

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

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



Greece



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Greece

Partner organisation(s): Hellenic Adult Education Association

Participating stakeholders

First development group

The first development group took place on December 11, 2023, under the auspices of the General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training, and Lifelong Learning at the Ministry of Education.

86 participants representing various bodies and organisations attended the meeting. More specifically, there were stakeholders from:

- Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport (in charge of planning, supervising and evaluating any VET actions, policies and programmes)
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs- Hellenic Manpower Employment Organisation (implementation of government policy on CVET, specifically on upskilling and reskilling)
- Ministry of Economy and Finance - Special Management Secretariat of European Social Fund Programmes
- National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational Guidance(responsible for creating a policy framework for the development of lifelong learning and certification of qualifications in Greece, linking with the open market and responding to the needs of the citizens, a central issue in EU policy)
- Human Resources Directorate, of the AtticaRegion(responsible for Personnel Training)
- Second Chance Schools (VET providers)
- General Secretary of Commerce of Greece (Coordinates the Greek unions / highly involved in adult learning)
- Adult Educators (providers)
- The Hellenic Red Cross(NGO, training provider)
- UNICEF (NGO, active in planning, monitoring, and financing of Roma inclusion in all aspects of social and economic life including housing, health, education, and employment)
- Learners (beneficiaries)
- Greek General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and the Fight Against Poverty
- Hellenic Open University (Adult Learning and Education provider (formal))
- Career consultants
- Institutes of Vocational Training (VET providers)
- Labour Institute of GSEE (scientific and research organisation of the trade unions in Greece, for GSEE to make substantiated interventions at the social and economic level, in employment, education etc.)
- Youth&Lifelong Learning Foundation (implement programmes of training and general education of adults that address the general population of the country, unemployed, youths but also the elderly)
- Task Force for the Inclusion of Roma Communities
- Department of Modern Greek Language of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Second development group

The second development group took place on December 15, 2023, online, to have participants from all over Greece.

A total of **49 participants** representing various bodies and organisations attended the meeting. More specifically, there were stakeholders from:

- Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport (in charge of planning, supervising and evaluating any VET actions, policies and programmes)
- Municipality of Larisa (Provides adult learning opportunities)
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Adult Learning and Education provider (formal))
- University of Peloponnese (Adult Learning and Education provider (formal))
- Decentralised Administration(exercise devolved state powers in urban planning, environmental and energy policy, migration and citizenship)
- Second Chance Schools from all over Greece (provide learning opportunities)
- Vocational Secondary Schools (VET providers)
- Adult Educators
- Trainers/ teachers
- Learners

Activities and methods used

First development group

Speakers: G.Voutsinos, General Secretary of Vocational Education, Training & Lifelong Learning opened the event; presentations from various stakeholders followed:

- G. Rempoutsika, CEO of the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational Guidance, regarding their **role in implementing UP**
- I. Papageorgiou, representative of the Labour Institute of the General Confederation of Greek Workers, on their **actions for the upgrading of skills**
- D. Patronas, Head of the European Programmes of the Hellenic Adult Education Association made an introductory presentation on the objectives and results of the Programme, **Upskilling Pathways**, the results of the **Stakeholder Analysis** and the **Key Discussion Areas** that would follow during the meeting
- A. Kokkos, Scientific Officer of the Programme and President of the Hellenic Adult Education Association presented the **survey on upgrading low skills** in Greece
- Ch. Manthou, Adult Educator, and former Director of the Second Chance School of Ioannina, on the **multilevel synergies** of the Second Chance Schools
- M.Magoula, a graduate of Second Chance School of Athens, on her **experience** as a learner
- E. Randis, a graduate of Second Chance School of Korydallos, on the **benefits** of participating as a learner and member of the Roma community.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to a workshop on opportunities, challenges, and suggestions for collaborative action plans. The participants were divided into small working groups, to discuss specific questions that were handed to them by the organisers regarding:

- The main obstacles to the development of skills of people with low skills and synergies -Possible solutions
- Good practices from partnerships and other initiatives related to UP at the national or EU level that could be exploited
- Resources, organisations or stakeholders that could be included in the collective effort to strengthen UP

- Incentives that would encourage the participation and engagement of people with low skills in activities to upgrade their skills
- Strategies that can be used to promote partnerships
- Short-term and long-term objectives for the upgrading of skills – Responsible bodies and allocation of responsibilities

The working groups shared their ideas during those discussions and then one representative from each group presented the outcomes to the plenary.

