

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



Romania

Romania

Partner organisation(s): Asociația Euro Adult Education

Participating stakeholders

The 5 Development Groups (3 in person and 2 online) organised in Romania encompass key stakeholders at regional and national levels, including public authorities, educational institutions, reference networks, organisations, and experts, which play a crucial role in promoting the Upskilling Pathways initiative in Romania.

On 24 August and 28 November 2023, there were organised two face-to-face development groups in the northeast region of Romania, în Suceava, and the next on 30 November 2023 in Botosani.

In total, 76 representatives of various institutions and organisations participated in these events.

The other 2 events were organised online on 29.04 and 10.05.2024, with 11 participants in the first and 9 participants in the second.

The key topics for the 4 development group meetings were the following:

- common understanding of the Upskilling Pathways
- implementation of Upskilling Pathways and examples of good practices
- the challenge in the implementation and possible solutions
- validation of non-formal and informal learning with a focus on adults with low skills
- cooperation mechanisms between the various stakeholders and examples of European projects focus on upskilling pathways and adults with low skills

Total participants: 96 participants (76 in person, 20 online)

Development Groups Suceava

The first development group took place on 24 August, followed on November 28, 2023, in Suceava in collaboration with the Bucovina Institute.

46 participants representing various institutions and organisations attended the meetings. Some of the representatives of the organisations participated in both meetings. More specifically, there were stakeholders from:

- **Government authorities-** issue the necessary legal framework and facilitate the professional training process by providing public-private services and facilities as part of education and development programmes, as well as by allocating funds for educational projects:
 - County Employment Agency Suceava - AJOFM Suceava (implementation of government policy on CVET, specifically on upskilling and reskilling)
 - County Council Suceava
 - Municipality of Suceava (City Hall)
 - Suceava County Prefect's Institution
 - County Culture Directorate Suceava,
 - Suceava County School Inspectorate represented the Ministry of Education in the county (in charge of planning, supervising, and evaluating any VET actions, policies, and programmes)
 - County Agricultural Direction Suceava
 - The General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) Suceava,(a key partner for local councils at the county level for the application

of social assistance policies and strategies in the field of child and family protection, single people, elderly people, disabled people, as well as any people in need)

- **Educational institutions** - Adult Learning and Education providers – formal education, Second Chance schools
 - Secondary School” Miron Costin” Suceava
 - Secondary School”Gheorghe Popadiuc” Rădăuți
 - Secondary School”Dimitrie Păcurariu” Șcheia
 - Secondary School Berchisesti
 - Sport college Suceava
 - Economic College” Dimitrie Cantemir” Suceava
- **Library :**
 - Library Bucovinei”I.G. Sbierea”,
- **VET providers and Adult education providers**
 - Bucovina Institute Association (VET provider)
 - Asociatia RYMA (adult education provider)
 - ”Mother riding” Association (provider for basic skills training)
 - Bucovina Plus
- **Community associations**
 - Association of Community Development Consultants
- **NGOs**
 - Regional Resource Centre for NGOs
- **Employers/Companies/ Start UPs** (which are investing in the continuous development of their workforce and offer various training and upskilling programmes for their employees)
 - ”Goodies from the countryside” SRL
 - ”Fancy Pan” SRL
 - ”Honey Pantry” SRL
- **Learners (beneficiaries) and Adult Educators**

Development Group Botosani

The second development group took place on November 29, 2023, face to face, in Botosani.

