

# PARTNERUP

## Development Groups

### Country Reports



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## Project information

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## Introduction

Development groups are planned as structured meetings of key stakeholders formed with the primary objective of facilitating discussion, cooperation, and partnership building in the context of improving the implementation of Upskilling Pathways. These groups are a critical component of initiatives aimed at enhancing adult learning opportunities and engaging stakeholders effectively.

These development groups serve as a platform for engaging in open and constructive discussions. They bring together a diverse set of partners and stakeholders from various sectors, including public authorities, education providers, adult learners, and other relevant parties. These discussions are centred around identifying challenges, sharing insights, and brainstorming solutions to improve the implementation of Upskilling Pathways.

Furthermore, development groups facilitate the organisation of meetings and interactions among key actors and cooperation partners. This includes representatives from public authorities responsible for policy and regulation, education providers delivering Upskilling Pathways, adult learners themselves, and stakeholders identified through comprehensive analysis. These meetings aim to create a collaborative environment where all relevant parties can come together, share their perspectives, and work towards common goals.

One of the primary tasks of development groups is to identify and design cooperation structures that can effectively support the goals of Upskilling Pathways. This involves determining how various stakeholders can work together, allocate responsibilities, and establish mechanisms for seamless cooperation. It may include the creation of frameworks, guidelines, and protocols that ensure coordinated efforts.

In addition, development groups focus on enhancing the flexibility and adaptability of learning pathways for adult learners. This involves discussing and proposing strategies to make learning opportunities more accessible, responsive to learners' needs, and adaptable to changing circumstances. The aim is to design learning pathways that empower individuals to acquire new skills and knowledge at their own pace and convenience.

Characterised by interdisciplinary collaboration, regular in situ or online meetings, data-driven decision-making, problem-solving orientation, and an action-oriented approach, development groups play a vital role in advancing the implementation of Upskilling Pathways and improving adult education. They foster collaboration, align strategies, and promote the creation of flexible and effective learning opportunities, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders work in synergy to achieve shared goals in adult education and lifelong learning.

## Priorities and key areas

The following priorities have been identified based on the stakeholder analysis:

- Strengthening collaboration mechanisms between the stakeholders - setting frameworks, structures and responsibilities for allowing and facilitating effective cooperation
- Development of policies which are less fragmented and more coherent with EU strategies
- Increasing participation - working on outreach strategies and practices - promotion of good practices, information exchange, communication and publicity for greater involvement of adults with no or low qualifications.
- Improving the effectiveness of training needs analysis
- Validation of informal and non-formal competences and prior learning
- Financial support mechanisms for adult learners
- Enhancing the role of ALE practitioners
- Relevance of non-formal educational practices for ALE
- Digitisation strategy for the development of ALE
- Support for local adult engagement initiatives, involvement of regional/local level in promoting ALE development
- How to exploit European experiences linked to UP

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Based on analysis findings, the development groups focus on several key discussion areas:

- **Opportunities**
  - What collaborations or initiatives related to UP exist within the country/at the EU level, and how can they be leveraged? Are there untapped resources, organisations, or stakeholders that could be brought into the collaborative effort to enhance UP? What best practices from other regions or countries can be adapted to improve collaboration in upskilling efforts?
- **Challenges**
  - What are the major barriers and challenges stakeholders identified which are hindering effective collaboration? What funding and resource allocation, policy, and/or accessibility and inclusion obstacles have been identified? What other challenges were reported?
- **Possible solutions**
  - What solutions have been proposed for the identified challenges and barriers? What models or strategies can be explored to overcome financial challenges in upskilling initiatives? How can policy changes to address legal and regulatory barriers to collaboration be supported? What strategies can be employed to promote partnerships in UP? Are there specific incentives that can be introduced to encourage participation and engagement from stakeholders?

- **Implementation plans**
  - What are the short-term and long-term goals for upskilling initiatives, and how can they be aligned with the objectives of the stakeholders? What is the timeline for implementation, and what are the key milestones that need to be achieved? How will responsibilities be distributed among the various stakeholders, and what governance structures will be put in place? What strategies will be in place to adapt and evolve the implementation plan as circumstances change or new challenges arise? What contingency plans can be developed to mitigate unforeseen challenges or disruptions in UP?



## Findings at the EU Level

## EAEA

### Participating stakeholders

The development groups organised by the European Association for the Education of Adults facilitated consultations with various Upskilling Pathways stakeholders. At the European level, the aim was to bring together organisations that work with learning providers, policymakers, social partners, and organisations in the social sector through different topics and connect them. The objective was to identify opportunities for cooperation and exchange. These development groups included organisations operating at national, local, and European levels.

#### ***Organisations that participated in EAEA's development groups include:***

##### **Social NGOs and CSOs on Lifelong Learning**

EAEA consulted with NGOs and networks primarily focusing on education for the development groups. This included organisations focusing on lifelong learning such as Solidar, EARLALL or the Lifelong Learning Platform, which contribute to Upskilling Pathways through their work on European policy and advocacy, as well as coordinating and contributing to European projects in the field of lifelong learning. Since these types of European NGOs, including the LLP and EARLALL, usually consist of a network with various national and local initiatives on education and upskilling, they were able to bring diverse expertise regarding the European and national to the development groups. Through their facilitation of regional and national partnerships through these networks, these social NGOs and civil society organisations contribute directly to the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways recommendations.

##### **Social NGOs and CSOs on VET**

Additionally, to the first group mentioned, NGOs and networks were consulted that focus on Upskilling Pathways through Vocational Education and Training (VET). While their structure and networks may work similarly to the previously mentioned NGOs on Lifelong Learning, their key focus lays more on upskilling relating to vocational education, therefore addressing labour market needs directly and focusing on upskilling to help people find (better) employment and aid them in their personal development. These organisations, for example, EVBB or EVTA, are often umbrella organisations and therefore combine their work on the European sphere with their partnerships on the national and local levels. They contribute through their advocacy and policy work to the implementation of UP as well as through their network and partnerships with grassroots organisations.

##### **Policymakers and intergovernmental organisations**

Addressing the EU-level in our development groups, EAEA invited policymakers directly responsible for upskilling to share their knowledge within the development groups. The Directorate General on Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) is the commission department responsible for EU policy on employment, social affairs, skills, labour mobility and the related EU funding programmes, therefore including upskilling. DG EMPL participated in the development groups mainly as an expert voice, introducing the EU's work on upskilling and presenting current frameworks, making them a key stakeholder on the European level in the project.