As expected, the most engaging activity was the workshop, where stakeholders worked together and tried to find common ground for collaboration.

Second development group

Speakers:

- A. Kokkos, Scientific Officer of the Programme and President of the Hellenic Adult Education Association greeted the participants and presented the **survey** on upgrading low skills in Greece
- D. Patronas, Head of the European Programmes of the Hellenic Adult Education Association made an introductory presentation on the objectives and results of the Programme, Upskilling Pathways, the results of the Stakeholder Analysis, and the Key Discussion Areas that would follow during the meeting
- D. Deligiannis, Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Larissa, on **good practices for cooperation** among bodies and organisations for social inclusion
- Ch. Manthou, Adult Educator, and former Director of the Second Chance School of Ioannina, on the **multilevel synergies** of the Second Chance Schools
- Learners, graduates of Second Chance Schools on their **experience** from their participation in training activities.

The presentations were followed by a discussion on opportunities, challenges, and suggestions for collaborative action plans. The participants were asked to share their ideas on:

- The main obstacles to the development of skills of people with low skills and synergies -Possible solutions

- Good practices from partnerships and other initiatives related to UP at the national or EU level that could be exploited
- Resources, organisations or stakeholders that could be included in the collective effort to strengthen UP
- Incentives that would encourage the participation and engagement of people with low skills in activities to upgrade their skills
- Strategies that can be used to promote partnerships
- Short-term and long-term objectives for the upgrading of skills – Responsible bodies and allocation of responsibilities

Opportunities

The Greek state has substantial experience in identifying opportunities for collaboration with other European countries and their public and private sector organisations. In the specific field of Upskilling Pathways, the country relies basically on two public structures: the Ministry of Education, and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The above two Ministries, at the same time constitute the two major channels that resources and economic funds are distributed to the country.

Some of the stakeholders that we have come along with are also tapping directly into European Union funds, through a multitude of European Union financed projects, in cooperation with Partners from all member countries of the Union. Such examples providing excellent results that are characterised as Best Practices are the training and certification of brewers as it was run by the Hellenic Brewery of Atalanti (EZA), and the multitude of Upskilling Pathways actions implemented over the years by the Municipality of Larissa.

Regarding untapped resources, organisations, or stakeholders that can be brought into the collaborative effort to enhance Upskilling Pathways, it seems that though there is a significant number of organisations that are active in the field, there is still scope in involving a greater number of actors. Such organisations are the local Chambers of Industry, Tourism, and Commerce. All three of the above Chambers have experience with European Projects and have been cooperating with Partners from EU member states, thus it is safe to assume that apart from their present involvement in Upskilling Pathways initiatives, their further and deeper involvement in the field, coupled with their knowledge of the local markets and the needs of the target group can ensure the best outcome of such initiatives.

As for best practices from other regions or countries that can be adapted to improve collaboration in upskilling efforts, almost all of the ones that have been identified by the present Project can be transferred to Greece. The main obstacle would be the bureaucratic procedures that are problematic in our country and can prove to be cumbersome or even forbidding in some instances.

Challenges

There are several major barriers and challenges stakeholders identified that are hindering effective collaboration. Primarily the fact that Upskilling Pathways Initiatives come under the responsibility and jurisdiction of two separate Ministries, the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Though both are responsible for the implementation of the national policy and are funded by the central government, it is only natural that they have their agenda and priorities of action, which put the Upskilling Pathways initiatives at a different pace for each of the two. Moreover, the collaboration of the Ministries is not ideal.