A total of **30 participants** representing various bodies and organisations attended the meeting, namely:

- County Council Botosani
- Municipality of Botosani
- County Employment Agency Suceava - AJOFM Botosani
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry Botosani (highly involved in adult education and learning)
- The General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) Botosani
- County Agency for Social Protection and Intervention
- County Directorate of Statistics Botosani
- Representative of the European Parliament Office
- Training Providers

- NGOs:
 - Association Nectarie & friends
 - County Foundation for Youth
 - Institut Bucovina Association
 - A.S.T.A Association
 - Euro Adult Education Association
- Adult Educators
- Trainers/ teachers
- Learners

Online Development Group meetings (2 meetings)

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

- National College" Nicolae Iorga" Valenii de Munte
- Secondary School" Platon Mocanu" Drajna
- Secondary School Cerasu
- Companies
- Consulting company
- Start-Up
- County Library Suceava
- County Centre for Resources and Educational Assistance
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry Botosani
- Institut Bucovina Association
- Training Providers
- Adult Educators
- Trainers/ teachers
- Learners

All these institutions took an active part in the discussion and worked in groups. Also, a large part of them expressed their desire to take part in online study visits, to be part of the development group, and to participate in the development of the road map.

Activities and methods used

In our Development group meetings, we used various methods and activities to engage participants as group works, roundtables, and focus groups. In our face-to-face meetings, the most successful were working groups because the participants could express their opinions and presented concrete suggestions for improving collaboration between the stakeholders. Also, the round table was efficient because the participants could present their experiences and we had a discussion about a common understanding of the concepts.

The agenda of the face-to-face events included:

The first event started with a round table, which focused on the:

- Presentation of the project
- Presentation of the objectives of the seminar
- Example of good practices in Upskilling Pathways

After the break, in the second half of the meeting, the participants were divided into small working groups, to discuss specific questions such as:

- The main obstacles to the development of skills
- Good practices from partnerships and other initiatives related to UP that could be exploited
- Resources, organisations or stakeholders that could be included in the collective effort to strengthen UP
- Challenges and possible solutions
- opportunities and collaboration between stakeholders,
- Short-term and long-term objectives for the upgrading of skills
- Responsible bodies and allocation of responsibilities

The participants focused on the challenge and started to think about the solution to the challenges.

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.

The last event was focused on presentations and round tables, where participants had the opportunity to discuss the common understanding of the concept of Upskilling Pathways, present their experience, and clarify questions related to upskilling pathways and target groups.

From the experience of the face-to-face meetings, it emerged that to have a concrete result, it is necessary to work concretely in working groups, some of the participants must be the same for continuity and the exact understanding of the tasks.

We will continue to work with a smaller number of participants to be able to work concretely in the development of road maps.

Overall, a combination of interactive sessions (with a focus on the working groups), expert and moderator contributions, and round table discussions proved to be effective in engaging participants, generating specific suggestions, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

Opportunities

In Romania, collaborations and initiatives related to Upskilling Pathways (UP) include local, regional, and national partnerships among various stakeholders as; educational and training institutions, public authorities, companies, key actors in the employment and labour market, and networks and social partners.

Successful cooperation mechanisms

There are various successful cooperation mechanisms initiated, which we can mention:

1. Cooperation in the second chance programme: in all of Romania, this programme is running as a Partnership for education - school and community. The main stakeholders involved are Schools, County School Inspectorates, local administration, NGOs, mediators, trainers, counsellors, mass media, employers, and training providers.

School-community collaboration in promoting the "Second Chance" Programme resulted in expanding the number of classes from primary education and secondary education in disadvantaged communities and communities geographically segregated. Campaigns were carried out promotion and information in different forms (arrangement of information spaces in schools and town halls, meetings, with young people and adults who have not completed their education mandatory, exchange of experience, presenting examples of good practice, TV shows, information in the press etc.) through the support provided by representatives of local authorities, non-governmental organisations, school and health mediators, counsellors etc. in the promoting and informing the benefits offered by the programme.

Involvement of responsible factors from schools and communities in popularizing, information on the benefits of the Programme "Second Chance" led to an increase in the number of requests to view completion of compulsory education, increasing the availability of teaching staff in supporting the programme and involvement in specific activities, at the manifestation of increased interest from students.

2. Cooperation in literacy and numeracy programmes: County Employment Agencies, schools, municipalities, training providers, and NGOs.

