

PARTNERUP

PARTNER UP Analysis Reports National level

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Executive Summary

The following national reports represent the outcome of the initial desk analysis carried out by the project partners in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Romania with the aim to deepen the actual state of the art in the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative (UP) in each project Country and at EU level.

The desk analysis allowed the partners to investigate and share knowledge about several aspects related to the UP initiative: legislative context and measures, key measures in place, wide target groups addressed, main challenges in reaching out the target groups, main challenges in skills assessment, provision of tailored learning and validation and recognition of skills acquired, actors delivering Upskilling Pathways, cooperation mechanisms in place.

It was based on stakeholders' contributions, on recent literature review, and on the consultation of National/EU documents on both Adult Learning and Education policies and Upskilling Pathways, published by European Commission or elaborated by European networks/associations.

The outcomes of the Analysis put the basis for the policy and practice work of the project.



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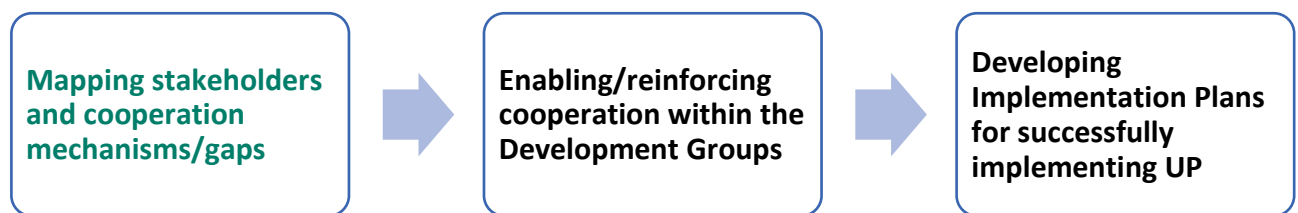
1 Introduction

The following national reports represent the outcome of the initial Analysis carried out by the project partners in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Romania with the aim to deepen the actual state of art in the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative (UP) in each project Country and at EU level.

Specifically, the Analysis was meant at collecting quantitative and qualitative data and information about:

- existing and missing stakeholders,
- existing cooperation mechanisms and structures,
- gaps in cooperation,
- good practices with reference to the Upskilling Pathways implementation in the Partner UP Countries and at EU level,

in order to **provide the basis for the policy and practice work of the project.**



The Analysis process allowed the partners to investigate and share knowledge about several aspects related to the UP initiative, by:

- analysing the main challenges in the UP implementation, in view of defining strengths and weaknesses in cooperation, identifying existing coordination structures, missing stakeholders and how this has impacted on a regular process of implementation;
- mapping and analysing a list of possible/useful stakeholders to engage, so as to make clear their added value and expected contribution;
- defining how they can further enable the implementation of UP.

In order to collect highly qualitative data, the Analysis is carried out according to two different methodologies, both aimed at defining gaps in cooperation and identifying opportunities for reinforcing positive/meaningful relationships already in place and involving and engaging missing and/or new stakeholders: **Desk Analysis** and **Stakeholder Mapping**.



The **Desk analysis** was mainly intended at deepening the actual state of art in the implementation of the UP initiative in each project Country and at EU level, by investigating:

- legislative context and measures;
- key measures in place;
- wide target groups addressed;
- main challenges in reaching out the target groups;
- main challenges in skills assessment, provision of tailored learning and validation and recognition of skills acquired;
- actors delivering Upskilling Pathways;
- cooperation mechanism in place.

It was based on recent literature review and on the consultation of National/EU documents on both Adult Learning and Education policies and Upskilling Pathways, published by European Commission or elaborated by European networks/associations.

The mapping of Stakeholders was developed at country level through different activities:

