

PARTNERUP

Development Groups

Country Reports



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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

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 national level



Italy



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Italy

Partner organisation(s): FORMA.Azione srl

Participating stakeholders

The Italian Development Groups include relevant stakeholders at the national and regional levels such as public authorities, educational institutions and reference networks, organisations and experts. They play a significant role in advancing the Upskilling Pathways initiative in Italy, by:

- leveraging their expertise, resources, and networks to facilitate the identification of individuals' learning needs, develop tailored learning pathways, and provide support services to ensure successful outcomes
- designing and implementing programmes aimed at upskilling and reskilling adults, particularly those at risk of unemployment or in need of new skills to adapt to evolving labour market demands;
- promoting awareness of the initiative, encouraging participation, and advocating for policy changes to further support lifelong learning and skills development at the national level
- influencing policy-making processes, advocating for the integration of lifelong learning principles into national policies and strategies aimed at addressing employment and skills challenges.

The main stakeholders who participated in the Italian Development Groups were:

- the **National Coordinator for the Adult Education Agenda**, working under the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis, a key institution in public policy research and analysis. The work of the Coordinator is dedicated to promoting lifelong learning and enhancing the skills and competences of adults across the country. Through various initiatives, the Coordinator aims to improve access to education, foster inclusive learning environments, and support the professional and personal development of adult learners. His role involves coordinating efforts among stakeholders, implementing educational programmes, and monitoring progress to ensure alignment with national and European educational objectives.
- **INDIRE** (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research) which serves as the ERASMUS+ National Agency in Italy, plays a pivotal role in the Adult Education sector. As part of its responsibilities, INDIRE manages and promotes the ERASMUS+ programme, facilitating opportunities for adult learners to participate in international mobility projects, training, and educational exchanges. By supporting these initiatives, INDIRE aims to enhance the quality of adult education, foster lifelong learning, and contribute to the professional and personal growth of adult learners. The agency also works to strengthen collaboration between educational institutions, organisations, and stakeholders, ensuring that adult education in Italy aligns with broader European objectives and standards.
- **RIDAP**, the Italian Network of Public Adult Education Centres, is a collaborative framework designed to promote and support lifelong learning initiatives across Italy. RIDAP focuses on enhancing access to educational opportunities for adults, fostering skills development, and encouraging continuous personal and professional growth. The network aims to create an integrated approach to adult education by sharing best

- practices, resources, and innovative strategies. RIDAP's efforts contribute to the overall improvement of adult education, aligning with national and European policies to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning.
- **RUIAP**, the Italian University Network for Lifelong Learning, is a consortium of Italian universities dedicated to promoting lifelong learning. RUIAP aims to enhance access to higher education for adults and provide opportunities for continuous personal and professional development. By fostering collaboration among member universities, RUIAP facilitates the exchange of best practices, the development of innovative learning programmes, and implementation of policies that support adult education. The network's initiatives align with national and European strategies, ensuring that adult learners can acquire new skills and knowledge throughout their lives, thereby contributing to their employability and personal growth.
 - the **Forum del Terzo Settore** (Third Sector Forum), an umbrella organisation representing a diverse range of non-profit organisations, associations, and social enterprises in Italy. Its mission is to promote and support the activities of the third sector, which includes volunteer organisations, social cooperatives, and NGOs. The Forum advocates for policies that enhance social inclusion and community development, facilitates collaboration among member organisations and provides resources and training to strengthen their capabilities. By promoting the value and impact of the third sector, the Forum Terzo Settore plays a crucial role in enhancing Italy's social fabric and supporting civic initiatives.
 - **EDAFORUM** is an organisation dedicated to the promotion and support of adult education and lifelong learning. It serves as a platform for dialogue, exchange of best practices, and collaboration among educators, institutions, and stakeholders involved in adult education. EDAFORUM aims to enhance the quality and accessibility of adult learning opportunities, advocate for policies that support adult education, and raise public awareness about the importance of lifelong learning for personal and professional development. Through its initiatives and activities, EDAFORUM contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and informed society.
 - **Erasmus+ Ambassadors for Adult Education**, coordinated by INDIRE, are individuals who actively promote the Erasmus+ programme by sharing their experiences and success stories, highlighting the positive impacts on their personal and professional growth. They provide guidance and support to potential participants, encouraging adult learners to take advantage of the opportunities for international mobility, training, and educational exchanges. Through their advocacy and outreach, these ambassadors help raise awareness about the benefits of lifelong learning and the Erasmus+ programme, contributing to the enhancement of adult education in Italy.
 - **4 Territorial networks for lifelong learning**, recently set up in Bologna (local), Monza Brianza (local), Sardinia (regional) and Campania (regional) territories, which play a vital role in adult education by fostering collaboration among local institutions, organisations, and stakeholders to enhance access to learning opportunities for adults. These networks facilitate the coordination of resources, expertise, and initiatives at the community level, ensuring that adult learners have access to relevant and high-quality educational programmes and services. By promoting partnerships between educational providers, employers, community organisations, and government agencies, territorial networks for lifelong learning support the development of tailored learning pathways that meet the diverse needs and interests of adult learners. They

