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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

**Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults  
Taking stock of implementation measures**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Skills matter

Skills are a driver for competitiveness, innovation and growth as well as for individuals' well-being and personal and professional fulfilment. This is the rationale for the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that “everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable people to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labour market”.<sup>1</sup>

Knowledge, skills and competences are acquired throughout the life course, from “cradle to grave” starting from family learning, through early childhood education and care, compulsory education, vocational and/or higher education and training, and continuing with adult learning in all its forms. Access to education and training and educational attainment levels have increased tremendously across the world and within the EU in the past few decades. In 1970, less than 20% of the world population aged 15+ completed lower, upper or post-secondary education, whereas by 2020 this share is forecasted to have grown to around 46% of the world population<sup>2</sup>.

In the EU, while almost three quarters of the population has at least an upper secondary qualification, basic literacy and numeracy skills cannot be taken for granted. Challenges persist for large parts of the adult population. In 2017, still 61 million adults aged 25 to 64 had stopped their formal education before completing upper secondary education<sup>3</sup>, 43% of the EU population has an insufficient level of digital skills and 17% has none at all<sup>4</sup>. The OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) also shows us that around 20% of the adult population in the participating countries<sup>5</sup> struggles with basic skills like literacy and numeracy.

To deliver on the core mission of the Union to achieve full employment and social progress, as set out in Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union<sup>6</sup>, the Skills Agenda for Europe<sup>7</sup> launched a number of actions to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation and understanding. Its aim is to support individuals to keep step with the rapidly changing skills requirements of the labour market, equip everyone with a minimum set of basic skills and make qualifications easier to understand, helping workers and learners to move around more easily within the EU.

As part of the Skills Agenda for Europe, the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults<sup>8</sup> was adopted in December 2016 (“the Recommendation”). It sealed the commitment of Member States to take action to address the high number of adults in the EU who have gaps in their basic skills, preventing them from engaging in further education or training, or progressing towards a qualification or better life and work chances. The Recommendation also contributes to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4<sup>9</sup>, of ensuring that by 2030 all youth and **a substantial proportion of adults**, both men and women, **achieve literacy and numeracy**.

The purpose of this report is to take stock of the steps that the Member States have agreed upon to implement the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en).

<sup>2</sup> “Global Rise of Education”, by Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, part of Our World in Data online publication, Oxford University.

<sup>3</sup> Labour Force Survey, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Digital Inclusion and Skills Report, European Commission, 2017 data.

<sup>5</sup> Austria, Belgium-FL, Czechia, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, UK. Hungary is currently doing the survey.

<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>.

<sup>8</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC\\_2016\\_484\\_R\\_0001](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2016_484_R_0001).

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.un.org/qa/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/qa/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E).

## 1.2 Investing in Skills Pays Off

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*As set out in the Skills Agenda, skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth. They are key to social cohesion.*

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The EU is undergoing rapid economic transformations, driven by increased digitalisation and automation, emergence of new technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, as well as the transition to a carbon neutral economy. These changes accelerate the demand for skills and benefit highly skilled people. However, many people face difficulties keeping up with the new skills needs, they are unable to improve their skills and qualifications and risk being crowded out of the labour market. Lifelong learning is key to meeting this challenge. It can also break the circle of social disadvantage which is fuelled by low educational levels and low occupational skills of parents that has a negative influence on the education achievement of their children, for whom problems of low achievement and social disadvantage persist throughout adulthood and are passed on to the next generation<sup>10</sup>.

Between 2002 and 2016 employment for low qualified people in the EU declined by 10%<sup>11</sup>, with less of the work available taken up by workers with low levels of education and training. The OECD's Survey of Adults Skills, ("PIAAC survey") shows that a poor skills supply severely limits people's access to high quality and rewarding jobs. When workers lack basic skills, economies find it more difficult to introduce productivity-enhancing technologies and organise work in new and innovative ways (OECD, PIAAC, 2016).