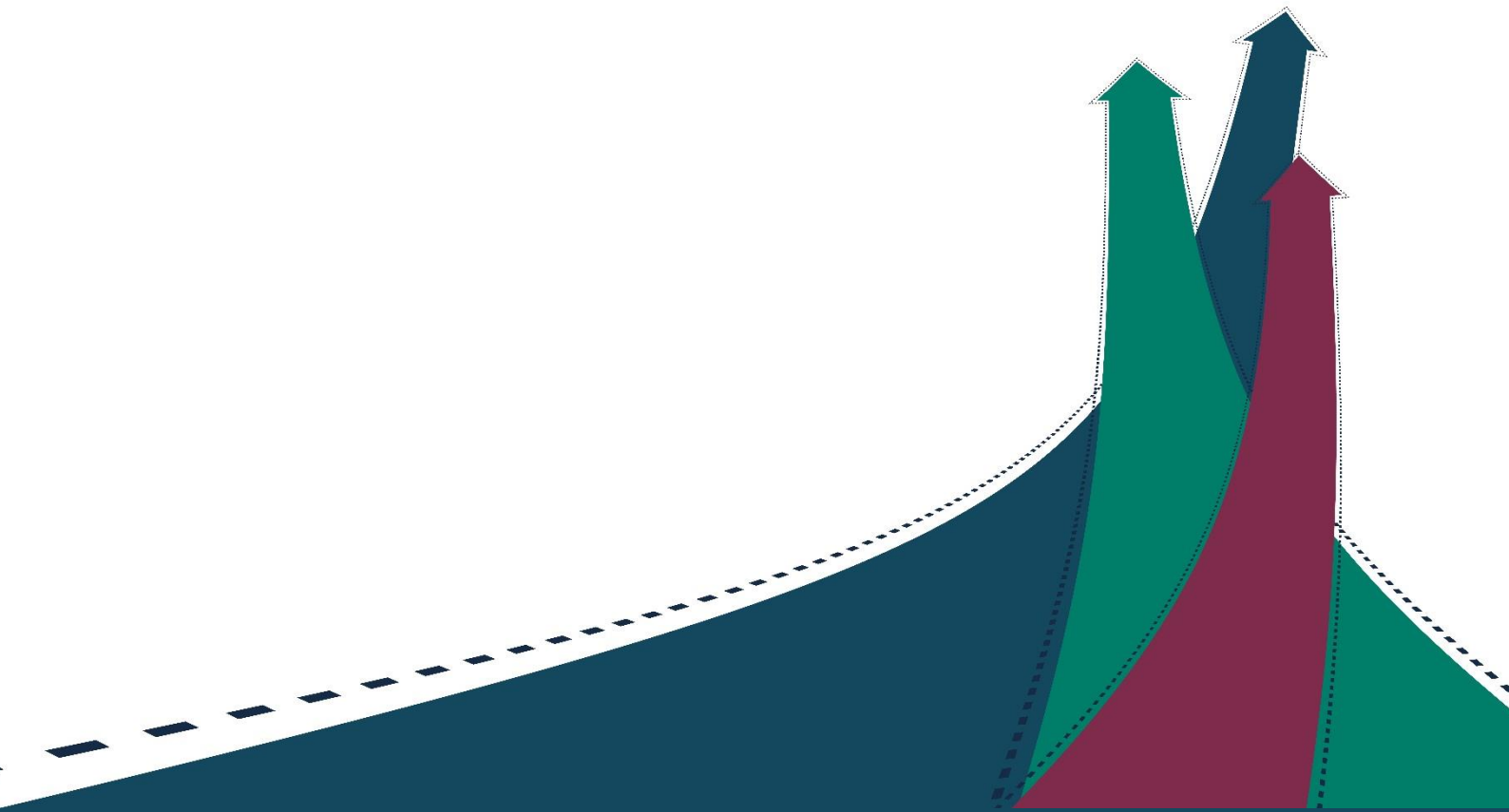
- **internal reflection** in partner organisation and/or in national project team, developed by collectively brainstorming about specific key questions, so as to share a common view of the main needs and objectives for the development of cooperation with/among stakeholders;
- **focus groups / interviews** with national stakeholders according common Guidelines, with the main aim to guide them in self-assessing their role in Upskilling Pathways, their relevance and their main contribution.

As results of the methodologies applied, the partners/national team produced an **Analysis Country Report** and a **Stakeholder Mapping Table**, as follows.



2 Analysis reports

Report of the analyses that have taken place at the respective national level



Country Analysis
CROATIA

Country Analysis - Croatia

Country	Croatia
Responsible organisation/s	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAЕ), Adult Education Institution Dante

Upskilling Pathways in each country: state of art in the implementation, main target groups, challenges

Pursuant to the Adult Education Act, adult education includes: implementation of formal education programs for the acquisition and evaluation of sets of learning outcomes/curricula for the acquisition of qualifications at **level 1** (primary education certificate), **level 2** (vocational education certificate), **level 3** (upper-secondary VET certificate, 1-2 years), **level 4**, **level 4.1** (upper-secondary VET certificate, 3 years), **level 4.2**. (upper-secondary VET certificate, 4 years) and at **level 5** (VET specialist programmes)¹ of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF), namely:

- a) education programmes for acquiring and evaluating **sets of learning outcomes (i.e., micro-qualification)**
- b) education programmes for obtaining a **partial qualification**
- c) education programme for obtaining a **full qualification**.