Intergovernmental organisations were present in a development group through the OECD, which contributes to the active implementation of Upskilling Pathways primarily through their research projects. They actively research key aspects of the recommendations, such as guidance and quality assurance, therefore having an active part in identifying methodologies and insights. Similarly to DG EMPL, they were consulted for their specialised expertise and served as speakers for two development groups, laying the foundation for the discussions that followed.

#### **Social partners and research institutes:**

Though social partners and trade unions usually primarily focus their work on the national level, EAEA invited the European Trade Union Institute to participate in the development groups. ETUI is the independent research and training centre of the European Trade Union Confederation which affiliates European trade unions into a single European umbrella organisation. It represents workers' interests at the EU level and aims to strengthen the social dimension of the EU. Upskilling and reskilling are key aspects of social integration as well as helping workers adapt their competencies for a green and digital transition. ETUI is therefore a relevant stakeholder, actively advocating for upskilling and its benefits. While trade unions, in general, are relevant in advocating for upskilling and workers' rights to education (for example through paid training leave), ETUI also provides trade-union-related trainings that focus on upskilling itself. However, in regards to the Upskilling Pathways recommendation in the EU, ETUI shows potential that remains untapped.

#### **Grassroots organisations:**

European policy and project work on implementing pathways is not feasible without also consulting with organisations on the grassroots level, which are directly involved in implementing Upskilling Pathways on the national and regional levels. Therefore, EAEA has opened development groups for members of different grassroots-level initiatives to participate and contribute with best practices, specialised knowledge and innovative ideas. Collaboration across the different levels of action is required to specifically identify current challenges and barriers that might need to be addressed by on the European levels as well. Concretely, the development groups featured local organisations offering counselling and guidance (for example Leerwinkel Brussels), training providers in different countries within Europe (for example the City Institute Lviv providing non-formal education in city libraries or the Digital Skills for All and Digital Überall facilitating workshops to improve digital skills in Austria) as well as organisations outside of the EU (Welfare for All from Nigeria).

## Activities and methods used

For the planning of the development groups, EAEA followed a methodology of first identifying key issues within the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways and then tackling them during the events. It was decided to host the first development group as a more general event to address the UP implementation in national contexts, specifically addressing EAEA members. The following events however focused on the topics of outreach, guidance and quality assurance. These topics were chosen as they were identified as key challenges and barriers, both in the stakeholder analysis of the Partner UP project and in the formal evaluation of the UP initiative by the European Commission. The activities planned therefore reflected the topics of the events and focused on peer learning and providing stakeholders with the space to share their expertise regarding these relevant themes.

### ***The concrete activities that took place during the four development groups organised by EAEA included the following:***

**Icebreakers:** At the beginning of the (face-to-face) sessions, one group activity would be organised to serve as an icebreaker. This included introduction rounds where participants were invited to share the story of their name, or an activity with “Inner Compass”-Cards, where everyone was meant to reflect on and share their expectations, feelings, and thoughts, relating to the cards they picked. These icebreaker activities served to bring the group closer together at the beginning of the events. They aimed to facilitate a group dynamic where everyone felt included and safe within the space and the group, as to make participants more comfortable sharing their stories.

**Presentation of the Partner UP project:** Each of the four events then thematically kicked off by providing a general overview of the Upskilling Pathways initiative and the Partner UP project. This includes the goals, objectives and methodologies of the project as well as the results of the stakeholder analysis. It also includes relevant news on the project, following events and results from external events on UP, such as the Upskilling Pathways Forum, hosted by Cedefop.

**Marketplace:** The first development group aimed to provide UP stakeholders on the national level with a space to share their upskilling initiatives. For this, the registered participants were asked to introduce their national initiatives for Upskilling Pathways. They shared their projects and the organisation's key objectives, innovative practices, and plans, creating a platform for learning from each other and sparking inspiration for further collaboration.

**Expert speeches:** For the development groups focusing on concrete topics such as outreach, guidance and quality assurance, it was key to involve experts on the subject. They shared their expertise on the topic, novel information from their projects and best practices they have encountered in their work. They therefore created a basic knowledge base for the stakeholders present in preparation for the collaborative activities to come. The speeches were followed by a dedicated session to answer the remaining questions and address the first discussion points that came up during the presentation. Specifically, we invited speakers to share a European and international perspective on the topics as well as stakeholders who reported on their experiences in their national contexts.

**Roundtable discussions in small groups:** For a more intimate exchange, all of the participants were invited to share their thoughts and ideas on the topic at hand within small groups. Usually, there were questions provided to the small groups, to steer the conversations and structure the debate. Topics to discuss included common barriers, challenges, and potential solutions. Further best practices were regularly shared in these discussions. They served especially in engaging all participants, including usually quiet or inactive ones.

**Interactive online tools:** For the development groups taking place online, interactive tools such as Mentimeter questions were utilised to act as a participatory activity for the stakeholders present. Participants would be asked to name key takeaways, to mention further interesting aspects to the topics that they did not get to share with the group yet or to exemplify how takeaways could be utilised in their actual line of work.

**Networking spaces:** To further connect different stakeholders and facilitate cooperation between them, a space for networking was created by EAEA following the development groups. This took place either during a networking lunch or reception and acted as a more informal and relaxed space for participants to get to know each other and connect further.

## Opportunities

### Utilising existing networks and correlations

Cooperation is key for the policy work regarding upskilling and reskilling on the EU level. This includes policymakers collaborating with social partners to discuss the establishment of necessary learning infrastructures such as paid training leave or childcare opportunities, which serve as important requirements for many learners to participate in up and reskilling initiatives. Many aspects regarding learning infrastructures call for solutions on the higher policy level, which is why such discussions are frequent on the EU level as well. Furthermore, organisations in the social sector and research institutes are consulted and engaged for specialised training needs or outreach activities.

To strengthen collective action on skills development in the EU, large-scale partnerships were set up in a “shared engagement model for collective action where major players in industrial ecosystems and value or supply chains, including associations, relevant public authorities and SMEs, commit to cooperate and invest to provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities for people of working age in the whole industrial ecosystem”. This takes place within the Pact for Skills Framework, included in the European Pact for Skills.