The PIAAC survey also highlighted the wider benefits of higher proficiency in basic skills for individual well-being and overall social cohesion. Positive correlations were found between proficiency in basic skills and health, beliefs about one's impact on the political process, trust in others and participation in volunteer or associative activities<sup>12</sup>.

In the context of investing in skills, it is important to keep in mind the potential of harnessing the skills that third-country migrants bring to the EU. Nevertheless, in 2017 more than one third (35.4%) of 25-54 year-old migrants born outside the EU had completed at most lower secondary education. Given that many third-country migrants have low qualifications (or skills level as measured by PIAAC), or that their qualifications acquired abroad are not easily recognised or valued in EU Member States<sup>13</sup>, upskilling their language and other skills will be necessary to ensure their smooth integration and to tap their potential.

Cedefop research on the economic and social cost of low-skilled adults in the EU<sup>14</sup> shows that apart from the employment consequences, low-skilled people may be more prone than others to social exclusion, poverty and crime, their participation in civic life is negligible, they tend to have low incomes and lower levels of health, well-being and life satisfaction.

According to this Cedefop research, investment in upskilling and reskilling would translate into:

- increased employability and higher earnings for individuals, as well as higher productivity and economic growth for the economy as a whole;
- productivity and growth in tax revenues and reduced costs to the public purse;
- improved health, social and civic engagement, and lower involvement in criminal activities;
- promoting trust, civic engagement, active citizenship and social inclusion;
- a more skilled and competent population, which is able to generate and adopt new ideas that stimulate innovation and technological progress.

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<sup>10</sup> Employment and Social Development in Europe, 2018, European Commission.

<sup>11</sup> Employment and Social Development in Europe, 2018, European Commission.

<sup>12</sup> Skills Matter, OECD, 2016.

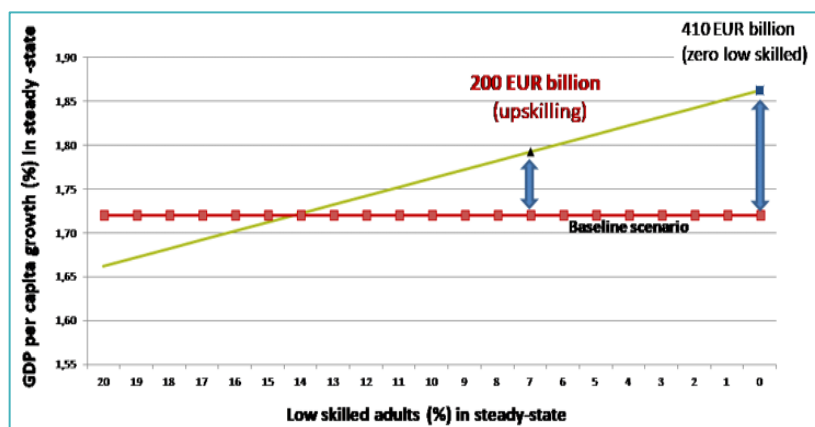
<sup>13</sup> See OECD/EU (2018), *Settling in 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*, OECD Publishing, Paris/European Union, Brussels. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307216-en>.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5560\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5560_en.pdf).

The study makes an estimate of the individual and social value in monetary terms of a faster increase in the level of skills in Member States, compared to the current trend.

Taking 2015 data as a baseline and taking into account the trend in attainment of upper secondary education among 15 to 54 year olds, who will be 25-64 in 2025, Cedefop estimated that a reduction of 50% in the numbers of low-skilled (25 to 64 year olds) by 2025, would mean an increase in annual GDP of over 200 billion EUR.

