




Analysis Report Summary

European Level



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1. Upskilling Pathways Implementation

The Stakeholder analysis on the European level was conducted by two European Organizations: the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and eucen. The analysis encompasses quantitative and qualitative data and information about cooperation mechanisms both existing and missing in the ALE scenario as well as existing and missing stakeholders, but also good practices in Upskilling Pathways implementation at EU level. The analysis was conducted in two steps. The first one was a desk analysis to deepen the state of art in the implementation of the UP initiative at EU level. Consequently, the second step consisted of a stakeholder mapping, structured by internal reflections with partner organizations and focus groups, interviews and surveys.

EU policies: state of work

At the European level there are different tools realized to effectively enhance education and skills policies. The **New European Skills Agenda (2020)** highlights the need for collective action and coordinated efforts among various stakeholders, emphasizing public-private partnerships, especially through initiatives like the **Pact for Skills**. This agenda promotes large-scale partnerships at local and regional levels to attract skilled workers from third countries. Similarly, the **Council Resolution on a new European agenda for adult learning (2021-2030)** stresses the importance of partnerships in promoting policy coherence and addressing barriers to adult learning. It calls for partnerships among adult learning providers, linking lifelong guidance and career development services, with a specific focus on **Upskilling Pathways**.

The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways emphasizes the importance of coordinating partnerships across various sectors –such as education, employment and cultural policy areas– to effectively reach diverse target groups. The Recommendation stresses also the need for public and private actors to work together, encouraging cross-border and regional cooperation to overcome the challenges posed by fragmented public policies.

An evaluation of the Upskilling Pathways implementation highlighted several issues with partnerships. While most EU Member States have established some form of stakeholder cooperation, the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities among the involved actors can limit the effectiveness of these partnerships. Coincidentally, successful cases were characterized by a well-structured national coordination platform that provided strategic direction and supported collaboration at all governance levels.





The outreach phase of Upskilling Pathways, particularly for vulnerable or socially excluded groups, is both critical and challenging. Effective outreach relies heavily on coordinated partnerships and platforms that connect upskilling opportunities to those in need. However, the involvement of certain stakeholders, such as social partners and NGOs in the social inclusion sector, remains marginal due to factors like insufficient resources, funding, and awareness.

2. Stakeholder Cooperation in UP

Given the wide and diverse range of stakeholders, their size and scope, the engagement and effect of each of them varies. Particularly, related to their level of engagement, we structured them in three categories.

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- **DG EMPL** has commissioned an ongoing evaluation of the Council Recommendation on UP, which includes consultations and surveys, with results published in a 2023 Commission Staff Working Document. DG EMPL supports stakeholder collaboration through platforms like **EPALE** and by ensuring UP remains a priority in adult learning forums. Additionally, DG EMPL funds UP initiatives through the Employment and Social Innovation (**EaSI**) programme, **Erasmus+**, and the **ESF+** fund, while also coordinating mutual learning activities to promote the uptake of UP at the national level.
- **Cedefop** has invested significant resources in understanding UP's implementation, particularly through its **Thematic Country Reviews**. These reviews, which began after Cedefop's **Policy Learning Fora on UP**, aim to identify national needs and priorities, with national Steering Groups conducting surveys and interviews at various levels to assess UP implementation. In addition, in order to facilitate stakeholder engagement and exchange across Europe, Cedefop organizes **Policy Learning Forums** to promote dialogue and confrontation.
- **ETF** primarily works outside the EU, monitoring how national governments implement Upskilling Pathways and supporting their integration into national skills agendas.





Which stage of the framework the networks contribute to specifically (whether skills assessment, learning provision, and recognition and validation), varies among stakeholders, and depends on the type of member organizations they are made up of. All Digital, for example, primarily focuses on the learning provision stage, specifically in digital skills training,

Both networks are committed to the **social dimension** of upskilling, focusing on social inclusion through education and training and also contribute to the other two stages of the framework: **skills assessment** and **recognition and validation of learning**. However, they face challenges such as limited human and financial resources, a lack of comprehensive frameworks and difficulties in applying existing frameworks to their specific educational offerings. While some trailblazer members are developing innovative, bottom-up solutions, these efforts are not widespread across the networks.