Furthermore, for non-governmental organisations on the European level, partnerships play a fundamental role in furthering the development of upskilling initiatives as well. On the EU level, many NGOs and networks can be identified, involving upskilling through project work or advocacy. Several NGOs tackling upskilling needs can be found, especially relating to the VET sector and lifelong learning. Usually, though the focus of these organisations is at the European level, many national stakeholders are part of the network and facilitate upskilling on the national and regional levels as well. We consulted with many of these umbrella organisations on the European level to inquire about new stakeholders they are working with and innovative ideas to tackle their organisation-specific challenges. This also provided an opportunity to examine different countries' contrasting strategies in an international context, compare them, and learn how international correlations can be established. Additionally, it allowed for understanding how one country's strategy to address an issue can be relevant to other countries' contexts as well.

### Untapped resources

Though corporations are a key part of defining the work in up- and reskilling initiatives on the European level, a lot of resources remain untapped and many organisations that could actively further the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways recommendations are not actively involved in it. Key challenges identified in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways like missing outreach could potentially be tackled by establishing more partnerships with organisations in the social sectors that actively work with societal groups that are oftentimes considered “hard to reach”.

As the development groups included many representatives from fellow European umbrella organisations as well as from the partner organisations from the national and regional levels actively working on upskilling pathways on the grassroots level, it became clear that while there are already many innovative initiatives in place, they rarely work within a universal coherent framework (such as the UP recommendation).

A higher level of cooperation between the national members of the different European umbrella organisations may be beneficial to facilitate the usage of a comprehensive strategy, while also showing how it can be adapted within different national and local contexts.

### **Best Practices**

Best practices were shared during the development groups, though concrete examples mostly took place on national and local levels.

In the first development group, a marketplace for national and local organisations took place to provide a space for them to present their upskilling initiatives and share their best practices. In this case, the EU-level event facilitated a place where organisations could peer learn not only within their own country but multinationally.

During the first development group, three best practices from Austria, Nigeria and Ukraine were shared.

#### **Best Practice 1: Digital Skills for All and Digital Überall Workshops (Austria)**

Caroline Pajancic from the Digital Skills Office at the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation leads the Digital Skills Initiative Austria. This initiative, funded by the Ministry of Finance, offers around 3,500 free entry-level digital skills workshops nationwide, following a successful pilot phase. These workshops, targeting adults with low digital skills, are accessible and held in various locations, including rural areas and community centres. The focus is on enhancing citizen participation through digital literacy, with a special emphasis on meeting participants where they are and addressing their specific needs.

#### **Best Practice 2: Strategic Methods by Welfare for All (Nigeria)**

Zaharaddeen Sulaiman coordinates Welfare for All, a community social services organisation in Nigeria. This initiative provides free upskilling and reskilling services to disadvantaged individuals through formal, informal, and non-formal methods. Key strategies include inter-organisational transitions, positive feedback mechanisms, and easy-to-understand training. The initiative highlights the mutual benefits of upskilling for employees and employers, emphasising resource savings, career advancement, and efficient systems. Funding comes from a mix of government and private sources, tailored to the organisation's nature. The initiative addresses the training needs in several different sectors within the labour market, that are relevant in Nigeria.

#### **Best Practice 3: Non-formal Education in Libraries of Lviv (Ukraine)**

Victoria Furhalo from City Institute Lviv oversees non-formal education initiatives in city libraries. These libraries serve as co-working spaces and provide themed educational opportunities. Targeting unemployed individuals, those on maternity leave, displaced persons, and veterans, the initiative offers courses in occupational education, psychology, and personal development. With a focus on practical skills and community integration, the programme has successfully helped 88% of participants gain new job skills and fostered greater community involvement.

In the topic-specific development groups, especially in the small group discussions, many European umbrella organisations and stakeholders were presenting practices from their networks and project partners. This includes specifically the use of public places to bring people together, as well as decentralising trainings and facilitating more involvement of employers in upskilling to create a larger and more effective outreach. For fostering more inclusivity through participation, financial aid was one key aspect. These examples and ideas and more were shared by our participants in our peer-learning sessions, for the other organisations present to perhaps share within their networks or implement in their work.

While the first development group focused on gathering EAEA members, further ones provided a space of action, focusing on the stakeholders in Belgium. The European umbrella organisations involved in the groups presented how public places bring people together, the deceleration of training and facilitation of involving employers in upskilling, to create a more effective outreach. To foster better inclusivity through participation, financial aid was one key aspect. These examples and ideas were shared by our participants in our peer-learning sessions as an inspiration to others.

#### **Best Practice 4: Education guidance in Brussels**

During the development group on guidance, Leerwinkel Brussels was able to share some of its best practices and introduced its services for providing learning and career guidance for young adults and vulnerable groups, with a focus on personal development. Key services include one-on-one guidance, workshops, information sessions, and information booths, with specific efforts in prisons and community outreach. They aim to expand their presence in community centres and enhance online and multilingual services to reach more disconnected communities in Brussels.

## Challenges

The development groups facilitated by EAEA revealed numerous significant challenges hindering the effective implementation of Upskilling Pathways. Consultations with both umbrella organisations and local grassroots initiatives revealed many of the challenges from the national and regional levels. The European development groups offered valuable insights into the barriers faced by various states, municipalities, and organisations across different countries. They provided a platform that enabled participants to share experiences and learn from each other's expertise, gaining a broader perspective on upskilling efforts beyond their national contexts.

***Consequently, the following challenges were identified through these development groups.***

### **Funding and Resource Allocation**

A prominent challenge identified by stakeholders is the difficulty in securing sustainable funding for adult learning and education. Many countries are undergoing political shifts that adversely affect national budgets allocated to education. As a result, funding on the EU level, which is predominantly project-based, offers only temporary financial support. This funding model lacks the long-term stability necessary for maintaining continuous educational initiatives, causing many projects to struggle or cease once initial funds are exhausted. Many beneficial programmes that are piloted through EU-funded projects therefore can not continue their work due to lack of long-term funding.

### **Policy Barriers**

Policy-related challenges are intertwined with funding issues. Political instability and varying national priorities across EU member states complicate the consistent implementation of upskilling programmes. Policy efforts may not necessarily align with EU- or even national-level policies, leading to fragmented efforts. This misalignment hinders the ability to create a cohesive strategy for upskilling pathways that can be uniformly adopted and supported across the EU.