**Graph 1:** Macroeconomic net benefits of reducing the share of low-skilled adults – average yearly GDP gain 2025-2050



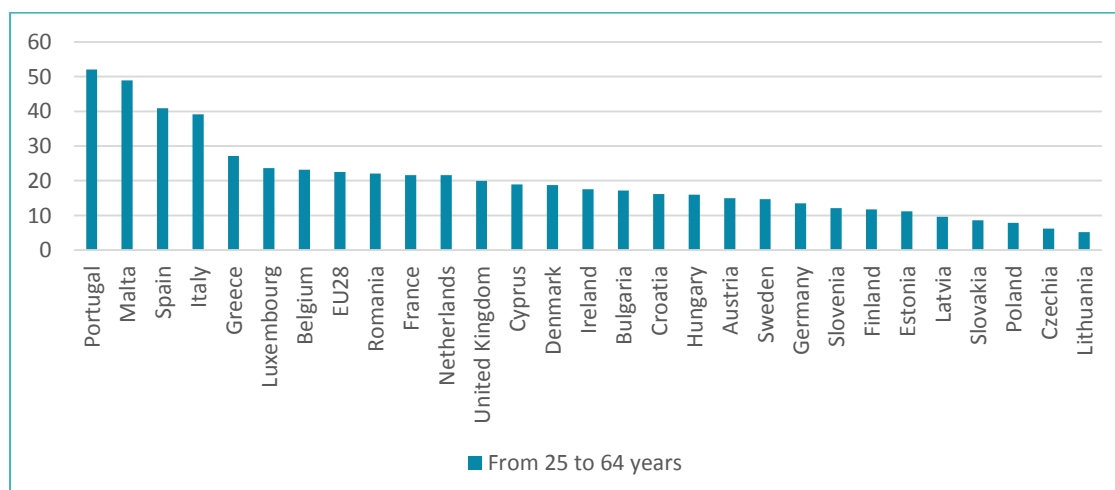
Source: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5560\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5560_en.pdf)

In other words, investment in upskilling can have **a real impact in economic terms, in addition to the wider societal benefits.**

### 1.3 Present and future skills needs

There are significant differences in the **levels of educational attainment** between and within Member States. The proportion of adults with only the lowest level of qualification (ISCED 0-2), which includes people with less than primary, primary and lower secondary education, ranges from as high as 52% in Portugal to as low as 5% in Lithuania.

**Graph 2:** Percentage of adults (aged 25-64) with at best lower secondary education (ISCED 0-2), in 2017

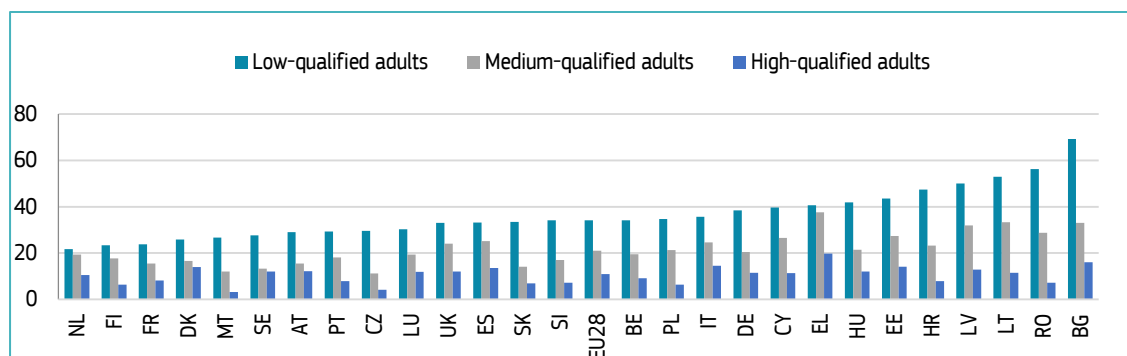


Source: Eurostat edat\_Isfe\_03

Low-qualified adults are more likely to be older. One third of the low qualified workers is economically inactive<sup>15</sup>, while **over half of them are employed**<sup>16</sup>. There is an almost 20 percentage points difference in employment rates of low qualified adults vs those with medium level qualifications.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, low-qualified employees are at greater risk of in-work poverty than employees with higher educational attainment<sup>18</sup>. On average over 34% of low-qualified people are at risk of poverty, while the figure for high-qualified people is less than 11%. In The Netherlands where the risk of poverty is lowest, the difference between high- and low qualified people is around 10 percentage points. While in Bulgaria where the risk is highest, almost 70% of low-qualified people are at risk, but only 16% of people with high qualifications fall into this category.

