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 4,172,085.2 1	EUR 4,172,085.2 1
EL	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 239,59 3.00	EUR 206,196.0 0	EUR 307,914.0 0	EUR 599,842.00	EUR 694,643.00	EUR 2,048,188.0 0
EL	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
EL	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,283,6 12.00	EUR 1,917,195. 00	EUR 2,312,576. 00	EUR 2,994,847.0 0	EUR 3,240,893.0 0	EUR 11,749,123. 00
EL	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 871,376.00	EUR 871,376.00
HU	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 146,42 4.00	EUR 184,004.0 0	EUR 249,865.0 0	EUR 557,935.00	EUR 604,666.00	EUR 1,742,894.0 0
HU	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
HU	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,116,4 13.00	EUR 924,301.0 0	EUR 1,875,212. 00	EUR 2,713,996.0 0	EUR 2,740,639.0 0	EUR 9,370,561.0 0
HU	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 649,708.00	EUR 649,708.00

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IE	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 147,995.00	EUR 110,529.00	EUR 175,225.00	EUR 293,345.00	EUR 160,665.00	EUR 887,759.00
IE	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
IE	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 741,787.00	EUR 769,988.00	EUR 1,513,340.00	EUR 643,145.00	EUR 1,534,785.00	EUR 5,203,045.00
IE	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 355,306.00	EUR 355,306.00
IT	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 619,463.00	EUR 857,718.00	EUR 1,156,351.00	EUR 2,102,396.00	EUR 2,234,692.00	EUR 6,970,620.00
IT	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
IT	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 4,592,333.40	EUR 6,715,724.00	EUR 8,084,376.00	EUR 10,588,754.00	EUR 11,747,872.00	EUR 41,729,059.40
IT	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 3,258,515.98	EUR 3,258,515.98
LV	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 63,230.00	EUR 67,751.00	EUR 106,156.00	EUR 229,965.00	EUR 252,652.00	EUR 719,754.00
LV	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
LV	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 571,710.00	EUR 781,830.00	EUR 1,065,283.00	EUR 1,738,642.00	EUR 1,503,868.00	EUR 5,661,333.00
LV	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 369,904.00	EUR 369,904.00
LT	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 135,659.00	EUR 152,251.00	EUR 216,626.00	EUR 462,747.00	EUR 318,541.00	EUR 1,285,824.00

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LT	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 693,877.00	EUR 1,068,022.00	EUR 1,240,812.00	EUR 1,582,429.00	EUR 1,932,519.00	EUR 6,517,659.00
LT	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 790,797.00	EUR 790,797.00
LU	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 41,644.00	EUR 41,540.00	EUR 62,065.00	EUR 45,784.00	EUR 24,375.00	EUR 215,408.00
LU	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
LU	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 615,589.00	-	EUR 586,428.00	EUR 350,143.00	EUR 1,152,469.00	EUR 2,704,629.00
MT	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 17,024.00	EUR 9,285.00	EUR 31,740.00	EUR 73,340.00	EUR 62,740.00	EUR 194,129.00
MT	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	-	EUR 627,303.00	EUR 448,264.00	EUR 592,520.00	EUR 747,715.00	EUR 2,415,802.00
NL	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 209,095.00	EUR 201,910.00	EUR 204,405.00	EUR 481,310.00	EUR 534,900.00	EUR 1,631,620.00
NL	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
NL	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,584,242.00	EUR 1,120,957.00	EUR 2,556,031.00	EUR 4,124,062.00	EUR 4,219,753.00	EUR 13,605,045.00
NL	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 745,075.00	EUR 745,075.00
PL	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 511,464.00	EUR 633,395.00	EUR 792,299.00	EUR 1,598,350.00	EUR 1,675,269.00	EUR 5,210,777.00
PL	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00

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PL	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 3,661,446.00	EUR 5,293,413.00	EUR 6,526,686.00	EUR 8,377,212.00	EUR 9,254,388.50	EUR 33,113,145.50
PL	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 2,464,417.00	EUR 2,464,417.00
PT	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 213,546.00	EUR 312,901.00	EUR 363,425.00	EUR 572,492.00	EUR 792,545.20	EUR 2,254,909.20
PT	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
PT	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,479,413.00	EUR 2,045,315.00	EUR 2,381,695.00	EUR 2,899,157.00	EUR 3,435,896.00	EUR 12,241,476.00
PT	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 637,248.00	EUR 637,248.00
RO	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 293,675.00	EUR 385,175.00	EUR 461,873.00	EUR 818,855.00	EUR 914,260.00	EUR 2,873,838.00
RO	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
RO	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,906,390.00	EUR 2,786,219.00	EUR 3,410,444.00	EUR 4,455,888.00	EUR 4,836,064.00	EUR 17,395,005.00
RO	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 1,320,493.00	EUR 1,320,493.00
SK	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 110,851.00	EUR 123,325.00	EUR 186,479.00	EUR 242,072.00	EUR 295,223.00	EUR 957,950.00
SK	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
SK	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 673,616.00	EUR 1,123,453.00	EUR 1,308,999.00	EUR 1,906,324.00	EUR 2,199,017.00	EUR 7,211,409.00

