Development Groups Summary
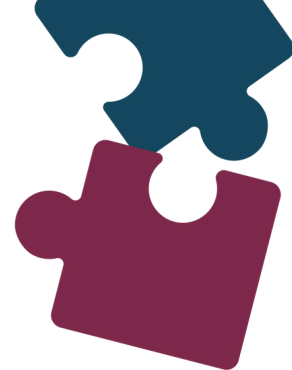
European Level

Stakeholders involved

Participants of Development groups at the EU level included stakeholders from higher education institutions (HEIs), university lifelong learning (ULLL) networks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), European policymakers focused on upskilling, international intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations promoting lifelong learning (LLL), social partners, research institutes, and grassroots initiatives. Participants included representatives from e.g. the University for Continuing Education Krems, the University College Cork, the Directorate General on Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), Solidar, the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP), the European Education and Training Association (EVTA), Social Platform, and the European Training Foundation. This list represents just a selection of the many organizations involved and in total, 92 participants were counted. All stakeholders brought different perspectives with regards to needs, challenges, opportunities, and solutions to discuss and improve UP and stakeholder engagement on the EU level.

Activities and methods for stakeholder engagement

The Development groups at the EU level were organized both online and in person by EAEA and EUCEN. EUCEN held four events, EAEA hosted one. In many times the events included a short presentation about the objectives of Partner Up, followed a participant's introduction to share projects and the organisation's key objectives. Events integrated also an expert speech to reflect a single key topic such as outreach, guidance, quality assurance, or trends in the EU and the various financial resources available to boost upskilling initiatives. Tu further enhance discussion and knowledge exchange between the participants on the presented topics, EAEA and EUCEN used different online and face to face interactive tools and methods. Tools and methods to foster collaboration between stakeholders included World Café activities, open discussions, Mentimeter questionnaires, and panel discussions.
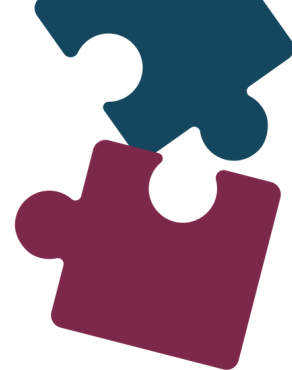
Opportunities

Key opportunities to foster UP on the EU-level include fostering peer learning, transnational knowledge exchange, public-private partnerships, NGO involvement, and collaborations with non-educational organizations.

Expanding access to upskilling programs and improving their program quality relies on **peer learning and knowledge sharing** through cross-sector collaboration between education, NGOs, and government. Such partnerships support a more inclusive approach to skills development. One example is the higher education association KU Leuven's "Continue" program. The program shows that when institutions work together across sectors, they can provide more accessible pathways for learners for the benefit of making education more accessible, and to align their training to evolving demands and trends of society. Another key opportunity is **fostering transnational knowledge exchange** through the sharing of EU-US good practices and lessons learnt between European and American stakeholders such as the American Association For Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) and the LLL Platform. Even though the US and EU contexts are quite different in the context of upskilling initiatives, transnational exchange allows sharing good practices, and learners are exposed to global trends and challenges. Additionally, **public-private partnerships** should combine government and industry resources to overcome financial barriers and ensure long-term funding for upskilling programmes. This can be facilitated by promoting and creating plans to implement educational funding models for the learner, such as Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). Such collaboration and approaches drive innovation, can create sustainable funding, and direct pathways for learners to employment. The **involvement of NGOs for targeted outreach** is also needed for reaching marginalized populations. NGOs have a deep understanding of local communities, partner with academic institutions and governments to expand access to upskilling and tailor programs to meet specific community needs.

Finally, collaboration with non-educational organizations, such as social services and healthcare providers, can engage marginalized groups by addressing broader needs, such as childcare and healthcare, while offering upskilling opportunities. These partnerships make programmes more accessible and flexible.

Challenges

The main barriers to upskilling collaboration that were identified during the development groups include knowledge gaps, financial limitations, regulatory constraints, accessibility issues, and organizational conflicts.

Awareness and knowledge gaps are reflected in the fact that stakeholders often have limited understanding of EU upskilling policies like the Council's Recommendation on UP. This hinders effective policy use and needs targeted awareness campaigns to improve stakeholders' expertise to make use of policy guidelines. Another issue are **financial constraints** and short-term funding, which hinders sustainable and long-term development of upskilling initiatives. In this context, NGOs and educational institutions are often impacted and forced to deprioritize long-term planning of upskilling initiatives. This financial gap can make cross-sector collaborations more difficult, as they need stable funding to progress. **Rigid policies and regulations** can also be constraining as regulated environment limits flexibility, making it challenging for stakeholders to innovate in UP. In addition, different political priorities in the individual EU Member States lead to a fragmentation of qualification efforts, reducing their coherence and scope. A big challenge is also the issue of **accessibility and inclusivity**. Marginalized groups, such as those in rural areas, ethnic minorities, and individuals with low digital literacy, often struggle to access upskilling opportunities. This causes accessibility gaps and excludes marginalized groups from learning and upskilling opportunities. The development groups also showed that **competing organisational priorities** are problematic. Internal agendas of organisations can conflict with collective training goals as they often prioritise short-term goals over shared, long-term initiatives.

Solutions

To foster UP on the EU-level and to afront the identified challenges different key aspects to improve UP were highlighted.

- Establishing **sustainable funding** models is key. Therefore, civil society organisations and policymakers of the EU should foster government-private sector collaborations to provide long-term funding for upskilling programmes. Additionally, structural changes are needed, such as implementing educational funding models like ILAs across Europe.

- Provide f**lexible and EU-consistent policies**, including entitlements for training leave and regular monitoring. Frameworks should also standardise quality assurance measures to facilitate aligning the national and EU policies, making it easier to achieve a broader impact. This can reduce regulatory differences between member states and enable accessible, consistent UP across countries.

- Use **digital collaboration and learning** platforms to manage resources, coordinate stakeholders, and deliver personalized learning plans, ensuring they meet specific sector demands and are scalable.

- Fostering **targeted awareness and outreach** campaigns is needed to highlight the benefits of LLL and upskilling can increase engagement among stakeholders and align more organizations with EU goals. EU umbrella organisations and policy bodies could provide information platforms to disseminate information on training opportunities across EU countries.

- Focusing more on **local partnerships for broader access** and start collaboration with community organizations and social services is relevant. This can expand access to - upskilling opportunities especially in rural and underserved areas. A centralized EU platform for training resources would further support inclusion across all regions.

- Engage in **peer learning and sharing of good practices** to engage different learning providers and stakeholders to start cooperating and to share their knowledge with each other. Collaborating with social sector organisations that focus on marginalized groups can foster mutual learning and help organisations develop inclusive educational practices.