Another operative network in social contexts is Solidar, active in projects focused on the recognition and validation of **transversal skills**. Among its members, Worker Education Associations and Popular Education Associations contribute the most to Upskilling Pathways while other members, including trade unions, focus less on education and more on formal education. **The failure to fully release the potential of informal and non-formal education in the implementation of UP lies in the engagement of cities with governmental levels.** As Eurocities stated, many cities in their network focus on compulsory education. Some cities, particularly those with strained relationships with national governments and where English is more widely spoken, are more likely to align with European frameworks and respond to initiatives like the Upskilling Pathways Framework. These cities tend to have their own skills agendas, which are adapted to local labor market needs and address marginalized groups. However, despite their strong position to implement localized interventions, municipalities often struggle with limited resources, which hampers the effectiveness of these efforts.

These networks often bridge local and European levels, representing their members in forums like EU working groups, contributing to European frameworks, and helping members access EU funding. However, many networks face **funding challenges** and on top of that, networks also highlighted that their members have diverse activities but **limited financial and human resources, leading them to prioritize areas with more funding potential**. As a result, while initiatives like the UPF exist, they haven't significantly increased efforts towards upskilling, mainly due to resource constraints.





Although UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has engaged in multilateral partnerships with European organizations, such as Cedefop and ETF, most of their activities either involve the governments of UNESCO member states, or organizations within member states. This is translated to merely **support local organizations in developing Recognition of Prior Learning procedures in the absence of a national framework**. Crucial to this support is the **collaboration of various stakeholders, including employers, higher education institutions, national authorities, and relevant institutions** that are already active in this field. As higher education institutions with a focus on professional learning, their members have **close connections with employers, and are able to create learning offers and qualifications that are labor-market oriented**.

Even when national frameworks for recognition and validation of skills exist, these frameworks often fail to reflect the realities of people with low skills or qualifications. Migrants, a growing and economically significant group in Europe, face challenges in all stages of the Upskilling Pathways, not just due to language barriers and cultural differences, but also because of labor market conditions. The increasing **diversification of societies**, driven by migration, has impacted all levels of education, especially **basic education**. As ATEE confirmed, this has led to a growing emphasis on **basic skills in primary and secondary schools**, as many children and teenagers across Europe are struggling to achieve adequate levels of **literacy and numeracy**.





3. Recommendations

Regardless of the background, the hierarchical structure or the function of the stakeholders, during the interviews, they all agreed on some common challenges they are facing as well potential solutions to them that can be summarized as follows:

- **More targeted funding:** the lack of direct funding in relation to Upskilling Pathways is perceived as a significant barrier to the implementation of the framework. As DG-EMPL representatives discussed, the funding shouldn't count only on European institutions, but also from each Member State if we want the implementation to be sustainable. On the other hand, Solidar suggested that employers should play a bigger role in the funding of learning offers for Upskilling Pathways.
- **Engaging “non-traditional” stakeholders for more effective provision:** suggestions were advanced in the direction of tech corporations in order to make the digital skills provision more effective. Extra care should be taken in regard to big tech companies when it comes to ethics and the profit-driven mentality typical of these corporations.
- **The importance of stakeholders for outreach, information sharing and governance:** although much has already been done by local members, minority communities groups are still at high risk of not being engaged in education provision, this is why not only is pivotal which stakeholders are engaged, but also how they are. As DG EMPL representatives indicated, in order to address specific issues, it is crucial to engage stakeholders not only in the delivery process of the UPF, but also to allow them to contribute with their expertise in all the steps of the engagement also when governance issues are involved. The creation of a platform to allow a space of confrontation between different stakeholders is the first step of cooperation.