### **Accessibility and inclusion**

The topics that came up the most frequently during the development groups were various issues concerning accessibility and inclusion. This includes many learnings from the EU-institutions partners on the grassroots level across the member states.

*Access to information:* The stakeholders participating in the European development groups reported that adults often have difficulties accessing comprehensive and updated information on training opportunities. This issue is exacerbated within harder-to-reach groups, or learners that might not be digitally literate and live rurally.

*Rurality:* Adding to that, people in rural areas face distinct challenges due to their geographical isolation. Apart from a lack of comprehensive information, education resources are often limited and educational facilities are few and hard to reach, reducing participation in upskilling programmes.

*Bad experiences with education systems:* Stakeholders reported issues on the grassroots level concerning learners' past negative experiences with formal education systems. These experiences discourage learners from re-engaging with learning opportunities as adults. The lack of trust and confidence in the education framework among these individuals regarding formal education is transferred even to non-formal training for upskilling.

*Lack of lifelong learning mindset:* The general absence of a lifelong learning culture leads to adults not prioritising continuous education. This leads to low participation rates and even if individuals do participate in training for their workplace, a lack of ownership concerning their education pathways, including a lack of interest regarding overall training quality.

### **Engagement challenges**

Another core topic that came up throughout the development groups was a lack of stakeholder engagement on both the national and EU levels. While many stakeholders could be identified that could aid the implementation of Upskilling Pathways, they are difficult to activate due to several factors. Even for the development groups it remained difficult to engage inactive stakeholders.

It remains unclear whether the lack of participation stems from a lack of interest or the limited resources of these organisations. Non-educational organisations, in particular, were challenging to engage, possibly due to their focus on their immediate operational concerns and their lack of resources for educational planning. This challenge could also be identified in planning the development groups. Though tailored and personalised outreach measures were provided, the engagement deficit of non-active stakeholders can be considered a limitation of the stakeholder groups.

### **Lacking collaboration**

Through our development groups at the EU level and consultations with initiatives from different countries, we have identified that many of the challenges discussed are prevalent across various countries, regions, and municipalities. However, Adult Learning and Education (ALE) systems are often managed through fragmented governance structures rather than centralised systems. This fragmentation, coupled with loose networks among stakeholders, makes collaboration and partnership difficult. At the local level, many innovative approaches to UP can be found. Despite this, the lack of coordination and collaboration, particularly at the grassroots level, often prevents the sharing of valuable knowledge and best practices. As a result, successful implementation practices are inhibited, and the potential for broader impact is diminished. This could be clearly shown by the lack of engagement with the development groups. Even through multiple and repeated personalised outreach activities, it proved to be difficult to light the interest of many potential stakeholders, so participation in the events remained low. This was especially true for stakeholders who were not particularly active within Upskilling Pathways initiatives or programmes before.



## Possible solutions

Numerous challenges on the international, national, and regional levels could be identified through the European development groups. These events offered a valuable platform for diverse stakeholders to share experiences and facilitate mutual learning. For many of these identified challenges, EU-level organisations can be crucial in addressing and overcoming them.

### Overcoming financial barriers

A multi-faceted approach is needed to overcome the challenges of securing sustainable funding for ALE. This includes that EU Civil Society Organisations and policymakers can encourage collaborations between government and private sectors to provide long-term funding for upskilling programmes. These partnerships can ensure sustained support beyond initial project-based EU funding, possibly by leveraging private investments and expertise as well as their need for skilled workers. Furthermore, apart from establishing financial cooperation, more structural changes are needed. For this, promoting and creating a plan to implement educational funding models for the learner, such as Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) is a key objective on the European level. While the European Union is actively working on this, further advocacy, mutual learning and research are needed to establish the ALE access and provision systems, as well as the quality assurance and governance frameworks needed to implement ILA on the national level. Additionally, there is still a need to advocate for policies that grant paid training leave, enabling workers to pursue further education without financial strain. This supports continuous professional and personal development by being able to afford enrolling in training. Above all, relating to funding, national funding strategies are needed to ensure sustainable lifelong learning practices can be upheld. Long-term national funding mechanisms to reduce reliance on short-term and project-based EU funds are needed. For this, organisations on the EU level can facilitate knowledge exchange and mutual learning programmes to help countries implement sustainable funding strategies.

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### Policy Alignment

Generally, advocating for aligning policies regarding adult learning and education for upskilling pathways is one key task for EU organisations to facilitate the successful implementation of the Upskilling Pathways recommendation. Though apart from advocating for structural government funding mechanisms such as ILA, as mentioned above, should also be supplemented with a cross-national effort to harmonise ALE regulations across EU member states, to facilitate easier collaboration and resource sharing. Providing a framework to standardise quality assurance measures can help align the national and EU policies, making it easier to achieve a broader impact. The policy work to address the policy challenges named by the member states concerning the implementation of UP also includes the support of legal reforms of barriers to collaboration, such as restrictive labour laws and complex regulatory requirements.

### Accessibility and inclusion

As a lack of accessibility and inclusion was regularly noted by our participants, targeted strategies need to be developed to address these challenges. One solution to these issues is that EU umbrella organisations and policy bodies could develop comprehensive information platforms that aggregate and disseminate information on training opportunities across their members and partner countries.

As discussed before in the challenges, special attention should be given to reaching digitally illiterate individuals, by creating accessible interfaces and guidance and support mechanisms to ensure everyone can utilise online platforms or enrol in training opportunities, and supporting rural populations by creating specialised outreach measures through partnerships with local governments, municipalities and organisations.

### **Building trust in education offers and a lifelong learning culture**

Responding to the challenges identified concerning a lack of trust in educational systems, European civil society organisations can play a pivotal role in creating supportive environments for adult learners, particularly those with past negative experiences in formal education. One key target for action on the EU level is the potential that lies in capacity building, for example in creating peer support networks for learners or counselling and mentorship programmes that offer guidance, support adult learners and encourage adults to engage with learning opportunities.

Apart from concrete programmes, building a lifelong learning culture can be supported at the EU level by launching public awareness campaigns and informing about the benefits of continuous education and upskilling, targeting diverse demographic groups to raise awareness and interest in upskilling. This also includes lifelong learning stakeholders such as employers to empower their employees to take advantage of upskilling opportunities. Advocating for different incentives for continuous education such as financial incentives or tax credits could also serve this purpose.

