Development Groups Summary
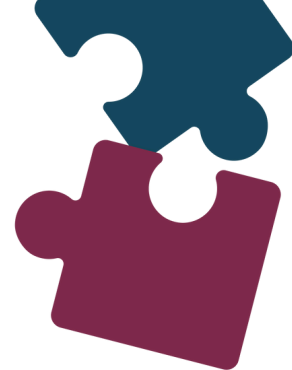
Country: Cyprus

Stakeholders involved

A total of 46 stakeholders participated in four development groups between May and June 2024, contributing to the implementation of the project. **Participants represented various sectors, including academia, research, adult education, vocational training, and employment services.** Their role, according to their profile, focuses on designing and promoting lifelong learning opportunities, strengthening institutional collaborations, and providing training and support to educators and learners.

Key stakeholders included:

- Representatives from public bodies, such as trainers from the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA), the Faculty Training and Development Unit Director at the University of Nicosia, and an officer from the Adult Education Centres under the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth.
- Industry stakeholders including a representative of the Human Resources Department of the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation and an officer from the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- Academic representatives from the University of Limassol, the Cyprus University of Technology, the University of Nicosia, and the University of Cyprus.
- Representatives of training institutions, including the University of Nicosia, KES College, and academic coordinators from Secondary Technical and Vocational Education.
- Trainers and researchers from CARDET, Innovate, and the Institute of Development.
- Trainers from the Cyprus Red Cross Youth Section and adult learners representing community and grassroots participation.

Activities and methods for stakeholder engagement

The Development Group sessions were conducted in both **online** and in-**person formats**. The first development group discussion was online and followed by face-to-face discussions. The online discussions provided a fertile ground for introducing the project and its results to the stakeholders. During the face-to-face discussions, participants were again introduced to the project aims and results. They were able to provide feedback and share their thoughts in greater depth. Overall, both formats appeared beneficial, enhancing the collaboration between the participating stakeholders. During the Development Group sessions, a range of activities were utilised. Each session began with a **presentation** of the project and meeting aims. This activity provided the backdrop of the project and allowed participants to understand better the project's scope and goals for the meeting. **Focus group discussions** were integral to online and face-to-face meetings, enabling the deep exploration of issues. Finally, **workshops** were conducted during the in-person meetings, allowing participants to develop concrete action plans, road maps, and mechanisms for improving the implementation of UP.

Opportunities

Several initiatives and collaborations may support the UP policy in Cyprus. The **Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth (MoESY)** has a leading role in the field of Adult Education in Cyprus. The MoESY developed the **Lifelong Learning Strategy** (CyLLIS) 2021-2027, which aims to enhance collaboration and create the necessary synergies amongst various stakeholders involved in adult learning to assist in implementing strategic objectives. The ministry also runs second-chance schools, non-typical education programmes, and vocational education and training (VET) programmes. These efforts are supported by networks involving municipalities, rural and urban communities, and adult education providers, and therefore enabling the upskilling and reskilling of adults. The **Human Resource Development Authority** (HRDA) complements these efforts by offering programmes and funding schemes targeting unemployed and economically inactive adults and employees. The **Cyprus Productivity Centre** (CPC) further supports workforce productivity through training on management, technical, and digital skills. Its programmes, aimed at the general public and targeted groups like older adults and those with low qualifications, address specific labour market needs. Other organisations, such as the **Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry** (CCCI) and the **Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation,** have a central role in upskilling and reskilling, promoting employee training and development. Despite these efforts, Cyprus needs robust networks for stakeholder collaboration in adult education. Establishing such networks could improve information exchange and foster better implementation of UP.

Challenges

Participating stakeholders identified several barriers and challenges hindering the effective implementation of UP. **Outreach challenges** involve obstacles in engaging adults with low qualifications due to, for example, the limited use of internet-based tools, challenges in maintaining motivation for participation, and challenges in raising awareness about the importance of lifelong training and development. **Governance challenges** stem mostly from the fragmented adult education sector in Cyprus. While many public authorities and organisations run programmes for adult education, more than an overarching authority leads to uncoordinated efforts. Stakeholders also noted the **proliferation of governmental bodies needing clear impact or support and the ongoing progress of the CyLLIS strategy implementation.** Also, stakeholders noted that while the MoESY developed the CyLLIS strategy (2021 – 2027), its implementation is still in progress. Stakeholders also noted challenges in **validation and recognition,** highlighting a need for greater clarity on how qualification bodies operate. Funding is another issue, **relying primarily on EU-funded projects rather than domestic funding.**
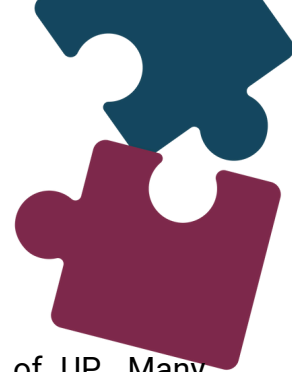
Finally, **awareness challenges** also hinder the effective implementation of UP. Many stakeholders are unfamiliar with the council's recommendation on UP and its three-step approach, indicating a need for more strategic coordination.

Solutions

Stakeholders participating in the development groups proposed various possible solutions to address the identified challenges and barriers. To strengthen strategic cooperation, stakeholders suggested using the **CyLLIS 2021-2027 strategy as a foundation for better coordination and implementation of UP.** This strategy, developed by the MoESY in consultation with key stakeholders, offers an action plan that could be adjusted to align with UP's goals. Additionally, **establishing a national body to oversee upskilling efforts** could unify fragmented efforts across sectors and regions. For better monitoring and evaluation, stakeholders emphasised the need for **standardised metrics and platforms to track upskilling outcomes.** Utilising existing tools like the Ariadni governmental portal could facilitate data collection and analysis. To improve accreditation and recognition, stakeholders proposed a **cohesive process for certifying informal and non-formal learning**. A national body dedicated to recognising prior learning could support this effort. **Policy reforms** were recommended to address regulatory barriers, such as amending labour laws to enable flexible working arrangements and expanding funding schemes to include self-employed individuals and public servants (for HRDA programmes). **Enhanced lifelong learning policies and inclusive education initiatives** targeting adults with low qualifications were also highlighted. To foster partnerships, stakeholders proposed creating **multistakeholder platforms,** such as an interactive online portal for sharing learning opportunities and regional hubs for coordinating local upskilling efforts. These platforms could enhance collaboration and decentralise adult learning activities. **Incentives to encourage participation** included financial stipends for training participants, micro-credentials that accumulate into larger qualifications, and career counselling services to guide individuals through their upskilling journeys. **Public awareness campaigns** were also suggested, targeting adults with low qualifications through personalised outreach, flexible scheduling, and mentorship.