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SK	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 350,435.00	EUR 350,435.00
SI	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 44,837.00	EUR 115,465.00	EUR 166,595.00	EUR 202,814.00	EUR 289,211.00	EUR 818,922.00
SI	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 502,128.00	EUR 635,251.00	EUR 723,797.00	EUR 1,566,784.84	EUR 1,813,301.00	EUR 5,241,261.84
SI	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 578,360.00	EUR 578,360.00
ES	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 563,313.00	EUR 797,233.00	EUR 1,073,059.43	EUR 1,693,281.00	EUR 2,168,689.00	EUR 6,295,575.43
ES	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
ES	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 4,264,403.95	EUR 6,401,492.00	EUR 7,923,715.00	EUR 6,305,747.72	EUR 11,645,117.00	EUR 36,540,475.67
ES	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 2,985,343.00	EUR 2,985,343.00
SE	KA104 - Adult education staff mobility	EUR 184,155.00	EUR 284,238.00	EUR 355,133.00	EUR 560,560.00	EUR 206,789.00	EUR 1,590,875.00
SE	KA200 - Strategic Partnerships addressing more than one field	-	-	-	-	-	EUR 0.00
SE	KA204 - Strategic Partnerships for adult education	EUR 1,253,387.00	EUR 1,818,002.00	EUR 2,493,593.00	EUR 3,538,743.00	EUR 3,794,557.00	EUR 12,898,282.00
SE	KA227 - Partnerships for Creativity	-	-	-	-	EUR 827,412.00	EUR 827,412.00
Total	-	EUR 51,134,937.70	EUR 68,255,389.00	EUR 87,757,929.93	EUR 118,277,616.56	EUR 165,903,901.94	EUR 491,329,775.13

Source: Data on Erasmus+ funding obtained from DG EAC/EACEA

Table A10_6 Overview of funding from Erasmus+ for Strategic Partnerships for Adult Education 2016 - 2020

Member State of Lead Partner	Project title	Year	Name of organisation	Amount
SI	UPSKILLING ADULT EDUCATORS FOR DIGITAL LEAD	2016	RAZVOJNO IZOBRAZEVALNI CENTER NOVOMESTO	EUR 193,888.25
DE	New talents for companies – Developing the potentials of immigrants and refugees	2016	VOLKSHOCHSCHULVERBAND BADEN-WURTTENBERG EV	EUR 339,746.50
EE	Tools 4 Trainers to Empower NEETs	2016	Kuressaare Gümnaasium	EUR 157,365.66
DK	Sowing the seeds for the digital agricultural worker	2017	Fagligt fælles forbund	EUR 223,465.00
SK	Career Coaches for Low Qualified Adults	2017	EUROPERSONAL& SERVIS s.r.o.	EUR 149,597.00
BE	Upskilling Pathways for Adults through ICT and social media	2017	ALPHABET FORMATION	EUR 59,410.00
SE	Accepted, Resettled, Integrated, Valued and Employed	2017	STIFTELSEN KURSVERKSAMHETEN VID U-AUNIVERSITET	EUR 392,544.63
IT	Adult Skills for Job Oriented Breakthrough	2017	E.RI.FO.-ENTE DI RICERCA E FORMAZIONE	EUR 355,606.00
FI	Rebooting, Re-rooting and Re-skilling Unemployed and Underemployed Higher Education Graduates for Work 4.0	2018	OY VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU - VASAYRKESHOGSKOLA AB	EUR 202,200.00
LT	Mentoring Network for Facilitating Access to Upskilling Pathways	2018	VIESOJI ISTAIGA BALTIJOS EDUKACINIU TECHNOLOGIJU INSTITUTAS	EUR 181,500.00
BE	Promote Open Source Technologies in non-formal Adult Education	2018	ALL DIGITAL AISBL	EUR 233,254.00
PT	See, Tell and Listen: Improving Refugees' Digital Literacy through Photovoice and Storytelling.	2018	CONSELHO PORTUGUES PARA OS REFUGIADOS CPR	EUR 212,160.00
EE	Digital Skills 4 All	2018	RAAMA NOORTE UHING NOORUS MTU	EUR 73,847.00
EL	Live and learn – Innovative ICT based learning and mentoring approaches for Alzheimer's communities	2018	INNOSYSTEMS SYMVOULEUTIKES YPIRESIES KAI EFARMOGES PLIROFORIKIS YPSILIS TECHNOLOGIAS MONOPROSOPI IDIOTIKI KEFALAIOUCHIKI ETAIREIA	EUR 241,980.41
PT	Social Media for Upskilling Unemployed and Low Skilled Adult Workers for Digital Society	2018	Consultis - Consultoria Empresarial, Unipessoal Lda.	EUR 191,465.00