Education programs for obtaining a partial qualification include:

- a) **vocational training** - partial qualifications that are acquired at level 2, 3 and 4 of the CROQF, and are accessed at least from level 1 (primary education certificate)
- b) **professional development programmes** - partial qualifications that are acquired at CROQF level 4, and are accessed from at least the same level
- c) **professional specialist training** - partial qualifications that are acquired at CROQF level 5, and are accessed at least from level 4.1.

The Croatian qualifications framework (CROQF) is an instrument governing the entire system of qualifications awarded at all education levels in the Republic of Croatia. The CROQF introduces **occupational standards** and **qualification standards** that serve as the basis for creating educational programmes at all education levels. The occupational standard includes a list of all key jobs of a specific occupation and a list of competences required for their successful performance; the qualification standard includes all learning outcomes that must be acquired in each programme leading to a specific qualification².

The new Law on Adult Education adopted in 2021 was one of the novelties for Croatia at a systemic level, introducing the recognition of **microcredentials**. In compliance with the new Law, the Agency for VET and Adult Education developed a detailed 'Methodology for creating

¹ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/2021-09/Croatia-nqf-country-page.jpg>

² <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/croatia-follow-croatian-qualifications-framework-register>

adult education programmes for acquiring micro-qualifications, partial qualifications and complete qualifications financed through vouchers and other sources of financing’.

The novelty of those programmes leading to microcredentials also lies in their type of financing, as they introduce **vouchers** for people engaged in education. Vouchers have been issued by the Croatian Employment Service (CES) from April 2022. By the end of October 2022, more than 102 adult education institutions were listed with more than 711 microcredential programmes available, including a vast number of programmes honing digital and green skills. Learners who are granted a voucher receive on average EUR 1 300 (paid directly to the selected and certified ALE provider). The majority of these learners are unemployed or searching for a new job opportunity (78%). To this date, more than 10 700 people have submitted a request to receive a voucher. Microcredentials promoted through this voucher system have already become one of the most forward-looking measures in attracting learners to adult education, while ensuring that the education provided is aligned with labour market needs.

Benefits of all these reforms in the Croatian adult education system include:

- prioritising skills development and **work-based learning**, adopting a learner-centred approach
- reshaped the structure for labour market anticipation and **feedback loops** between occupational standards, qualification standards and curricula
- drastically increasing the number and variety of vocational training and professional development programmes available **free of charge** for individuals (as prior to this reform the majority of the programmes were paid for by learners themselves or infrequently financed by the CES through public procurement calls for specific deficitary professions)
- allowing both **employed and unemployed** individuals to access education free of charge
- enabling adults with **CROQF level 1** (primary education certificate) to access micro-qualifications and partial qualifications that are acquired at level 2, 3 and 4 of the CROQF, thereby ensuring greater vertical mobility

However, a number of challenges still remain.

- A major challenge mentioned by all stakeholders is **reaching out to and motivating** adults with low qualifications to participate in education, considering their experiences in formal education, self-confidence, and sense of accomplishment. There is a need for more targeted and innovative approaches to engage these individuals effectively – to implement national media campaigns to promote the benefits of ALE, to offer necessary support that can enable them to access learning (i.e., paid transport costs for learners living further away from ALE providers, paid training during work enabling adults to do both with employer’s support). This also includes professional guidance and/or any information provided to learners – this would significantly decrease the number of adults that drop out of the initial stages of the process as well as increase the number of adults interested in learning.
- While the voucher system has brought great improvements to the system of acquiring micro or partial qualifications, **the process of acquiring a full qualification** at level 3/4 (secondary education) is still too long and not adapted to adults (i.e., containing subjects and content initially developed for teenagers accessing so-called regular education in secondary schools), which greatly discourages individuals from accessing those

education programmes and this leaves them unable to access further education and learning opportunities that require CROQF 3 or 4. In addition, the development of green and digital skills is offered through vouchers, but a disproportionate number of participants are interested in digital skills, not green skills.