**Graph 3:** People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by educational attainment level (population aged 18 and over) in 2017



Source: Eurostat 2018 *ilc\_peps04*

Also, when looking at skills proficiency, one out of five adult Europeans only have the lowest levels of literacy skills; one out of four have the lowest levels of numerical skill<sup>19</sup>; and more than 40% of adults struggle with digital skills<sup>20</sup>. The Skills Needs Indicator<sup>21</sup> shows that literally all basic content skills (reading, numeracy, problem solving) are **in short supply** in almost all Member States.

On the other end of skills spectrum, the OECD Skills for Jobs Database shows an **increased demand for high-level cognitive skills**<sup>22</sup>, related to reading, understanding and processing information, and processing information and ideas. However, the EU has relatively few (10%) adults who perform at the highest level in literacy, numeracy and digital skills according to the PIAAC data, again with some significant differences between and within the Member States.

These skills gaps are likely to be further accentuated by ongoing structural changes in the economies around the world that result in an overall shift towards jobs requiring higher skills, at the expense of low skilled jobs. In many of the advanced economies, including the EU, long-term growth in the number of jobs in occupations requiring high levels of skills and qualifications has been noted (OECD, 2017)<sup>23</sup>. Most jobs forecast to be created by 2030 will require a medium or high level of education, while it is expected that the supply of workers with high-level qualifications will be insufficient within the next decade. Evidence shows that high skilled workers will be less affected by automation as they will be more easily re-deployed to non-routine jobs (OECD, 2018)<sup>24</sup>.

Meanwhile, it is expected that the low-qualified and low-skilled individuals will encounter more difficulties in finding and keeping their jobs<sup>25</sup>. Already now in the EU there **are three times as many low-qualified adults as there are elementary occupations**<sup>26</sup>. Advances in technology will have

<sup>15</sup> Adult Education Survey 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Labour Force Survey 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Labour Force Survey 2017.

<sup>18</sup> EU-SILC Survey 2017.

<sup>19</sup> OECD PIAAC.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission (2018), Digital Scoreboard <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-scoreboard>.

<sup>21</sup> OECD, World Bank, ETF, UNESCO 2013, Indicators of skills for employment and productivity; <http://www.oecd.org/q20/topics/development/indicators-of-skills-employment-and-productivity.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> OECD, Skills for Jobs, 2018; average across OECD countries between 2004-2014.

<sup>23</sup> OECD (2017) OECD Employment outlook 2017.

<sup>24</sup> OECD (2018) OECD Employment outlook 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Eurostat (2017) European Labour Force Survey (EU LFS).

<sup>26</sup> Joint Employment Report 2018, analysis based on LFS 2017.

further negative impact on the structure of some low skilled occupational groups (around 22% of all adults).

The World Economic Forum's 2016 report, *The Future of Jobs*<sup>27</sup>, found that, by 2020, across all types of occupations, on average, more than a third of the core skills needed to perform most jobs will be made up of skills currently not yet considered crucial to the job.

In today's world experiencing major transformations in the labour markets, quality education and training delivered at all stages in life become even more crucial. The 2018 Future of Jobs report<sup>28</sup> of the World Economic Forum highlights **a reskilling imperative**, showing that already by 2022, no less than 54% of all employees will require significant upskilling and reskilling.

Furthermore, according to a recent OECD study on *Automation, skills use and training*<sup>29</sup>, the **highest risk of automation** is found in **routine jobs with low skill and education requirements**, with automation risk declining with skills, education and hourly wages. This points once again to the need to design and implement effective policy interventions targeting the most vulnerable, mostly the low skilled and/or low qualified.

Although unemployment levels have now dropped to pre-crisis levels, in the EU-28 unemployment was at 6.7% in October 2018<sup>30</sup>, the nature of jobs –“a large majority of jobs will require some level of digital competence, and an increasing number of elementary jobs require some core or generic skills (such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork and emotional intelligence)”<sup>31</sup>.

People with the right combination of technical, vocational and core work skills, being able to move easily between jobs, occupations and sectors, will attract higher remuneration and will have sound employment prospects. The first step is providing low qualified adults with the opportunity to develop a good level of basic skills.