also serve as platforms for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and innovation in adult education, contributing to the personal and professional development of individuals and the socio-economic development of communities.

- **Public authorities (Regione Piemonte, Provincia Trento)** which, as regional and provincial authorities, respectively, have the responsibility of developing and implementing policies and programmes that promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults within their territories. They allocate resources, provide funding, and establish partnerships with educational institutions, non-profit organisations, and other stakeholders to support the delivery of adult education and training programmes. Additionally, these public authorities offer guidance, advocacy, validation and support services to adult learners, ensuring they have access to relevant educational opportunities that meet their needs.
- **Polo Équipe Formativa Territoriale dell'Umbria** (Territorial Training Team of Umbria) was established to ensure the dissemination of actions related to the Piano Nazionale Scuola Digitale¹ (National Digital School Plan), promote training actions for teaching staff, and enhance students' skills in innovative teaching methodologies. It serves as a hub for educational initiatives and collaboration in the Umbria region of Italy. It functions as a coordinating body that brings together educational institutions, training providers, employers, and other stakeholders to enhance the quality and accessibility of education and training opportunities within the region.
- **Companies** which are investing in the continuous development of their workforce and offer various training and upskilling programmes for their employees, or offering services for adult learning organisations (i.e. platforms for issuing badges).

¹ <https://www.miur.gov.it/scuola-digitale>

Activities and methods used

For carrying out the Development groups, a variety of activities were utilised to engage participants, generate actionable suggestions for improving the Upskilling Pathways (UP) initiative, and foster collaboration between stakeholders, starting from 5 main priorities

Priority 1: the lack of clarity in relationships between various entities undermines the coherence of the adult learning system. Efforts to engage local actors to bridge the gap between national policies and local needs must be strengthened.

Priority 2: the link between lifelong learning/adult education and the world of work is weak, and incentives to support the commitment of key actors and professionals in public/private partnerships are limited, especially for employers, who are usually primarily interested in vocational training.

Priority 3: It is essential to inform and actively involve adults in the processes of education and validation of non-formal and informal learning, especially to identify potential learners with low qualifications.

Priority 4: there is a need for a clearer definition of roles, guidelines, processes, and mechanisms for recognizing prior learning experiences that enhance the access of individuals to further education and employment opportunities.

Priority 5: the professional profile of teachers/trainers in adult education and training does not require specific training focused on adult education. Consequently, their professionalism is not always recognised, both politically and communally, due to the undervaluation of adult education and training in general. This also applies to trainers operating in vocational education and training.

The activities included:

- **webinars** featured contributions from experts and testimonials, providing participants with valuable insights and perspectives on various aspects of the UP initiative;
- **panels of experts** from different backgrounds, organised to discuss key topics related to UP, offering diverse viewpoints and facilitating informed discussions among participants;
- **interactive sessions** based on group work or tools such as Jamboard, allowing participants to actively engage with the content, exchange ideas, and collaborate in real time.

Among these activities, interactive sessions based on group work or Jamboard were particularly successful in engaging participants and generating actionable suggestions. These sessions allowed for active participation, collaboration, and the exchange of diverse perspectives, resulting in concrete ideas and recommendations for improving the UP initiative.