As was discussed in the development on quality assurance specifically, the idea of an LLL culture is especially relevant for this aspect, since it can encourage all stakeholders (learners, learning providers, employers, etc.) to take more ownership of the trainings they engage with. Ownership leads almost automatically to a higher level of personal investment in the quality of trainings, aiding structural quality assurance mechanisms in place.

### **Professionalisation**

Building trust in adult learning and education opportunities goes hand in hand with a need to professionalise training offers. This especially includes investing in the professionalisation of adult educators, as to promote the quality and effectiveness of learning offers. This encompassed the use of innovative teaching methods, and individualising training offers, that contain flexibility to accommodate learners' specific needs, offering a safe and inclusive learning environment and providing guidance throughout the educational process. Professionalisation must be accompanied by suitable **quality assurance** practices, ensuring coherent and effective trainings.

### **Engagement**

Engaging inactive stakeholders has remained a key challenge for the national organisations that were consulted during the development groups as well as for the European organisations working on upskilling. Therefore, the need persists for European stakeholders to keep up the efforts to reach out to organisations that could benefit from the implementation of UP. This applies especially to non-educational organisations, to involve them in contributing to Upskilling Pathways.

## Peer learning

Engagement and collaboration between relevant actors are relevant not only to secure funding and outreach but also to facilitate peer learning. Different learning providers and stakeholders must cooperate also to share their knowledge. Many grassroots organisations have been working within their individual regions' structures and with their target group of learners for a long time and have therefore found unique methods for overcoming their specific challenges. As previously mentioned, even though this context is susceptible to be different depending on many factors for the different organisations, they may face some barriers that are different. Additionally, engaging with organisations in the social sector working with specialised marginalised groups can facilitate mutual learning regarding how to approach these groups within a learning context. Peer learning can greatly benefit any organisation that is aiming to create an inclusive learning environment, especially if the organisations have the time and resources to adapt said beneficial practices.

## Implementation plans

To strengthen collaborative action on upskilling pathways in the EU, the main objective of the European development groups organised by EAEA was to facilitate mutual learning, share best practices from outside the scope of one country and gather innovative ideas to tackle key challenges identified by the Upskilling Pathways evaluation and by the stakeholder analyses conducted previously for the project. Therefore, the implementation phase at the European level differs from country-level implementation and is based on transferring learnings from one level to the other.

To achieve this, we plan to tackle the main challenges identified and answer them with some of the best practices that were collected during the events.

The main challenges identified were described in detail in the previous chapters but mainly consisted of

- Missing or non-effective outreach, leading to low participation, especially from more marginalised groups
- Lack of guidance for adults
- Financial challenges and reliance on short-term programme-based funds

By creating a space for initiatives from different countries to share their approach to addressing these barriers, we can now work on utilising these learnings in enhancing the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways recommendation internationally and on the EU level. EU-level organisations play a key role in organising and coordinating these processes.

In the short term, implementation would include further dissemination of learnings within different countries and bringing relevant ideas and solutions to the appropriate national, and regional stakeholders. It would also include the continuation of mutual learning processes to achieve more diversity of input on the topics at hand and to be able to put the ideas presented into a more holistic framework. To achieve this, specialised pilot projects and programmes could be established to facilitate this further knowledge exchange and further strengthen partnerships. Furthermore, campaigns could be launched to raise overall awareness.

For long-term goals to achieve sustainable change and to ensure the continued impact of sharing knowledge across countries, more structural approaches need to be considered. This includes securing long-term funding. This process can be informed by the best practices that were gathered in the development groups and during the following exchanges. To ensure sustainable funding, a shift in respective policies is needed to facilitate structural change, which also includes aligning these national policies with the EU level. One overarching goal to assure long-term impact is the cultural shift of lifelong learning, which was previously discussed in the development groups.

### **Distribution of Responsibilities:**

EU-level organisations are responsible for overseeing the overall strategy, facilitating cross-national partnerships, organising exchanges and ensuring policy alignment. National organisations are mostly involved in the practical implementation of the best practices within their contexts. The responsibility to advocate for needed changes on the national policy level lies on both the EU level and the grassroots initiatives and national stakeholders within the countries, facilitating collective action.

Organisations in the private sector need to be activated to invest in upskilling initiatives and provide the opportunity to participate in trainings for their employees, in collaboration with training providers.

To adapt and evolve the implementation plan, mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of progress need to be established. Regular collection and analysis of data are required to assess the effectiveness of implemented strategies and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, feedback loops should be created to gather input from stakeholders at all levels. This feedback will be used to adapt and refine strategies, ensuring they remain relevant and effective in meeting the needs of the target groups. During this process, flexibility in the implementation plan must be maintained. This allows for a quick response to changing circumstances and new challenges, ensuring that the upskilling initiatives can adapt and evolve as needed.

Contingency plans would include conducting regular risk assessments to identify potential challenges and disruptions that could impact the upskilling initiatives. These assessments will help anticipate and prepare for possible issues. Furthermore, Alternative strategies should be developed to ensure the continuity of upskilling initiatives. These strategies will provide backup plans that can be implemented if the primary approaches encounter obstacles or if they do not work as expected.

## Evaluation of the events

To collect feedback from the participants, they were asked to write some sentences on some post-its or share verbally about their overall experience and opinions at the end of the session. This method of feedback was chosen for the events due to previous experiences from similar events of not getting responses back when sending an evaluation form to them after the event.

The feedback from event participants was overwhelmingly positive, particularly for the face-to-face events. Participants appreciated the well-organised structure, which included initial input on the topic followed by opportunities to share their own experiences in a more intimate setting. This format was highlighted as particularly effective in facilitating meaningful discussions and contributions from multiple stakeholders.

For the face-to-face sessions, the use of icebreakers and introduction rounds was especially well-received. These activities helped create a more comfortable space for participants, facilitating open and engaging discussions. Participants praised the events for their organisation and structure and the way they balanced informative presentations with interactive sessions, allowing for a rich exchange of ideas and practical insights.

The online events also received positive feedback, particularly for the use of participatory tools such as Mentimeter. These tools were effective in maintaining engagement and facilitating interaction among participants, despite the virtual format. Attendees appreciated the sharing of best practices within the sessions and found the discussions to be of high quality, with interesting speakers and relevant topics.