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PT	Upskilling Pathways in AE-PRO	2018	AMAR TERRA VERDE LDA	EUR 99,260.20
DE	Building urban ecosystems for lifelong learning	2018	LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITAET MUENCHEN	EUR 254,913.50
RO	IN_DIGIT2EU - Digital based tools aiming at the development of skills for internationalisation	2018	ASOCIATIA CENTRUL DE DEZVOLTARE ARAD	EUR 234,450.44
BG	Free platform for training search UNEM	2018	Centar za profesionalno obuchenie Razvitie	EUR 179,721.00
IT	Foster, multiply and connect adult Education	2018	European Digital Learning Network	EUR 93,758.68
BG	Upskilling Pathways for Employability	2019	SDRUDZENIE ZNAM I MOGA	EUR 150,900.00
AT	Guidance for Individual Vocations in Europe	2019	ÖSB Social Innovation gemeinnützige GmbH	EUR 153,862.53
LV	PROMOTING FINANCIAL, DIGITAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCES FOR VULNERABLE ADULTS (WOMEN) WITH RESTRICTED ACCESS TO THE DIGITALISED MARKET (HOME BASED) - FINE2WORK	2019	PROJECT NET	EUR 145,307.20
FR	Digital Technologies to Improve Adult Learning	2019	MUSIQUES DE NUIT DIFFUSION ASSOCIATION	EUR 242,996.00
SE	Upskilling for more creative circular economy	2019	SWIDEAS AB	EUR 222,560.00
ES	Employment 4 Inclusion: Innovation for enabling social and labour inclusion of migrants, newcomers, asylum seekers and refugees	2019	SOLIDARIDAD SIN FRONTERAS	EUR 141,349.00
FR	Creating Opportunities for Adult Learners through entrepreneurial competences	2019	ALFMED	EUR 279,945.38
CY	Developing Strategies for Adult Education Providers and Adult Educators	2019	CENTRE FOR ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LTD-CARDET	EUR 178,856.41
SI	DIS-ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMMUNITY SUPPORT CENTRES: AN INNOVATIVE OUTREACH PROGRAMME TO EQUIP ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES WITH KEY COMPETENCES (SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL AND DIGITAL)	2019	CENTER PONOVNNE UPORABE	EUR 277,750.00
FR	DiverPass- a guidance for professionals to support migrant learners	2019	SECOURS CATHOLIQUE	EUR 187,434.70

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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