Such initiatives have been implemented in the past and are still being implemented with good results, especially through European Union Projects. What was put forward during our meetings with representatives of the above institutions was the fact that in several cases there was no continuation or putting into practice and exploitation of the projects' findings or results once the projects were finished. This was mainly due to the lack of funds or the change in the Ministries' priorities.

A further identified challenge consists in the ability of Upskilling Pathways providers to reach the target group through the "usual" communications channels, such as websites' announcements and calls for participation interest, press releases, etc. prove to be of limited use, due to the very specific characteristics of the individuals forming the group, as well as their geographic disparity and local conditions.

The number of local initiatives is rather small compared with the ones that have been planned for the national level by the central government. The stakeholders have argued that local projects are needed to address the specific needs of a geographic entity instead of broad-swiping initiatives that may not be in tune with their day-to-day labour and business reality. This seems to be a valid point as we have seen that most of the local initiatives have proven to be highly successful and effective in providing the target group with skills that have helped them in changing their labour market position and status and constitute examples of best practices.

A critical obstacle that was identified refers to the funding and resource allocation, which though having their source at the central government level, are not aimed at the same objectives, due to the lack of effective communication between the key actors. Though all organisations follow the national policy, each is prioritising differently which results in a lack of coordination and a decrease in the efficiency of the projects.

Other challenges that hinder the effectiveness of the Upskilling Pathways initiatives and actions in offering upskilling opportunities are the following:

- lack of concrete connection of the relevant training programmes to the local labour market needs, due to ineffective training needs analysis,
- lack of credible accreditation of acquired skills,

- low motivation of the members of the target group to participate in Upskilling Pathways initiatives mostly because of low levels of self-esteem and traumatic past experiences from their participation in formal education.

Possible solutions

Several solutions have been proposed during our developers' meetings.

Firstly, the enhancement of the role of Second Chance Schools, as they are, in Greece, the most effective tool in providing a certified level of education that is generally recognised within the country. This was put forward in our meetings both from senior members of their organisations and the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport, under whose umbrella they function, as well as graduates who pinpointed the real-life benefits of attending them.

Secondly, the need for a close cooperation between the two Ministries, the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sport and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs which are the two key actors in the field of Upskilling Pathways, since they constitute the government bodies that translate the central government policies into specific initiatives. The two Ministries will have to be in constant communication to analyse the situation of the target group, identify possible opportunities for action, create contingency plans focused on the links between local labour market needs and local target groups needs, oversee the creation of Upskilling Pathway courses by the providers and distribute the required funds accordingly.

Thirdly, the necessity of close cooperation between the local Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Tourism, etc, with the Professional Bodies and the strong support of the local government will ensure the creation of viable programmes which will be effective in providing the target group with the required skills that are needed in the specific locality and labour market.

There seems to be no need for specific models or strategies to overcome financial challenges in upskilling initiatives. What is needed is a comprehensive strategy concerning the distribution of funds from the central government down to the providers through the ministries and other public organisations involved.

Legal and regulatory barriers to collaboration do not exist. The creation of central government policies that will cover the responsibilities, initiatives and time frames to respond to specific needs from the part of the two ministries and the local government is believed to be of great assistance in the formulation and speedy implementation of Upskilling Pathways.

Promoting partnerships in Upskilling Pathways could be significantly strengthened, on the one hand, by streamlining the procedures and diminishing the bureaucratic burden of the non-governmental entities that seek to participate in the relative initiatives. On the other hand, there is a need for a comprehensive strategy regarding reaching, communicating, and motivating the members of the target group to take part in the relative actions. During our meetings with the developers, the fact that local government, public agencies, and providers have to become creative to address the specific target group, through other than the usual communications channels, was repeated. This singularity points to the need for close cooperation and common planning of all the actors involved.