Participants also responded favourably to webinars featuring contributions from experts and testimonials. These sessions provided valuable insights and real-world examples, enhancing participants' understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with UP implementation.

Overall, a combination of interactive sessions, expert contributions, and panel discussions proved to be effective in engaging participants, generating specific suggestions, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

Opportunities

In Italy, collaborations and initiatives related to Upskilling Pathways (UP) include local, regional and national partnerships among educational institutions, public authorities, adult learning providers, key actors in the employment and labour market and networks and third-sector organisations. These collaborations represent opportunities to be transferred or scaled up as best practices.

Regional and local level

The existing Territorial Networks for Lifelong Learning serve as models of effective collaboration at the local level. These networks bring together stakeholders from various sectors to address the diverse learning needs of adults and align education and training initiatives with local labour market demands. Leveraging the experience and expertise of these networks, by transferring the model to other areas, can enhance UP initiatives by promoting coordination, sharing resources, and fostering innovation in adult education. **ReMAP** is promoted by the Metropolitan City of Bologna in collaboration with the Emilia Romagna Region and in partnership with the Local Public Adult Education Centre. It includes 84 public and private entities working closely on the topic of lifelong learning within the metropolitan area. Following a process of dialogue and consultation, a Framework Agreement for the establishment and development of the Metropolitan Network for Lifelong Learning was signed. Signatories include the Regional Employment Agency, lead local authorities of socio-sanitary districts, National Association of Municipalities – regional branch, provincial education offices, Provincial Centres for Adult Education, secondary schools offering adult education, University of Bologna, accredited vocational training centres, Chamber of Commerce, business associations, trade unions, and third-sector organisations. The Agreement defines the service levels of ReMAP, mutual commitments, the composition of the network, and its governance. The network operates at three levels: information and guidance; training level; and skills enhancement level, including skills identification, validation and certification.

ReTAP Campania is the Regional Network for the development and strengthening of Adult Learning and Education throughout the Campania Region. It includes the Regional School Office for Campania, the Education Department of the Campania Region, the Regional Centre for Research, Experimentation, and Development for Adult Education, and the eight Provincial Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) operating in the region. ReTAP aims to promote lifelong education and guidance, implement appropriate pathways for the adult population, organise training seminars for CPIA teaching and administrative staff, and establish partnerships between CPIAs in Campania and public, private, and third-sector entities to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all. Furthermore, ReTAP aims to facilitate institutional interaction among CPIAs, the Region, Universities, local authorities, and other educational institutions to jointly plan common research, experimentation, and development actions in adult education, as well as to support digital innovation.

ReSAP Sardegna - this network among public adult education centres, employers' associations and public employment services as well as Regional Departments for Education, Health and Welfare, promotes lifelong learning through sustainable formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities at various stages of life, as a fundamental right for individuals to enhance their skills, knowledge, and abilities for personal, civic, and professional development. Additionally, ReSAP fosters an integrated regional system for

lifelong learning as a space for public-private partnership experimentation to support citizens in acquiring skills required by the most innovative strategic sectors of the territory, fostering active and inclusive citizenship. The interventions coordinated within ReSAP are structured around 3 areas as already mentioned for ReMAP.

Territorial Network for Lifelong Learning in Monza-Brianza: the network includes the public authority Province of Monza Brianza, as well as Adult Learning and VET providers, employers, third sector organisations, companies and social enterprises, employment services and the national academic network for lifelong learning (RUIAP). It aims to facilitate collaboration by sharing analyses of needs and committing to meet them together. The primary objective is to prioritise keeping the entire population engaged in the learning and labour market, encompassing economic, cultural, and social aspects, by encouraging the acquisition of new skills beneficial for personal and collective development. Therefore, the parties share a common desire to establish an integrated system for lifelong learning that offers opportunities for both employed and unemployed citizens to understand their rights and duties as citizens, address gaps in access to various services, and promote integration, reintegration, and retention in the labour market.

These networks could be widened including:

- **industry associations and chambers of commerce**, which can provide insights into emerging skills needs and support the development of relevant training programmes;
- **technology providers** offering e-learning solutions and digital tools to enhance access to education and training;
- **VET providers and employment services** (both public and private)
- **community organisations and social enterprises** working with groups at risk of social exclusion, who can provide support services and tailor training programmes to their needs.