FR	SUPPORTING TECHNIQUES FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ICT COMPETENCES	2019	Association de Gestion des Fonds Européens	EUR 274,929.00
DE	A TOOL KIT WITH EFFECTIVE OUTREACH AND MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR UPGRADING THE KEY COMPETENCES OF MARGINALISED AND VULNERABLE LOW-SKILLED ADULTS (FOCUS ON WOMEN): ENSURING SOCIAL INCLUSION, ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA	2019	GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ UNIVERSITAET HANNOVER	EUR 275,435.00
IT	MASTER - Measures for Adults to Support Transition to further Education and Re-skilling opportunities	2019	FORMA.AZIONE SRL	EUR 372,057.00
NL	SHARE the Badge	2019	Stichting Bloom	EUR 217,655.00
IT	TAsk-based laNguage teaching and collaborative lEarning for upskilling low-qualified Migrants	2019	CENTRO PER LO SVILUPPO CREATIVO DANILO DOLCI	EUR 374,932.00
EL	Engaging unemployed low-skilled adults over 45 years old in training opportunities through collaboration schemes among CSOs, employers and training providers	2019	ACTIONAID HELLAS ASTIKI MI KERDOSKOPIKI ETAIRIA	EUR 241,487.41
FI	IMPROVING GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN ADULT LEARNING	2019	Työväen Akatemia	EUR 54,313.60
RO	JIMINY - Journey to Increase your techniques of eMotional Intelligence, digital awareNess and entrepreneurship lilestYle	2019	Asociatia de Dezvoltare Economico-Sociala	EUR 226,015.00
SE	Build up motivation, digital and language skills in migrant adults, to favour work and social inclusion	2019	INTEGRATION FOR ALLA	EUR 256,055.50
RO	Upskilling adults 45+, with migrant backgroud	2019	Institutul Roman de Educatie a Adultilor	EUR 145,053.00
BG	Upskilling Lab 4.0	2019	BALGARSKA STOPANSKA KAMARA - SAYUZ NA BALGARSKIA BIZNES	EUR 211,384.00
FR	Up-skilling and motivating low-skilled young adults through key competences to unlock their potential for employment and social life	2019	Centre Régional Information Jeunesse Occitanie Pyrénées Méditerranée	EUR 248,036.00
DK	Co-creative RETHINKing for sustainable cities	2019	VEJLE KOMMUNE	EUR 286,136.00

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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

FR	The Taste of Fusion Learning: social inclusion and alphabetization through multisensory approach	2019	D'ANTILLES ET D'AILLEURS	EUR 194,855.00
FR	Supporting skills audits in adult education through digital tools	2019	ITG CONSEIL	EUR 366,490.00
DE	New Upskilling Pathways for Adult Migrants In Craftsmanship	2019	Afridat UG (Haftungsbeschränkt)	EUR 154,966.00
BG	Power Up. Empowering and Upskilling women with a migrant background to foster their social and labour inclusion	2019	GENDER ALTERNATIVES FOUNDATION	EUR 120,806.00
PL	Edu +	2019	Stowarzyszenie Pozytywnych Zmian	EUR 35,460.00
RO	INnovation Capacity building foR EnhAncing Sustainable growth and Employability	2019	UNIVERSITATEA STEFAN CEL MARE DIN SUCEAVA	EUR 280,203.00
IT	COMP-UP: Motivate Adults to Improve Basic Competences	2019	CO&SO -CONSORZIO PER LA COOPERAZIONE E LA SOLIDARIETA'-CONSORZIO DI COOPERATIVE SOCIALI-SOCIETA' COOPERATIVA SOCIALE	EUR 248,416.00
IT	EduStorytelling	2019	MV INTERNATIONAL	EUR 191,915.00
IT	R.E.M.I.D.A. - REnewed Models for the Inclusion of Disadvantaged Adults	2019	Consorzio Ro.Ma.	EUR 299,058.00
PL	The Hexagonal Leader	2019	FUNDACJA DIVERSITY HUB	EUR 296,420.00
IT	Green abilities to tackle social issues	2019	Fratello Sole S.c.a r.l.	EUR 275,356.00
ES	Development of Critical and Creative Thinking Skills to Foster Employment and Impact Success in Job	2019	FUNDACION EMPRESA UNIVERSIDAD DE ALICANTE DE LA COMUNIDAD VALENCIANA	EUR 76,925.00
IT	CUP - Convicts Upskilling Pathways	2019	COMPAGNIA DI SAN PAOLO	EUR 449,616.00
FR	ENTRE-FORWARD: ENHANCING ENTREPREUNERSHIP SKILLS	2019	COOPERATIVE D'INITIATIVE JEUNES	EUR 317,844.00
DE	THINK SOCIAL: Promoting social entrepreneurial mindsets for a sustainable future.	2020	CULTURE GOES EUROPE (CGE)-SOZIOKULTURELLE INITIATIVE ERFURT EV	EUR 284,163.00
SI	Guidance for Low-skilled Adults towards Skills Assessment and Validation	2020	CENTER ZA IZOBRAZEVANJE IN KULTURO TREBNJE JAVNI ZAVOD	EUR 229,287.00
PL	SILVER HERITage	2020	Stowarzyszenie Pozytywnych Zmian	EUR 73,540.00
FR	Supporting Advanced Learning for Stakeholders Involved in	2020	RESEAU INTERNATIONAL URGENCI	EUR 392,252.00

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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