- While there are some training programmes available through the voucher system that **only require CROQF 1** – it's a disproportionately low number, resulting in poor vertical mobility of learners. In addition, the training programmes funded through the voucher system are only related to developing digital or green skills, thereby **limiting the range of topics and qualifications** that are offered free of charge for adults.
- **Formal qualifications cannot be acquired through recognition of non-formal and informal learning**, but OECD's project to establish a validation system of prior learning in Croatia has been underway³.

Stakeholder cooperation in UP: successful cooperation mechanisms, missing stakeholders and gaps in cooperation

Key Croatian stakeholders in UP and adult learning at the local, regional, and national level have been interviewed. This includes public bodies like the Ministry of Science and Education, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, and the Croatian Employment Service. Other stakeholders at the national level that participated are associations - the Association of Adult Education Institutions, Association for the Advancement of Human Resources and Adult Education at the Croatian Chamber of Commerce, Croatian Andragogy Society, and the Croatian Employers' Association. A variety of ALE providers, and regional/municipal branches of national associations and bodies were also interviewed.

Shortcomings and challenges in the education system emphasized by the stakeholders include the lack of time for workers with low qualifications, the outflow of the labour force, and inadequate employer investment in their workers' development. If employers are not investing adequately in worker development, further engagement and advocacy might be needed to encourage them to participate in upskilling efforts. The focus on micro-qualifications and digital competences should align with the evolving demands of the labour market and ensure the relevance of the skills being taught. The existing system lacks recognition of prior knowledge, needs an expanded voucher system, requires more media promotion for certain occupations, and improvement in the guidance provided to adults.

As evidenced by all of the stakeholders' responses, there is already a good web of cooperation to address these issues between relevant ministries, ALE associations, employment services, employers, trade unions, and ALE providers. (e.g., employment service with relevant ministries, employers and ALE providers, employers with ALE providers and relevant agencies).

Additionally, as indicated by one of the stakeholders, through European projects and the implementation of CROQF, in the last few years, the cooperation between the stakeholders has increased significantly, from the labour market to state institutions, especially the CES, the

³ <https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/skills-and-work/adult-learning/validation-prior-learning-croatia.htm>

Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy. Cooperation also extended to European institutions, especially agencies (EACEA, CEDEFOP).

An important finding regarding gaps in cooperation is that while each stakeholder seems to identify where they contribute to improving UP in Croatia, they seem to find other stakeholders responsible for solving the issue, i.e., they have suggestions on what should be done and steps they are taking in that direction, but they primarily assign that task to someone else, another stakeholder. Stakeholders with more of a national reach seem to believe that stakeholders working on a local level can reach individuals better and vice versa.

This indicates that both stakeholders and their cooperation would greatly benefit from coming together, sharing and re-evaluating their roles and expectations from each other. One stakeholder even suggested establishing of a joint body that would include all important stakeholders. Agreeing on a joint strategy could help ensure that needs are being met and issues are not left unaddressed.

For further information, see **Stakeholder mapping table** [here](#).

Other relevant experiences of stakeholders' activation/cooperation

Across the stakeholders involved in the UP Initiative, a pattern of collaborative efforts emerges. Many stakeholders actively collaborate with each other to design and implement upskilling programs that align education with the demands of the labour market. These collaborations often involve seeking increased funds to support education and training programs, with a particular emphasis on allocating funds for basic skills training and specialized programs aimed at bridging the skill gap.

A common goal among stakeholders is to ensure that these programs are designed with a focus on quality and relevance. They recognize the importance of tailored programs that specifically address the unique needs of individuals with low qualifications while maintaining high standards of education. This focus extends to regulatory frameworks and the recognition of prior learning, where stakeholders work to establish guidelines that ensure program effectiveness and alignment with the national qualifications framework.

However, stakeholders are cognizant of the challenges in motivating individuals with low qualifications to actively participate in these programs. They acknowledge that engagement strategies need improvement to overcome barriers to enrollment and participation. Additionally, some stakeholders highlight challenges in terms of collaboration itself. Communication and coordination among the various stakeholders are areas that need further attention to ensure effective collaboration and implementation.

To address these challenges, stakeholders advocate for change. Many stakeholders emphasize the introduction of micro-qualifications, improved funding models, streamlined processes, and enhanced communication strategies. They recognize that raising awareness and promoting participation in education programs are vital aspects of their efforts.