There seems to be no need for specific incentives to be introduced to encourage the participation and engagement of stakeholders. During our meetings, the declared and underlying message of the involved parties was focused on the need to remove obstacles rather than providing financial or other forms of incentives.

Implementation plans

The stakeholders and developers that took part in our two meetings pointed out that unless the effective and efficient coordination of the two Ministries takes place, it is difficult to formulate strategies, plans, milestone events, etc on a national level, as the policies of these two main actors of the field may change according to their priorities which are not dedicated solely to the upskilling of persons that are facing their extraction from the everyday economic life of the country, but with a variety of subjects concerning the totality of citizens and aliens residing in the country.

Having said that, they also declared that their most pressing need is to establish local strategies that will render their organisations as flexible as possible. Only through flexibility they perceive that they will be able to continue trying to exploit all opportunities that arise in upskilling, by cooperating, communicating with the target group as best as possible, taking into account the local labour market needs, and seeking the participation of the local government, the professional bodies and chambers of their territories, while remaining alert to the opportunities that may arise through the participation in European Union projects as well as publicly funded initiatives.

A strong case has been generally made for the continuation of the existence of Second Chance Schools, which cater to the needs of both locals and aliens residing in the country since the completion of their course is equivalent to the nine-year compulsory attendance of a Greek school of the country's formal education system. At the time of writing this report, we are awaiting the official signing of a multi-ministerial decision that will allow Second Chance Schools to enrol students with little knowledge of the language and prepare them for the existing courses, thus enlarging the target population to include migrants that start living in Greece.

Evaluation of the events

For the 1st event, 58 participants completed the evaluation forms and 17 from the second one.

Overall event evaluation

The overall organisation of the event was rated as “Excellent” or “Very good” by 86% of the participants, while only 13% found it just “good” or “fair”. Moreover, 93% said that the event objectives were clear to them. Only 3 participants found that the event didn’t meet their expectations.

Content and agenda

The quality and relevance of the content was “Excellent” or “Very Good” for 85% of the participants, while 15% found it “Good” or “Fair”. Regarding the objectives, as outlined in the agenda, addressed during the event, they were “Completely” or “Mostly” addressed for 93% of the participants, and only 3 participants thought they were partially addressed. To the question “Did you have the chance to connect with relevant stakeholders?”, only 3 answered “No”.

According to most participants, the event supported cooperation among stakeholders, given that they had the opportunity to participate actively, exchange ideas with other organisations and bodies, and discuss common action plans and synergies.

The session or **topics they mentioned as most valuable** were:

- The Partner Up research findings
- The discussion on the barriers/solutions for people with low qualifications
- The good practices that were mentioned
- The exchange of ideas
- The opinion of the beneficiaries, because it reflects the quality of the training they received
- Working in groups and finding common solutions
- The importance of developing a culture of adult education in Greece
- The need to design educational material in cooperation with students, taking their needs into account while encouraging and supporting them to develop their skills
- The upgrading of the certification examinations for adult educators' competencies which reinforces their teaching skills
- The establishment of common policies
- The reinforcement of the Second Chance Schools

Some additional comments on supporting upskilling pathways that they did not have the opportunity to express during the event were:

- “Structured actions are needed”
- “The event was excellent both in terms of the subject and in the development of initiatives”
- “I would like a section to be dedicated to the current situation in the European Union regarding traineeships”
- “There should be direct and more practical cooperation between institutions and enterprises for the immediate training of trainees with low skills and their immediate absorption into the labour market.”

Suggestions and comments

Regarding any aspects of the events the participants would like to see improved in future events:

- Proposals for possible pathways for the upgrading of people with low skills in our country, including possible institutional interventions
- More support for Second Chance Schools
- Extended participation of more stakeholders e.g. people with disabilities
- Qualifications - skills of adult educators today and in the future
- Larger participation of learners to exchange experiences, information on the labour market, etc.
- Even more active participation

As for additional comments or suggestions about the events, all comments were very positive. They even mentioned that there should be more such targeted events, highlighting difficulties and discussions, at least once a year.