Employment Agencies organise literacy and numeracy programmes for adults who have not completed primary education. Many county agencies organise these courses for the beneficiaries of the minimum guaranteed income because most of them are people who unfortunately do not know how to write, read and calculate; therefore they are offered the chance to enter the labour market by becoming literate. After learning to write, read and calculate, they will be able to take a qualification course. The courses are held in the halls of some educational institutions, with qualified staff from the Employment Agency.

As a result, vocational training courses represent an alternative through which the unemployed can have an extra chance to get employed.

The Employment Agency intends to qualify the labour force needed by the structures subordinated to the town halls, for example, green space caretakers and asphalt pavers. In this sense, collaboration protocols were signed with the municipalities, so that practical training is done within these structures and theoretical training in classes provided by the town halls.

Also, the persons registered with the employment agencies can benefit, free of charge, from assessment and certification services of the professional skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning, the financing of which is ensured by the unemployment insurance budget.

3. *Collaborations in various projects, with European funding, for various target groups:*

Various institutions and organisations use the opportunities to access ESF and Erasmus+ funding to support the implementation of the UP for adults with low skills.

Many programmes and projects have been implemented, for example, the representatives of stakeholders involved in the Focus Group in Suceava highlighted some projects in the region where very good collaboration was established:

- People from rural areas: - close cooperation between NGOs with the labour office on profiling and registering all people with low skills that we identify in rural areas. We are organising job fairs together, meeting with employers and creating facilities for those difficult to employ.
- People with disabilities and special needs - close cooperation between NGOs with special schools from the region because they do not have many options to support the qualifications of youngsters with disabilities and special needs and we try to complete the offer with training opportunities offered by Training providers and keep together the youngsters in the school.

Also, our organisation has some examples of projects financed by the European Social Fund, where cooperation between various partners functioned very well. The project "**RURAL FORCE - TRAINING, Certification, more chances for employment!**" was co-financed by the ESF, Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013, Priority Axis 5 "Promotion of active employment measures", Major Area of intervention 5.2 "Promotion long-term sustainability of rural areas in terms of the development of human resources and employment" - POSDRU/135/5.2/S/128962. This project implemented all 3 steps from Upskilling Pathways. The project lasted 18 months with the **general objective** of ensuring increased opportunities for 940 job seekers through information activities and career counselling.

To engage these target groups, a targeted outreach is required. Partnerships need to be established, including working with local authorities, learning/ training providers, social services, civil society networks, employment services, employers, social partners, chambers of commerce, libraries, cultural houses, church groups, and schools. Sometimes financial incentives are a source of motivation to take them to training provider courses or back to school.

As for best practices from other countries that can be adapted to improve collaboration in upskilling efforts, some of them that have been identified by the present Project can be transferred to Romania, for example:

- the Ambassador network from Italia,

- the initiative from Latvia, where each municipality has a coordinator of adult education.

Challenges

The major barriers and challenges hindering effective collaboration in upskilling initiatives, as identified by stakeholders, following the brainstorming and working groups from our development groups meetings include:

- A common understanding of the concepts of Upskilling Pathways for adults with low skills, and the steps of the Upskilling Pathways according to the Recommendation of Upskilling Pathways adopted in December 2016 by the Council of European Union.
- Lack of information and awareness on different levels about the Upskilling Pathways.
- Flexibility in organising training on the job or apprenticeship model, the most interesting for vulnerable groups
- Lack of responsibilities distributed among the state offices with a big gap in communication and cooperation
- The legal frame and the national policies do not encourage the training and qualification of people with low skills. Just the ESF programme supporting currently the qualification within investing in people projects
- Specific problems in collaboration, depending on the availability of local authorities, often based on personal relationships, the disinterest of local authorities
- Mentality – the cooperation based on interest
- Ignorance of legal obligations
- Challenges in implementing UP
- Strategy for action plan based on need analysis
- Equal policy and programmes distributed between the regions
- Discrepancy between the needs of the labour market and the educational and training offer
- For several projects, there was no permanent 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
- Not enough funding and resource allocation for this field
- Inconsistent or fragmented policy frameworks across different sectors and levels of governance
- Low motivation of the target group to participate in Upskilling Pathways initiatives mostly because of low levels of self-esteem and bad experiences from their participation in formal education