Central to the stakeholders' commitments is the goal of addressing skill gaps in the workforce. Stakeholders are dedicated to bridging the divide between education and industry needs, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the skills demanded by a rapidly changing job landscape. Their initiatives align with broader national strategies and policies, such as the 2030 National Strategy and other skill development initiatives, showcasing their commitment to supporting the economic and social advancement of the country.

A recurring theme is the emphasis on access and inclusivity. Stakeholders are committed to providing education and training opportunities that cater to individuals with varying skill levels and backgrounds. This commitment stems from a belief in the transformative power of education, enabling individuals to acquire the skills they need to succeed in their careers and contribute to the growth and prosperity of the nation.

Qualitative information about the analysis process

A total of 14 stakeholders were interviewed, either in person or via a video call. Each stakeholder was addressed during a separate (one-to-one) interview. A wide range of key stakeholders have been included in the process – representatives of relevant ministries, ALE associations, employment services, employers, trade unions, and ALE providers.

Stakeholders participating in the analysis process have demonstrated a commendable level of engagement. Through their input, questions, and reflections, they actively contributed to the exploration of upskilling pathways in Croatia. Their willingness to share experiences, raise pertinent questions, and respond thoughtfully to insights highlights their high level of participation and genuine interest in comprehending the complexities surrounding upskilling initiatives.

Their willingness to participate in the analysis process as well as the answers provided during the interviews indicate that there is good, already established, cooperation among stakeholders but that it could be strengthened with better and continuous communication and a clearer division/sharing of responsibilities when it comes to addressing barriers to/in upskilling pathways for adults.

In addition to including more stakeholders in the next project steps, we hope to include the same responders to encourage better networking among them and support them in devising solutions and mitigating strategies for the identified barriers to upskilling pathways in Croatia.

Good practices

N.B. 'Good practices' are defined, in this context, as strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and/or evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result in supporting identification, engagement, commitment of stakeholders as well as cooperation among them, with specific reference to the UP initiative. The Good practices can be local, regional, national or international ones.

Good practices have highlighted the significance of offering tailored, interactive, and engaging learning experiences for individuals with low qualifications. ALE providers should adapt teaching methods to adult learners' needs, promoting practical skills relevant to their desired professions. By offering flexible scheduling, psychosocial support, and simplified enrollment processes, institutions can increase learners' self-confidence, motivation, and retention.

In addition, good practices include designing training programs tailored to employers' needs, involving them in curriculum development, and facilitating practical training opportunities. Collaborative efforts between ALE providers, employment service, and employers can enhance learner employability and align training with industry demands.

Half of the stakeholders interviewed also mentioned the *Zaželi* project. 'Zaželi - women's employment program' was financed under the Operational Program Effective Human Resources 2014-2020 from the European Social Fund. The project was being implemented by local government units and associations for a duration of up to 30 months, and is intended for the employment of women in a disadvantageous position on the labour market, with an emphasis on women over 50 years of age, women with the highest completed secondary education, women with disabilities, women victims of human trafficking, treated drug addicts, women victims of domestic violence, homeless women.

Through 'Zaželi - women's employment program' and its three phases of implementation, a total of 1,184 projects were successfully financed. More than 22.5 thousand women were employed who provided support and care services for almost 130 thousand elderly and/or infirm persons, which testifies to the importance and effectiveness of the program in strengthening social cohesion and providing the necessary care and attention to the most vulnerable groups society.

One stakeholder also praised AVETAE's national campaign Lifelong Learning Week through which citizens are informed on the importance of education and learning and which has been running for over 15 years. The backbone of each of the Lifelong Learning Weeks is informing the citizens on the ways they can become a part of the lifelong learning process and motivating them to do that. The campaign has developed during the years: the number of activities, implementation areas and institutions involved has risen, the involvement of key stakeholders has been strengthened and – most importantly – the number of citizens participating has constantly been rising. During the campaign, citizens are able to visit free workshops, lectures, round tables and similar events; a number of institutions open their doors and introduce potential learners to their educational programmes.

Priorities for Development Groups

1. Gathering the same stakeholders that participated in this round of interviews, but trying to include representatives of local municipalities/governments as they have a large impact on a local level, but most stakeholders mentioned an infrequent level of collaboration
2. Discussing what motivation, promotion, and guidance strategies can be introduced or improved as well as who plays what role in the process/delineating responsibilities
3. Discussing how to make the UP system more vertically mobile for adults with CROQF 1 or no qualification
4. Discussing possible expansion of micro-qualifications to a variety of skills, not just green and digital

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