However, some areas for improvement were noted. The participation and engagement levels in online events did not match those of the face-to-face sessions. Missing engagement is a usual issue for online events, though further utilising interactive features and finding new ways to boost participation in the online setting can be considered for potential improvements.

Overall, both the face-to-face and online events were rated highly by participants. The structure of the events, the quality of discussions, and the relevance of the topics were all positively received. Moving forward, incorporating more interactive elements and strategies to increase engagement in online settings will be essential to further enhance the effectiveness of these events. The biggest setbacks of the events were the difficulties in reaching many participants, especially organisations not directly focused on education, as was described before.

# EUCEN

## Participating stakeholders

### **Event 1: In-person meeting in Barcelona (ES), Friday 17 November 2023**

The development group meeting held in person on Friday 17 November 2023 gathered a total of **16 participants**. The majority of stakeholders, about 65%, represented higher education institutions (HEI). A proportion of these were from lifelong learning/continuing education departments within their university. The rest of the stakeholders were non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Four of the participants were also representing their ULLL National Networks (i.e. AT, FR, IE and TR), with the capacity to talk to their members at their next event and encourage them to replicate similar working groups towards more collaborative upskilling pathways in their countries.

### **Event 2: Online meeting, Thursday 14 December 2023**

The development group meeting held online on Thursday 14 December 2023 gathered a total of **16 participants**. The vast majority of stakeholders, about 80%, represented HEIs from 6 different countries, some of them also representing their ULLL National Networks. A proportion of these were from lifelong learning/continuing education departments within their university.

The rest of the stakeholders were from NGOs, some of these were representing students and other NGOs representing public universities. Finally, the guest speaker Sofie Daskarova represented the Directorate-General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

The HEIs have a dual role in implementing Upskilling Pathways: they are simultaneously education and skills providers and also activists influencing policymaking and promoting upskilling among the public. The participating NGOs, while not directly involved in Upskilling Pathways from a skills provision point of view, have the potential to voice the need for upskilling opportunities and reach a different audience with the right information.

The video recording of this session in December 2023 has been edited and uploaded to the YouTube channel of EUCEN. Currently, this video is being promoted through social media to attract other stakeholders to watch it and encourage them to get involved in Partner UP or to develop further their own upskilling pathways collaborations at the local/regional/national level.

### **Event 3: Online meeting, Thursday 09 May 2024**

The development group meeting held online on Thursday 9 May 2024 gathered a total of **10 participants**. 50% of the stakeholders came from higher education institutions, 30% from NGOs and the remaining stakeholders were from a higher education association or an international institution.

In comparison with previous development group meetings, this event featured a keynote speaker from the higher education association KU Leuven Association. With regards to upskilling pathways, their work is exemplary in how to establish connections and in enabling collaboration between different stakeholders for the benefit of making education more accessible. The UNESCO Institute for LLL (UIL) with the Director of Adult Continuing Education at University College Cork (IE) presented the impact of collaborating in learning regions, being UIL the drivers of this approach and Cork one of the learning cities in their portfolio, with lots of activity and a very structured approach to enable upskilling pathways in the region.

The video recording of this session in May 2024 has been edited and uploaded to the YouTube channel of EUCEN. Currently, this video is being promoted through social media to attract other stakeholders to watch it and encourage them to get involved in Partner UP or to develop further their own upskilling pathways collaborations at the local/regional/national level.

### **Event 4: In-person meeting, Cork (IE), Thursday 30 May 2024**

The final development group meeting held on Thursday 30 May 2024 gathered a total of **39 participants**. Over 60% of participants were from higher education institutions, 12% were from NGOs, 10% were from statutory bodies, 7% were from national agencies and the remaining participants were from local organisations working collaboratively to enable upskilling approaches.

The session included a panel with two local stakeholders, a European NGO and the President of the US Association of Adult Learning (AAACE).



## Activities and methods used

### **Event 1: In-person meeting in Barcelona (ES), Friday 17 November 2023**

This face-to-face workshop was held in parallel to eucen's Autumn Seminar in Barcelona. It enabled eucen to promote the session the day before and encourage some participation of key stakeholders. Both events (the seminar and this workshop) shared coffee breaks, allowing participants from both groups to mingle. The Partner Up session was promoted on Thursday 16 November when some stakeholders showed interest in participating. The workshop took place on Friday 17 November and included:

- Project presentation by eucen
- World Café activity
- Open discussion
- Time for networking

Encouraged by this event in Barcelona, some participants engaged in the project and participated in the next sessions organised by eucen online and in Cork.

### **Event 2: Online meeting, Thursday 14 December 2023**

The event was kicked off by an interactive section using the tool Mentimeter. This exercise required participants to respond to some questions on the importance of upskilling and stakeholder cooperation and asked them what cooperation arrangements they are currently involved in. The host summarised and commented on all the answers, giving the audience a chance to share their thoughts. This exercise was useful to get people engaged and to obtain insights from them. It worked well and people responded favourably.

After presenting the project Partner Up by eucen, Sofie Daskarova from the Directorate-General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, went into detail about the importance and impact of Upskilling Pathways. This presentation generated interest among participants and lots of questions.

The event then transitioned to a more open discussion format where participants reflected on their experiences and opportunities for further developments. This section was especially useful to brainstorm actionable suggestions for improving UP and also to create collaboration between stakeholders.

### **Event 3: Online meeting, Thursday 09 May 2024**

Carme Royo from the European University Continuing Education Network (eucen) introduced the session and the keynote speakers. The event emphasised the importance of partnerships in promoting lifelong learning and upskilling in various contexts. Specific examples of effective practices were highlighted, demonstrating diverse approaches to skills development and entrepreneurship.

The event featured the following presentations:

Edith Hammer from the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) introduced the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. Her presentation focused on the network's role in promoting lifelong learning at the local level within cities.

Seamus O'Tuama, Director of the Centre for Adult and Community Education at University College Cork, built upon Edith's presentation by providing practical insights from Cork. He emphasised the importance of recognising individuals within the global network.