The transferring and/or scaling up at the local/regional level of the model of Territorial Networks for Lifelong Learning will allow the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships and coordination mechanisms to ensure the alignment of education and training initiatives with labour market needs.

National level

EPALE Italy Platform

Firstly, the EPALE Italy Platform can be leveraged for knowledge sharing and collaboration, considering it provides a space to share and adopt best practices from other EU countries that have successfully implemented UP initiatives, among others. By accessing and disseminating the vast array of resources available on EPALE, such as toolkits, research papers, and case studies, local UP programmes can be significantly informed and improved. Additionally, networking and forming partnerships through EPALE's features can connect experts in adult education and upskilling from across Europe, leading to valuable collaborations. Hosting webinars and workshops via the platform can further bring together stakeholders from different regions to discuss and develop new UP strategies. Furthermore, professional development opportunities on EPALE can enhance the skills of educators and trainers involved in UP initiatives. Training programmes and peer learning through discussion forums and collaborative projects on the platform can contribute to the continuous improvement of adult education professionals.

EPALE Ambassadors

EPALE Ambassadors can play a crucial role in advocacy and raising awareness about UP initiatives. By leveraging their experiences and networks, they can help promote the benefits of UP initiatives among policymakers, employers, and the general public. This can also involve engaging in advocacy efforts to influence national and regional policies that support and fund UP initiatives.

Moreover, EPALE Ambassadors can facilitate partnerships by bridging gaps between different sectors such as education, industry, and government, thus creating holistic and integrated UP programmes. Appointing local champions through the Ambassadors' network can also promote UP initiatives at the community level, ensuring engagement at the grassroots level.

Disseminating information about upcoming UP opportunities, funding, and support services can be effectively managed through the communication channels of EPALE Ambassadors. Sharing success stories and testimonials of UP initiatives can inspire and motivate other regions and stakeholders to participate in similar efforts.

EDAFORUM

After participating in the development groups, and thanks to this experience, EDAFORUM promoted a wide working group, involving different stakeholders in Adult Learning including FORMA.Azione, to create and implement a national strategy to contrast existing educational poverty in the country by building an organic and integrated lifelong learning system to continuously provide all people with the knowledge and skills needed to live and work. The Strategy, under development, will include initiatives to be undertaken to ensure the exercise of the right to lifelong learning from adults and will be the basis of the PARTNER UP Implementation plan for Italy.

Challenges

The major barriers and challenges hindering effective collaboration in upskilling initiatives, as identified by stakeholders, include:

- **limited funding and resources**, which pose significant challenges to the development and implementation of collaborative upskilling programmes. Competing priorities and budget constraints often restrict investment in lifelong learning initiatives, leading to gaps in service provision and inequitable access to educational opportunities. In particular, CPIAs (Public Local Centres for Adult Education) face a lot of difficulties in performing their functions due to a lack of premises, facilities, and equipment, inadequate staffing with proper training, insufficient widespread presence, and a lack of funding proportional to the needs;
- **inconsistent or fragmented policy frameworks across different sectors and levels of governance** can impede collaboration in upskilling efforts. The implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the development of adult population skills approved in 2021 is not considered to be successful. Misalignment between education, employment, and social policies may result in overlapping responsibilities, duplication of efforts, and regulatory barriers that hinder cross-sector cooperation;
- **insufficient training and professional development opportunities**, as well as a **lack of recognition** of adult learning professionals, hinder the adoption of innovative practices and the implementation of effective collaboration strategies;
- **lack of cooperation with key actors in the labour market**, mainly employers, which can hinder the relevance and responsiveness of upskilling initiatives to labour market demands, resulting in a mismatch between skills acquired and skills needed in the workforce. Moreover, generally, Employment Services act as regional instruments strictly oriented towards employment interventions, generally without connections to other organisations operating in the fields of education and social services;
- **limited involvement of the Third Sector**, which plays a crucial role in enhancing non-formal skills.