Possible solutions

Suggestions for improvement of the challenges and gaps

- Information and awareness campaigns among people with low skills, in different forms, and at different levels, considering the complexity of the target group
- Awareness of the need and explanation of the advantages of having a competence, a qualification
- Organising a national event to highlight the issue of upskilling pathways and promote opportunities and positive examples, with the involvement of various stakeholders, including media
- Resettlement of skills at the profile level
- Continue work
- Support for disadvantaged families
- Mediators and advisors for this target group
- Contact person in each public institution for the guidance of families from the Diaspora
- Updated databases with this target group and feedback from these people regarding the training/retraining, literacy programmes
- Leverage existing funding programmes and mechanism

Implementation plans

A template for the action plans with the following framework was developed (see below) and the working groups discussed, analyzed, and *generated concrete and applicable suggestions for improving UP and supporting collaboration between stakeholders*. After that, they presented the resulting ideas to the whole group of participants.

Challenges/ Barriers/ Obstacles					
Objectives					
Implementation Actions/ Solutions/ Strategies	1.	Collaboration	Responsibilities	Timeline / Short term	Long term
	2.				
	3.				
Impact					

Short-term goals

- Organising events to raise awareness about the Upskilling Pathways in the frame of LLL week " Festival of your chance " and the importance of lifelong learning.
- Share interesting practices to enhance dialogue among stakeholders and transfer models that demonstrate to be efficient in the promotion campaigns.
- Establishing collaborative working groups at the regional level to continue to discuss and promote the experiences of UP.

Long-term goals

- Developing a structured framework for stakeholder collaboration, and peer learning in the UP field.
- Creating a continuous and integrated lifelong learning system nationwide, based on the experience of North East region
- Alignment with Stakeholders' Objectives
- More involvement of the employer cooperation in the educational process
- Clear roles and responsibilities are defined for all stakeholders involved in the upskilling initiatives.

Evaluation of the events

Participants generally rated the event very positively, emphasizing its relevance and usefulness in addressing the topic of upskilling pathways. Most participants indicated that the event fostered cooperation among stakeholders by providing opportunities for active participation, idea exchange with other organizations and entities, and discussions on common action plans and synergies.

All participants rated the overall organization of the event as "Excellent" and stated that the event objectives were clear to them. The majority of participants reported that the event exceeded their expectations, and it was organized to high standards.

Regarding the objectives, as outlined in the agenda, addressed during the event, they were "Completed" for the majority of respondents.

According to most participants, the organization of such debate sessions can create a series of collaborations and partnerships between local producers, state institutions and large economic agents. The event supported cooperation among stakeholders, given that they had the opportunity to participate actively, exchange ideas with other organizations and bodies, and discuss common action plans and synergies.

Some responses from the participants:

- The workshop was welcomed as there were invited from several fields and institutions, but also local businessmen-producers, who had the opportunity to make connections, future collaborations and partnerships.
- We had the opportunity to share our professional experiences and to have an auspicious inter-institutional dialogue.
- I believe that the solutions noted as a result of this debate will have a positive impact on the local community. On the other hand, the interaction between the institutions present is an important aspect to emphasize.
- The informative material was well structured, and the trainer created an atmosphere through which he permanently captured our attention
- Extremely interesting sessions with highly topical topics. I would like to collaborate on other projects in the future.

Some recommendations from the participants for future events:

- To be organized periodically and the duration to be 2 days.
- Several local and regional companies and entrepreneurs may be invited.
- Turning ideas into action.

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