Monica Quitens from the KU Leuven Association detailed their collaboration between HEIs in Flanders as part of the [Continue](#) initiative. Continue is an online platform for lifelong learning that offers more than 2,000 further training courses in 11 domains and 6 in HEI. The Continue initiative is extremely innovative, offering high-quality further education and training opportunities from this unique network (a university, four colleges and a school of arts) and through collaboration with external partners. Monica's presentation highlighted this regional collaboration and provided more details on the lifelong learning activities offered, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the efforts in place.

### **Event 4: In-person meeting, Cork (IE), Thursday 30 May 2024**

The workshop was promoted at the regional level in particular. The week before the session there were 14 regional stakeholders registered that confirmed their participation. To open the workshop to other groups and make the discussion more transversal and interesting, eucen decided to promote the project in general and the workshop in particular on Wednesday 29 May (i.e. the afternoon before, after the closing of day 1 of the eucen conference), sponsoring a small reception for around 180 guests (i.e. soft drinks and small niggling), where the Partner Up poster was presented and leaflets of Partner Up were distributed. Emerging from this action, 25 participants joined the workshop on Thursday.

On Thursday 30 May, the event began with a Welcome Coffee providing an informal setting for participants to get to know each other and network. Following this, Carme Royo from the European University Continuing Education Network (eucen) officially welcomed attendees and presented the day's activities, followed by an introduction to Partner Up and Upskilling Pathways.

Subsequently, Elisabetta Verginelli also from eucen hosted an interactive slot using the tool Mentimeter. As seen from our previous event, participants respond favourably to interactive sessions using this tool.

Carme Royo then presented the panellists and moderated the discussion among them: Brikena Xhomaqi of the LLL Platform (BE), Steven Frye from AAACE (US), Lorna Moloney

from Cork Education and Training Board (IE), and Louise Bourke from IRD Duhallow (IE). Several questions posed by eucen triggered the discussion in the panel:

1. In your organisation are you facilitating any initiatives related to the upskilling and reskilling of adults? Are these initiatives formally structured or ad-hoc efforts?
2. How can one formally structure a network of collaboration for the benefit of upskilling initiatives? What are you missing to be able to formalise these connections?
3. What are your thoughts on a global network of exchange of practices and ideas for upskilling adults? For example, a US-EU network to share experiences and lessons learnt?

Immediately after, once the audience had warmed up with the panel, the discussion was opened to the participants who commented and asked different questions to the panellists.

After a quick networking and coffee break, participants split into two rooms to share their experiences and get the opportunity to discuss potential future actions to enhance their collaboration towards upskilling pathways in their community.

Finally, attendees regathered in the main room where discussions were summarised before the closing remarks were shared.

The participants gathered for a light networking lunch.

## Opportunities

### **Event 1: In-person meeting in Barcelona (ES), Friday 17 November 2023**

An opportunity which was highlighted was the knowledge and skills present among the participating stakeholders and how, with increased collaboration and peer learning, together we can multiply the reach and impact of upskilling initiatives.

HEIs who would normally focus on traditional recruitment and educational pathways have a major opportunity to offer learning opportunities to non-conventional learners in support of diversity and inclusion, and concurrently, of upskilling objectives. The HEIs representing ULLL National Networks found the approach of Partner Up very interesting and were eager to share the experience with their network with the expectation of encouraging the development of national (or regional) collaborations.

On the other hand, the participating NGOs can reach more specific audiences with information on opportunities but do not have the resources to devote to learning provision.

### **Event 2: Online meeting, Thursday 14 December 2023**

Through the presentation by Sofie Daskarova, Directorate-General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, attendees learnt about the positive trend of Upskilling Pathways (UP) in the EU and the various financial resources available to boost upskilling initiatives. Certainly, the sharing of best practices and lessons learnt among participants was the most obvious opportunity to aid the implementation of UP.

### **Event 3: Online meeting, Thursday 09 May 2024**

Monica Quitens, from the KU Leuven Association in Flanders, showcased their successful model of higher education institutions partnering to offer lifelong learning opportunities. This association, comprising research universities and university colleges, has created a platform called Continue, which consolidates various lifelong learning courses to meet today's demands and industry needs.

Seamus O'Tuama, from University College Cork, showcased the initiative "Leadership in the Community" which engages marginalised groups such as Irish Traveller women and prisoners, which represents a very innovative approach to inclusive upskilling.

Leveraging these collaborations involves expanding partnerships to include more diverse stakeholders such as NGOs, industry actors and local governments.

Best practices such as the use of public awareness campaigns of the 'Continue' initiative to promote LLL can be adapted to identify new stakeholders and enhance collaboration.

Furthermore, adopting a strategic and trust-based approach to partnerships and ensuring sustainable funding are critical for long-term success.

**Event 4: In-person meeting, Cork (IE), Thursday 30 May 2024**

The panel discussion of this event was especially useful in identifying opportunities to enhance upskilling initiatives from different perspectives and different levels.

For example, the sharing of best practices and lessons learnt between European stakeholders and other organisations further afield was discussed. Steven Frye from AAACE (US) welcomed the idea and indeed highlighted that as the US and EU contexts are quite different there are so many small details that we might do differently that we are not even aware of. Having the opportunity to come together and discuss EU vs US upskilling initiatives can be a learning and enriching experience for both sides. All participants agreed that this sort of collaborative effort represents an opportunity and it would be beneficial to take advantage of this. The panel supported the idea of creating a ‘global platform’ (or space) to discuss and share upskilling pathways policies, approaches and challenges.

## Challenges

### **Event 1: In-person meeting in Barcelona (ES), Friday 17 November 2023**

One challenge that emerged was the lack of awareness of the Council's Recommendation on Upskilling Pathway. Participants were aware of upskilling and the importance of upskilling initiatives, but not all were aware of the Council's Recommendation and how this could help them. They also mentioned financing as a barrier to being more proactive in this area.

### **Event 2: Online meeting, Thursday 14 December 2023**

One simple, yet major challenge to collaboration for UP is the lack of knowledge of the Council's Recommendation on Upskilling Pathway. The session revealed that stakeholders are perhaps involved in upskilling in some form, but they are not aware this could be considered as part of UP and how they can leverage the Council's Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways to bolster their current activities.

Secondly, another challenge that emerged was that at the EU level implementation of UP is uneven across member states. Measures often lack scale and coordination and effective outreach is insufficient, especially among the "hardest to reach".