Possible solutions

- **Organising "The General States of Lifelong Learning" event** to start a campaign to highlight the issue of educational poverty in Italy and propose positive examples of lifelong learning networks. The event will involve public, media, and political engagement, showcasing successful experiences from formal, non-formal, and work training sectors. The event will facilitate dialogue among cultural, media, political, and union representatives to drive solutions and improvements in lifelong learning across the country.
- **Creation and implementation of specific working groups to map experiences and ensure a collaborative, continuous, and integrated approach.**
 1. experience realised by Adult Learning formal education providers, coordinated by INDIRE. This group will liaise with RIDAP and RUIAP to verify cooperative practices, organisations involved, locations, institutional support, funding, and results;
 2. experiences carried out by non-formal education structures, coordinated by EPALE. This group will collaborate with EPALE ambassadors and stakeholders, as well as the Third Sector Forum, to map cooperative practices, organisations involved, locations, institutional support, funding, and results;
 3. experiences in Vocational Training and the world of work, coordinated by Sylvia Liuti, FORMA.Azione. This group will liaise with employment services and VET providers to verify cooperative practices, organisations involved, locations, institutional support, funding, and results.

Once mapped, the highlighted practices will be promoted to ensure their continuity and systematisation through combined support actions.
- **Continue working on transferring and adapting the model of the territorial lifelong learning network**, consisting of formal and non-formal organisations working synergistically in a continuous, integrated manner, with an official agreement and engagement with institutional levels to impact policymaking at local and regional levels.
- **Define a list of contacts to enhance the campaign for lifelong learning** and enrich it with proposals capable of combating educational poverty in the country.

Implementation plans

Short-term goals

- Organising "The General States of Lifelong Learning" event to raise awareness about educational poverty and showcase successful lifelong learning networks.
- Establishing collaborative working groups to map experiences and integrate them into a cohesive lifelong learning network.

Long-term goals

- Systematising a framework for stakeholders' cooperation, mutual learning and exchange in UP, meant to inform and support policy-making in adult learning.
- Establishing a continuous and integrated lifelong learning system nationwide based on Territorial Networks for Lifelong Learning.

Alignment with Stakeholders' Objectives

Stakeholders aim to address funding limitations, policy inconsistencies, insufficient training opportunities, lack of employer cooperation, and limited involvement of the Third Sector. Aligning goals involves enhancing collaboration, improving policy frameworks, increasing training opportunities, and fostering stronger ties with employers and the Third Sector.

Timeline and key milestones

Short-term: organising the event within the current year to initiate the campaign and promote; ending the mapping process and sharing interesting practices to enhance the dialogue among stakeholders and transfer models that are demonstrated to be effective.

Long-term: establishing a permanent exchange among policymakers at national and regional levels, to support the role of Adult Learning for inclusion, democracy, and equality.

Responsibilities and Governance

Responsibilities will be distributed among stakeholders, working on cross-sector coordination for enhancing cooperation among education, employment, and social sectors for cohesive policy implementation.

Clear roles and responsibilities are defined for all stakeholders involved in the upskilling initiatives.

Adaptation strategies and contingency plan

Strategies include flexibility in policy adaptation, continuous dialogue among stakeholders, monitoring of outcomes, and adjusting initiatives based on feedback and emerging challenges. Regular reviews and updates to the implementation plan will ensure relevance and effectiveness.

Evaluation of the events

Participants generally rated the event positively, highlighting its relevance and usefulness in addressing the topic of upskilling. Several stakeholders at the national level openly shared that PARTNER UP is the only initiative at the national level that effectively works on stakeholders' cooperation in UP, highlighting the main challenges in Adult Learning.

A large majority found the webinars and workshops well-structured and comprehensive, covering various aspects of upskilling initiatives effectively.

Panels, experts' contributions and interactive sessions were perceived as engaging and insightful, with participants appreciating the diverse perspectives shared by speakers and panellists.

The results presented were considered valuable, providing practical insights and actionable recommendations for enhancing upskilling efforts.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Increasing interactivity and opportunities for networking, such as breakout sessions or group discussions, to facilitate deeper engagement and knowledge sharing.
- Sharing more case studies and interactive exercises to make the content more tangible and applicable to their specific situations.

Additionally, several participants expressed interest in follow-up sessions or resources to continue learning and exchanging ideas beyond the event.