	Sustainable Food systems Initiatives			
RO	Team2Share – Integrated Training & Teaching for Learning further aiming Knowledge Sharing Across Generations	2020	INSTITUTUL NATIONAL DE CERCETARE STIINTIFICA IN DOMENIUL MUNCII SI PROTECTIEI SOCIALE	EUR 189,606.00
LT	Creativity, Resilience, Empowerment for Work	2020	Versli mama	EUR 191,186.00
LT	Creative Talent Factory	2020	Europiniu inovaciju centras	EUR 265,397.00
PT	Art & Inclusion - Non-formal education through art as to tool to social inclusion of people with disabilities and people with mental illness	2020	CENTRO SOCIAL DE SOUTELO	EUR 186,752.00
PL	Digital Security for Senior Citizens	2020	STOWARZYSZENIE CENTRUM WSPIERANIA EDUKACJI I PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚCI	EUR 181,070.00
SE	Motivating Low-Skilled Adults in Accessing Upskilling Pathways to Increase Job Opportunities	2020	IGITEGO	EUR 351,040.00
EL	Social Impact Measurement for Civil Society Organizations	2020	HIGHER INCUBATOR GIVING GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY	EUR 162,216.00
ES	Activation of Green ROofs Synergies as a tool for civic participation & environmental consciousness -AGROS	2020	AYUNTAMIENTO DE LA PALMA DEL CONDADO	EUR 245,381.00
SE	Tourism: Empowering communities to strengthen local economic development	2020	Stiftelsen Minerva	EUR 123,470.00
BE	Innovating Social Entrepreneurial Leadership Education	2020	LABO vzw	EUR 251,250.00
FR	Supporting marginalized young adults to enter labour market through innovative Career Mentoring Model	2020	Eurotracks	EUR 214,686.00
FR	Providing access to guidance, training and validation of non-formal and informal learning for migrant women working in care sectors	2020	INSTITUT CORSE DE FORMATION ET RECHERCHE EN TRAVAIL SOCIAL	EUR 297,232.00
DE	I-WELCOME - Reinforcing migrant women's integration in society and the labour market	2020	K.I.T. - KULTUR IM TURM E.V.	EUR 285,224.00
PL	Build you future piece by piece	2020	WYŻSZA SZKOLA BIZNESU I NAUK O ZDROWIU	EUR 191,911.00
SK	Local Adult Education Policy	2020	ACADEMIA ISTROPOLITANA NOVA	EUR 288,647.00
FR	European Inter-Generational Support Career Development Initiative	2020	APRECA	EUR 395,188.00

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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

DE	Promoting the integration of migrants at local level through digital skills	2020	BK Consult GbmB	EUR 189,860.00
RO	STrengthen the Skills Of NEets	2020	Centrul de Resurse pentru Educatie si Formare Profesionala	EUR 169,015.00
LU	Mutualizing generational competencies for training migrants in Europe: Pathways for social mobility, autonomy and welfare of vulnerable individuals.	2020	Social Impact Development Centre	EUR 279,554.00
IT	LiteracyAct - Basic literacy, transversal skills and competences for adult migrants through Community Theatre	2020	ASSOCIAZIONE DI PROMOZIONE SOCIALE ASINITAS ONLUS	EUR 239,120.00
NL	An Integrated Method to Support Migrants	2020	Stichting Surplus	EUR 258,383.00
SE	One Block for Educational Credentials	2020	SWIDEAS AB	EUR 234,490.00
IT	Upskilling Adult Educators	2020	UNIVERSITA DEGLI STUDI DI MACERATA	EUR 319,275.00
EL	Teaching to Marginalized Groups	2020	MPIRMPAKOS D. & SIA O.E.	EUR 81,485.00
IT	Social Inclusion Through Gamification in Education	2020	Erasmus Learning Academy	EUR 184,221.00
IT	Enhance public library services for visually impaired users through ICT tools and training	2020	Unione della Romagna Faentina	EUR 250,130.00
HU	Transnational Roadmap for Educators in Digital Soft Skills	2020	Yes You Can Training & Coaching Kft.	EUR 211,929.00
BG	Creative Hub: Continuous Audio-Visual Upskilling among Cultural Operators	2020	Event Production Co Ltd.	EUR 375,019.00
FR	Supporting migrants' professional and social integration as carers	2020	CERTIFICATION & COMPETENCES	EUR 329,970.00
AT	Upskilling parents - how to guide children safely through distance learning through times of crisis	2020	Akademie für politische Bildung und demokratiefördernde Maßnahmen	EUR 74,700.00
PT	Computer Science for All – Training Teachers for Future Education	2020	E-COMPUTAÇÃO - ASSOCIAÇÃO PARA O ENSINO DA COMPUTAÇÃO	EUR 205,972.00
SE	Upskilling Paths for Social Integration of Migrants	2020	Internationella Kvinnoföreningen	EUR 294,370.00
DE	SUPPORTING PARENTS TO DEAL WITH THE EXCESSIVE ONLINE TIME AND HABITS OF THEIR CHILDREN: A PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMME FOR ALL	2020	GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ UNIVERSITAET HANNOVER	EUR 322,670.00

