



## Implementation of the Upskilling Pathways

### EAEA Feedback to the Public Consultation

February 2022

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) welcomes the [European Commission's Public Consultation on Upskilling Pathways](#). Adopted by the European Council in December 2016, the [Upskilling Pathways strategy](#) presents an ambitious skills strategy that has enabled adults in Europe with low(er) basic skills, according to policy targets, to have their skills assessed, receive tailored learning provision and have their learning outcomes validated. EAEA has collected feedback from its members on the state of the implementation and the impact of the strategy.

Feedback from EAEA members, based on the survey conducted for the [EAEA Country Reports 2021](#), shows a varied picture of implementation. In some countries, notably Austria, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia and Ireland, Upskilling Pathways has been integrated into national skills and qualifications strategies. **Upskilling Pathways has prompted national strategies to focus on basic skills and validation of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning**, moving the attention of learning programmes on learners with low(er) basic skills.

Some EAEA members report that the Upskilling Pathways strategy has raised awareness of ALE in their respective countries and has increased and improved cooperation between ministries of education and labour. A number of Erasmus+ KA2 projects as well as ESF projects promote the visibility, development and implementation of the strategy.

A Bulgarian EAEA member says that their *“New Adult Learning Strategy Efforts’ aim 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 to create the conditions for non-formal learning. The choice of individual strategies for education, training and learning will be encouraged, supported and developed.”* The member also states that the new national strategy will foster cooperation between several ministries and with the involvement of the social partners, social institutions, local authorities, education providers and employers in order to achieve the best outcomes: *“The Ministry of Education and Science will take initiatives and coordinate its actions with other institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Agency, as well as with organisations, municipalities, vocational schools and local businesses to close the loop of services. The strategy provides support in literacy and learning content as well as the acquisition of qualifications for the job search.”*

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about major changes in the ALE sector in some countries, and in some cases has led to an acceleration in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways. In certain member states, learning programmes and activities that contribute to the implementation of Upskilling Pathways are now **(partly) funded by the Recovery and Resilience Fund**.



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EAEA's Portuguese member reports: *“In the framework of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan (PRR), the financing agreement for the ‘Accelerator Qualifica’ was signed on 7 September between the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and the ‘Recuperar Portugal’ mission structure. ‘Accelerator Qualifica’ is a new incentive granted to adults who meet certain conditions to obtain a school or vocational qualification under the process of recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC). Accelerator Qualifica gets 55 million euros through the PRR and aims to reach 100 000 certified adults by 2025. The financial support each adult receives is equivalent to 1.25 of the IAS, which this year amounts to EUR 548, and is linked to the completion/achievement of an RVCC qualification. Until now, this was the only adult qualification for which there was no financial support of this kind.”*

However, a majority of EAEA members indicate that **funding for ALE programmes has stagnated or slightly decreased in 2020-2021**. Only a few members indicate that funding has improved. As of the end of 2021, it was not apparent that the Recovery and Resilience Fund would provide additional funding to ALE - rather, in some countries, a shift in funding is emerging and programmes that were previously funded through other means are now financed through the Recovery and Resilience Fund. However, in order to implement Upskilling Pathways to their full extent, additional funding is needed in most countries, especially if individualised learning programmes are to be developed and increased staffing is required.

In addition, some EAEA members argue that the implementation of Upskilling Pathways has not only shifted the focus of ALE policy towards the validation of skills and the promotion of basic skills, but has also **narrowed the focus of ALE** in general, especially towards employability.

An EAEA member from Greece reports: *“The Greek government enacted a new law on adult education at the end of December 2020. Law 4763/2020 (Government Gazette A-254/21-12-2020) (and it) contains numerous provisions aimed at organising the field of adult education in Greece. However, the general tenor of this law is that adult education is mainly in the field of vocational education and training and the development of skills related to employment.”*

Upskilling Pathways **do not always seem to reach the most vulnerable target groups**, for instance women who are inactive in the labour market and older workers (e.g. in Hungary). The general figures on participation in adult learning also do not allow any conclusions to be drawn on whether previously "inactive" groups are brought into learning through Upskilling Pathways. Target groups that would benefit most from Upskilling Pathways would need to be engaged by active outreach measures, and learning programmes would need to be tailored accordingly to enable these groups to enter, and build, learning pathways. A number of countries, for instance Germany and Slovakia, note that there is a **lack of infrastructure** to implement the Upskilling Pathways. Guidance measures are not sufficiently available everywhere; however, they would be in a central position to address target groups with low skills.

Furthermore, there is a **need for better cooperation between non-formal and formal adult learning** to increase the flexibility of learning programmes and facilitate easier entry into learning. All this requires more training of staff and educators in validation programmes, basic skills programmes, etc. Public investment in infrastructure and the training of adult learning and education staff is at the

forefront. EAEA members, for example from France, report difficulties in recruiting adult educators and other ALE staff, as remuneration is not attractive due to the funding structures of ALE, and, at the same time, tight budgets of ALE providers do not always allow for staff training either. Structural funding of ALE increases the quality of educational provision and promotes the inclusion of disadvantaged target groups in Upskilling Pathways.