### **Event 3: Online meeting, Thursday 09 May 2024**

Stakeholders identified some barriers and challenges hindering effective collaboration. Key obstacles included funding and resource allocation issues as insufficient financial support and resources limit the ability to sustain collaborative efforts. Policy barriers were also highlighted, particularly rigid regulatory frameworks that hinder flexibility and innovation. Accessibility and inclusion challenges were noted, with specific emphasis on the lack of inclusive practices and accessibility features for diverse groups. Additionally, other challenges such as misaligned priorities among stakeholders and insufficient communication channels were reported as significant impediments to effective collaboration.

### **Event 4: In-person meeting, Cork (IE), Thursday 30 May 2024**

Participants highlighted time constraints and competing priorities as a challenge to effective collaboration with other organisations. Specifically, internal agendas and objectives get prioritised over long-term collective efforts even though these have the potential to have a positive impact on the individual organisation level

## Possible solutions

### **Event 1: In-person meeting in Barcelona (ES), Friday 17 November 2023**

The development group meeting itself helped in clarifying doubts about UP.

### **Event 2: Online meeting, Thursday 14 December 2023**

Increased efforts in outreach activities and awareness campaigns were identified as solutions to the lack of understanding and knowledge about UP. Whereas, to tackle the uneven UP implementation across member states, further collaboration is needed.

### **Event 3: Online meeting, Thursday 09 May 2024**

To address the challenges and barriers identified, several solutions and strategies were proposed.

For financial challenges in upskilling initiatives, models such as public-private partnerships and blended financing mechanisms were discussed, highlighting the importance of shared investment between government and industry.

Policy changes to overcome legal and regulatory barriers to collaboration can be supported through comprehensive stakeholder engagement and the establishment of clear, flexible guidelines that facilitate cross-sector cooperation.

Strategies to promote partnerships in upskilling programmes include fostering a culture of collaboration through networking events and forums and developing formal agreements to solidify commitments.

### **Event 4: In-person meeting, Cork (IE), Thursday 30 May 2024**

To address the challenges of time constraints and competing priorities hindering effective collaboration, several solutions were proposed. Integrating collaborative goals into individual and organisational objectives can align internal priorities with long-term collective efforts. To promote partnerships in upskilling, fostering a culture of collaboration through regular networking events, forums and cross-organisational workshops can be beneficial. Establishing formal agreements can help solidify commitments and provide a clear framework for collaboration. Additionally, leveraging technology platforms for better coordination and communication can streamline efforts and maintain momentum in partnership activities.

## Implementation plans

### **Event 1: In-person meeting in Barcelona (ES), Friday 17 November 2023**

The short-term goals of the participants included going back to their countries and encouraging more engagement and collaboration with existing and new stakeholders in their communities. Also, their participation in future Partner Up events could give them a better global perspective and more insights into the topic that could help them advance in their current initiatives.

### **Event 2: Online meeting, Thursday 14 December 2023**

At the EU level, the long-term goal of UP from the European Commission's perspective is to have at least 60% of all adults participating in training every year, by 2030. In the short-term, although the trend is positive, more can be done to bolster upskilling initiatives. Cooperation among key stakeholders and peer learning were highlighted as the way forward.

### **Event 3: Online meeting, Thursday 09 May 2024**

The upskilling initiatives discussed in the event have both short-term and long-term goals. In the short term, the focus is on identifying skill gaps and providing training to enhance productivity. Long-term goals aim at continuous learning and development, ensuring employees stay relevant in a rapidly changing market. These initiatives align with stakeholders' objectives by boosting organisational capabilities and employee satisfaction.

The timeline to implement this is varied and includes initial assessment and planning, pilot programmes, full-scale rollout and periodic evaluations. To adapt and evolve the implementation plan, strategies such as regular feedback and flexible training will be employed. Contingency plans include alternative training methods, backup resources and crisis management protocols to mitigate unforeseen challenges or disruptions.

### **Event 4: In-person meeting, Cork (IE), Thursday 30 May 2024**

The short-term goals are to make use of newly established connections created thanks to the development groups meetings of Partner Up and stay in touch to discuss further



collaborations. The long-term goal would be to establish more formal collaboration mechanisms and embed them within each organisation so that they can be valued and prioritised. Key milestones for this include internal discussions in each organisation to get the buy-in of the senior-level management, followed by the kick-off of informal meetings to ultimately agree upon and establish a clear and formalised collaboration structure.

Responsibilities among stakeholders are yet to be agreed upon, this would take place after discussions with the senior leadership.

Contingency plans to mitigate unforeseen challenges include appointing a representative that would take on the role of coordinator that will oversee all stakeholders and remind them of the agreed-upon responsibilities.

## Evaluation of the events

### **Event 1: In-person meeting in Barcelona (ES), Friday 17 November 2023**

Feedback was collected orally at the end of the event. Participants rated the event favourably. Firstly, attendees reported it was very useful for clarifying doubts over the existing Council's Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways. Secondly, it was useful to have an in-person event to get to know new stakeholders key in the area of upskilling.

### **Event 2: Online meeting, Thursday 14 December 2023**

Feedback was collected orally at the end of the event. Participant feedback highlighted that the interactive session was very well received because it breaks up the long online meetings and enables participation from all. The duration of this online event was slightly too long and participants struggled to stay engaged online after a few hours, suggestions were made to shorten the online event in the future.

The presentation by the EU Commission was the most valuable session providing new information and food for thought for all.

### **Event 3: Online meeting, Thursday 09 May 2024**

Feedback was collected orally at the end of the event. The evaluations left by participants reflected a generally positive experience. The event resulted in fewer participants than those signed up initially because 9 May happened to be a holiday in some European countries. Nevertheless, the people who did attend were very interested and they appreciated the high level of interaction between speakers and participants.

The speakers themselves reported the event as a learning opportunity as they were also able to hear from the other speakers, get inspiration and build new connections with key stakeholders. Discussions were perceived positively, highlighting the depth and relevance of the topics covered.

### **Event 4: In-person meeting, Cork (IE), Thursday 30 May 2024**

Feedback was collected orally at the end of the event. Attendees reported the event as a useful learning and networking opportunity. The event helped discuss collaboration opportunities with lots of potential to foster upskilling initiatives and push agendas to align with these activities. The split rooms were reported to be especially popular because they gave a chance for the audience to mingle with presenters and ask questions.