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MT	Digital Skills for the Artificial Intelligence Revolution	2020	B&P Emerging Technologies Consultancy Lab Ltd	EUR 397,715.00
FI	Innovative Training Solutions for Learning at Work in Disruptive Industries	2020	HAMEEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU OY	EUR 273,880.00
RO	WISE (Work Integration Social Enterprises) for Digital Upskilling	2020	ATELIERE FARA FRONTIERE	EUR 176,492.00
RO	My Career Matters!	2020	FUNDATIA HEALTH ACTION OVERSEAS	EUR 201,160.00
ES	Digital competences for women in rural areas to increase their entrepreneurial opportunities and employability. Towards inclusion through entrepreneurship.	2020	Asociación de Familias y Mujeres del Medio Rural	EUR 280,787.00
RO	OPI - Open Innovation Competences for Responding to Modern Economic Challenges	2020	UNIVERSITATEA DIN PITESTI	EUR 218,081.00
SI	Common framework for adult education providers to support engagement for learners with SpLDs	2020	Andragoski zavod Maribor - Ljudska univerza	EUR 259,840.00
ES	Practices and Approaches for Upskilling Educators	2020	INICIATIVAS DE FUTURO PARA UNA EUROPA SOCIAL COOP V	EUR 89,160.00
PL	Women empowerment	2020	ZWIĄZEK CENTRALNY DZIELA KOLPINGA WPOLSCE	EUR 47,325.00
ES	Upskilling by Creating individualized Learning Pathways	2020	Gabinete de Recolocación Industrial	EUR 210,139.00
IT	Social justice in lifelong guidance services for low-educated adult migrants	2020	ilmiolavoro srl	EUR 365,415.00
Total			EUR 23,882,567.98	

Source: Data on Erasmus+ funding from DG EAC/EACEA

Table A10_7 Funding from Erasmus+ for National Coordinators for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning: Selection Year 2019 (EU Member States only)

Project title	Applicant and Partner organisations	Country Code	Maximum EU grant
Weiterentwicklung der Basisbildung in der Initiative Erwachsenenbildung	BUNDESMINISTERIUM FUER BILDUNG, WISSENSCHAFT UND FORSCHUNG	AT	182.669,92 €
Steps on the way to the future	VLAAMSE GEMEENSCHAP	BE	136.910,00 €
National Coordinators for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning	MINISTERE DE LA COMMUNAUTE FRANÇAISE DE BELGIQUE	BE	102.055,00 €
National Coordinators for the implementation of European Agenda for Adult	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE	BG	222.490,00 €
National Coordinators for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning 2020-2021	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE, CYPRUS	CY	166.326,00 €
EAAL - EVROPSKÁ AGENDA VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ DOSPĚLÝCH	NARODNI USTAV PRO VZDELAVANI, SKOLSKÉ PORADENSKÉ ZARIZENI A ZARIZENI PRO DALSI VZDELAVANI PEDAGOGICKYCH PRACOVNIKU	CZ	72.000,00 €
Nationale Koordination Agenda Erwachsenenbildung: Deutschland	BUNDESINSTITUT FUR BERUFSBILDUNG	DE	566.220,73 €
Supportive ressources for Enterprices and FVU-providers	UNDERVISNINGMINISTERIET	DK	105.110,00 €
National Coordinator for Adult Learning Work Plan: Estonia	EESTI TAISKASVANUTE KOOLITAJATE ASSOTSIATSIOON ANDRAS	EE	140.000,00 €
EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR ADULT LEARNING	Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs	EL	249.333,00 €
National Coordinators for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning - FI	Opetus ja Kulttuuriministeriö	FI	116.000,00 €
National Coordinators for Adult Learning Work Plan : France	AGENCE ERASMUS+ FRANCE / EDUCATION FORMATION	FR	448.072,04 €
Adult and Community Education: Supported Learner Pathways	AONTAS	IE	212.000,00 €
IT - IMPLEMENTATION OF ADULT LEARNING EU AGENDA 2020-2021	ISTITUTO NAZIONALE PER L'ANALISI DELLE POLITICHE PUBBLICHE	IT	486.905,47 €
National Coordinator for Adult Learning Work Plan: Liechtenstein	STIFTUNG ERWACHSENENBILDUNG LIECHTENSTEIN	LI	65.611,00 €