What emerges is that those countries that have **integrated Upskilling Pathways into a broader lifelong learning strategy** are most likely to reach the target groups and build innovative upskilling programmes, for instance Slovakia, Finland and Austria. Furthermore, those countries that succeed in involving other stakeholders, e.g. labour market services, but also social partners, are more successful in upskilling. EAEA members argue that Upskilling Pathways requires a holistic approach that needs not only the education sector but also the active engagement of employers, social services, labour market services, etc. in order to reach key target groups and make progress in the implementation of the strategy.

EAEA would like to highlight some key recommendations for the broader and better implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.

## Recommendations for the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways Strategy:

### 1. **Financing:**

- a. **Prioritise and invest in ALE, basic skills, and outreach.** Public investment is crucial for the successful implementation of ALE, basic skills, and outreach. The system must be financially stable and supported systematically to enable the participation of those who need it most.
- b. **Quality requires sufficient funding.** Tendering of public funding to education providers in the context of Upskilling Pathways, for instance through the ESF+ and/or the Recovery and Resilience Fund, should not be based on the bidding of the cheapest provider. In order to provide quality adult education, education providers need to invest in their infrastructure, recruit well-trained teachers and be able to offer further training.
- c. **The Recovery and Resilience Fund must be an additional source of funding** and should not replace pre-existing financial supports. The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation needs additional funding and an integrated implementation approach to be fully implemented across Europe.
- d. **Provide funding and support learning within communities, cities and regions.** They are essential for increasing the participation of learners with low educational attainment. ALE providers, including the voluntary and community sectors, need more investment including support and funding. This will benefit both the learners and their communities and provide better skills, more participation, active

citizenship and more social cohesion. This is especially true for remote and rural areas, where ALE must be provided to engage isolated and marginalised people.

## 2. Governance:

- a. **Strengthen the governance of adult education and basic skills through national lifelong learning strategies.** A comprehensive lifelong learning strategy will help link learning pathways. Within the Upskilling Pathways strategy, the responsibilities need to be clearly spelt out. Additionally, benchmarking and target setting can help the monitoring of progress.
- b. **Ensure adult education and basic skills are linked to existing social inclusion and outreach strategies.** In many countries, there are social inclusion strategies for disadvantaged groups, but they do not take ALE into account. By integrating ALE into existing initiatives and policies, these will be improved, and learning will become mainstreamed.
- c. **Strengthen non-formal education and learning structures.** Better infrastructure for non-formal ALE must be provided through legislation, institutional development and continuous and secure financial support.
- d. **Provide incentives and support for the professional development of adult educators** in cooperation with relevant higher and further education institutions.

## 3. Cooperation:

- a. **Put learners at the centre, involving them in consultation and decision-making processes.** ALE providers should give learners the opportunity to co-design their tailored offer of learning and their upskilling journey. Member states should cooperate with adult learners and communities in the preparation of strategies and in their implementation.
- b. **Reinforce cooperation between ministries, sectors, institutions and services of different fields.** A successful strategy needs strong cooperation between different levels of policy-making, sectors and institutions. Traditionally, many organisations, including ministries and funding sources, work in silos. Upskilling Pathways can provide a genuine incentive to forge new relationships and deepen the existing ones.
- c. **Ensure cooperation between civil society and non-formal learning providers.** In order to implement the strategy effectively, non-formal learning providers and civil society organisations must be recognised and valued as key stakeholders. Non-formal education providers understand the needs on the ground and the barriers faced by adult learners. Including these organisations from the early stages of implementation will ensure outreach, adequate provision and ownership.

## 4. Inclusion:

- a. **Analyse and remove barriers.** Barriers that hinder people from participating, especially from disadvantaged groups, need to be examined in depth. We urge member states to analyse their legal, financial and institutional frameworks in terms of promoting or hindering the participation of disadvantaged groups. In



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implementing Upskilling Pathways, stakeholders and ALE providers should pay due regard to the accessibility of the intake phase and the initial assessment, discussing also learners' expectations and responsibilities.

- b. **Ensure that priority target groups can access learning opportunities free of charge** as part of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.
- c. **Adopt and promote inclusive language** in both policy design and implementation. All stakeholders should acknowledge, and value, the wealth of diverse experiences, skills and abilities that adults - especially from disadvantaged backgrounds - can bring to their Upskilling Pathways and those of their fellow learners, irrespective of their educational attainment. Language should be free from stigma, prejudices and stereotypes.
- d. **Facilitate the involvement of health and social care practitioners**, including social workers and psychologists, in the design and day-to-day implementation of inclusive Upskilling Pathways. Upskilling Pathways should take into account the needs of adult learners, providing holistic support to enable them to succeed.

#### 5. Skills addressed:

- a. **Ensure that Upskilling Pathways include skills that help learners thrive not only as workers, but also as active citizen.** Upskilling Pathways should not focus solely on employability, but provide a broad and versatile skillset that can empower learners in a variety of life situations, including access to services; health, caregiving and parenting; civic participation; employment.
- b. **Provide language learning and mobility opportunities to everyone in the EU, including migrants and refugees.** The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation can act as a core pillar of EU policy, welcoming people into Europe and connecting people across Europe, forging meaningful and peaceful relationships. Adult learning can provide a social and educational intervention to improve life circumstances, employment opportunities, and social cohesion.

#### [More information](#)

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The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.

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