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National Coordinator for Adult Learning Work Plan: Lithuania	LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS SVIETIMO IR MOKSLO MINISTERIJA	LT	178.722,00 €
Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in Luxembourg	MINISTERE DE L'EDUCATION NATIONALE DE L'ENFANCE ET DE LA JEUNESSE	LU	126.700,00 €
National Coordinators for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning	LR IZGLITIBAS UN ZINATNES MINISTERIJA	LV	182.667,00 €
National Coordinators for the Implementation of the EU Agenda for Adult Learning (Malta)	MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT	MT	170.667,00 €
New Pathways to Basic Skills	MINISTERIE VAN ONDERWIJS, CULTUUR EN WETENSCHAP	NL	210.597,00 €
National Coordinator for Adult Learning Work Plan: Portugal	AGENCIA NACIONAL PARA A QUALIFICACAO E O ENSINO PROFISSIONAL I P	PT	206.663,34 €
Adult learning, a step forward for all	Ministry of Labour and Social Justice	RO	293.447,00 €
Support and network for teachers - a way to implement the EU Agenda	SKOLVERKET	SE	140.788,00 €
National Coordinator for Adult Learning Work Plan: Slovenia	ANDRAGOSKI CENTER REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE	SI	149.333,34 €
National Coordinator for Adult Learning Work Plan: UK	NATIONAL LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE	UK	492.000,00 €
Total			€ 4,347,646.11

Source: Data on Erasmus+ funding from DG EAC/EACEA

6. Horizon 2020

Table A10_8 Examples of Horizon Projects focusing on Upskilling Pathways

Project Title	Description	Duration	EU funding
YOUNG_ADULLLT - Lifelong learning for young adults: better policies for growth and inclusion in Europe	YOUNG_ADULLLT analyses the impact of LLL policies on young adults' life courses, yielding insights on the conditions, strategies, and necessities for policies to become effective. It provides insights on informal and non-formal learning to better address vulnerable groups and contributes to a better understanding of the structural relationships and functional match between education/training and the labour market sectors.	2016-2019	EURO 2,499,075.00
EduMAP - Adult Education as a Means for Active Participatory Citizenship	EduMAP provides comprehensive analyses and practical insights on the efficacy of the European adult education system in preventing social exclusion and compiles an inventory of successful initiatives and communicative practices in and outside the EU. The fundamental aim is to help policymakers and educational agencies to ensure that the young generations as a whole are able to acquire the skills needed to fully participate in European societies and the labour market.	2016-2019	EURO 2,498,112.50
ENLIVEN - Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive and Vibrant Europe	The ENLIVEN research models how policy interventions in adult education markets can become more effective. It implements and evaluates an innovative Intelligent Decision Support System to provide a new and more scientific underpinning for policy debate and decision-making on adult learning, especially for young adults. It will enable policy-makers to enhance the provision and take-up of learning opportunities for adults, leading to a more productive and innovative workforce, and reduced social exclusion.	2016-2019	EURO 2,499,788.50
KIDS4ALLL - Key Inclusive Development Strategies for LifeLongLearning	KIDS4ALLL aims to implement a pilot action that will experiment a learning method and learning environment in formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts to address the integration challenges of migrant children	2021-2024	EURO 3,039,903.63

Source: Relevant project examples from Horizon 2020 provided by DG RTD

7. SRSP (Structural Reform Support Programme)

Table A10_9 Overview of SRSP projects focused on adult learning 2016-2020⁵⁶⁸

Country	Title of project	Year	Amount
HR	National information system for adult education	2017	EUR 10,000
PT	National Plan for Adult Literacy in Portugal	2018	EUR 250,000
BE	Recognition of learning outcomes for very low-skilled people	2019	EUR 250,000
ES	Measures towards the design of a system for the identification, evaluation and recognition of basic competencies in adults	2019	EUR 300,000
HU	Technical support to improve the quality and relevance of the adult education system	2019	EUR 280,000
CY	Support to design Lifelong Learning Strategy in Cyprus	2020	EUR 250,000
IT	Improving the recognition of competences and development of individual learning pathways by the Provincial Centres for Adult Education in Italy	2020	EUR 400,000
Total			EUR 1,740,000

Source: Information provided by DG REFORM

⁵⁶⁸ Under call on 'technical support to EU Member States to support them in their reform agendas in specific areas which include 'education, life-long learning and training, vocational education and training, youth policies, labour market policies, including social dialogue, for the creation of jobs, increased labour market participation of under-represented groups, up- and re-skilling in particular digital skills, media literacy, active citizenship, active ageing, gender equality, civil protection, border and migration policies, the promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty, income inequality and all forms of discrimination'

8. TSI (Technical Support Instrument)

Table A10_10 Projects relevant to upskilling supported by the TSI

Country	Title of project	Year	Amount
CY	Improvement of the Digital Skills of Adults in Cyprus	2021	EUR 400,000
LV	Support employers in promoting skills development in Latvia	2021	EUR 600,000

Source: Information provided by DG REFORM

Annex 11 – Table summarising costs and benefits

Cost	Cost description	Type (one-off or recurrent)	Citizens/consumers		Businesses		Administrations	
			Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment
Direct compliance costs								
Adjustment costs: Implementation costs	Activities undertaken to enable familiarisation with the Recommendations	One-off	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	National and regional ministries and government bodies responsible for employment and/or education policies provided internal staff and stakeholder training to provide information on the Recommendations. No monetary estimates provided.
Adjustment costs: Direct labour costs	Developing and/or rewriting existing qualifications frameworks and standards, and (re)designing modular courses.	One-off (per course)	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	For policymakers and organisations representing low-skilled adults at the EU level, these costs are typically limited to one or two staff members working across adult education rather than focusing purely on UP measures, so are estimated to be low (no monetary estimates provided).
Adjustment costs: Equipment costs	Modernising and improving learning spaces	One-off	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	Approximately four fifths of survey respondents noted that they had incurred infrastructure costs to some extent. Only two Member States spoke of this cost during interviews, noting they experienced costs in modernising and improvement learning spaces. No monetary estimates provided.

Other	Advertising/marketing costs to raise awareness of courses among citizens	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	Advertising/marketing costs to raise awareness of courses among citizens of learning opportunities. No monetary estimates provided.
	Financial incentives	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	Approximately a third of interviewees and survey respondents mentioned providing some form of financial incentive to individual learners, employees and/ or training providers. Bulgaria highlighted that vouchers for the employed to undertake training had been introduced as a result of the Recommendations, with a total project cost of €15.3million over 2018 to 2021.
Indirect costs								
Indirect costs to individual learners	Expenses (travel and accommodation costs), course supplies such as textbooks, reduction in learners income due to a reducing their paid work hours to completing the training.	One-off (per course per individual)	<i>Not available</i>	The survey of adult learners found 59% of learners faced training cost. Estimates provided range from €10 to over €700 per course.	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	
Direct economic benefits								
Improved welfare	Upskilling of population/reduction in skill shortages	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>	Gaining a qualification, moving into further education, gaining basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills, improved soft skills. No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>	Improvement in skills and knowledge of employees and job applicants. No monetary	<i>Not available</i>	Increase in the share of the population with the skills needed for green and digital transitions. No monetary estimates provided.

						estimates provided.		
	Increase in employment & productivity	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>	Moving into employment, getting a promotion ⁵⁶⁹ . No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>	Increased in employee productivity. No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>	
Improved market efficiency	Increased learning opportunities and information on opportunities available	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>	Increased number of adult education courses available. No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	Increased awareness of citizens and employers of adult education courses and the benefits of life-long learning. No monetary estimates provided.
Indirect benefits								
Wider macroeconomic benefits	Reduced welfare payments and increased tax revenue	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	Reduced welfare payments and increased tax revenue following on from upskilling the population and an increase in employment. No monetary estimates provided.
Wider welfare benefits	Improved individuals' participation in society	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>	More integrated into society. No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	

⁵⁶⁹ A 2018 evaluation for Ireland found that jobseekers engaged with training financed as part of UP were approximately 18 percentage points more likely to have progressed into employment /self-employment after 3-6 months than similar individuals who had not received this training.

Improved individuals health and wellbeing	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>	Improvement to individuals health and wellbeing. No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	Reduced public health spending. No monetary estimates provided.
Reduction in crime	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>	Drop in crime rates. Noted as a possible future benefit by one Member State. No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	Reduction in the financial cost associated with crime (e.g. prisons and enforcement).
Improving cohesion of society and equal opportunities	Recurrent	<i>Not available</i>	Improving cohesion of society and equal opportunities. No monetary estimates provided.	<i>Not available</i>		<i>Not available</i>	

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