## 2. Upskilling Pathways – rationale and concept

Among the 61 million low qualified adults, aged 25 to 64, more than 34 million are in employment, more than 21 million are inactive and under 6 million are unemployed (LFS, 2017). The incidence of low qualified adults is higher in older cohorts, especially for women. Although 40% of 30 to 35 year olds are expected to have attained higher education qualifications by 2020, up to 17% (2017) of the same age bracket **have not progressed beyond lower secondary education**, therefore, the problem persists and not only among older people. 34% of the population aged 18 and above with low educational attainment are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, against only 11% among those who acquired tertiary education. Employment rates among the low qualified are also much lower than for medium and higher qualified (around 55% for low qualified against 75% for medium qualified and 85% for high qualified people).

Through the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation, Member States agreed to adopt a strategic and coordinated approach to providing joined-up learning opportunities to the EU's 61 million<sup>32</sup> low-skilled adults. It aims to support adults with low levels of skills and qualifications to enhance their basic skills that is literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and/or to acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards higher qualifications.

Upskilling Pathways provide for low skilled and low qualified adults to have access to upskilling opportunities built around the concept of an easily accessible pathway comprising three steps:

<sup>27</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2018.pdf).

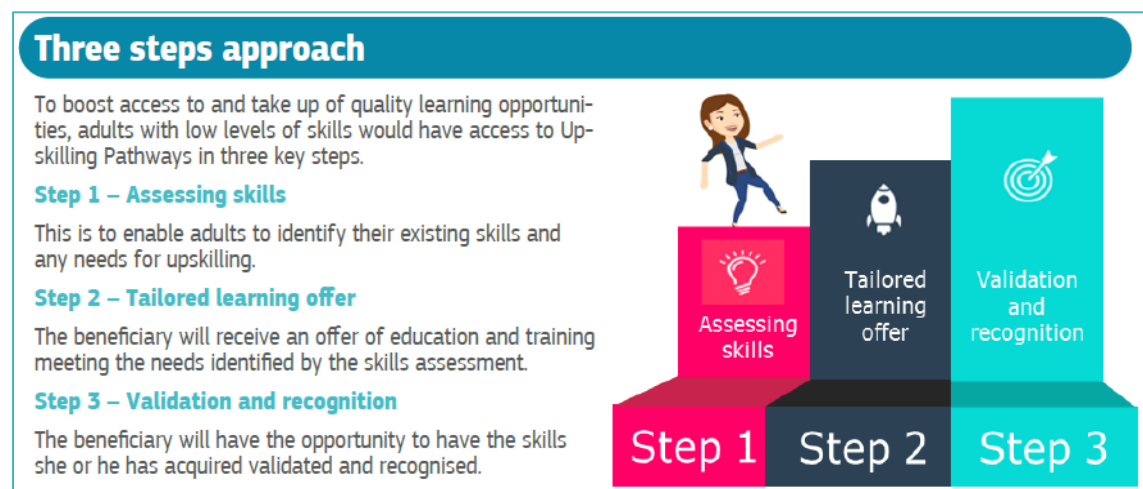
<sup>29</sup> Nedelkoska, L. and G. Quintini (2018), “Automation, skills use and training”, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 202, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/2e2f4eea-en>.

<sup>30</sup> Eurostat, 2018. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/9422707/3-30112018-BP-EN.pdf/fb7929e7-5e59-4a28-ba16-46a0beb188dc>.

<sup>31</sup> Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults.

<sup>32</sup> In 2017, 61.3 million people aged 25 to 64 had at most a lower secondary education qualification (Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, 2018). In 2012, the year of the PIAAC data collection, Labour Force Survey recorded that 70 million 25 to 64 year olds had at most lower secondary qualifications. This figure is decreasing every year since then, in particular because: a) the education levels of those reaching 25 years are higher as more young people finish upper secondary education or equivalent, and b) because those people retiring have, in general, lower levels of education with the exception of some Eastern European countries.

1. skills assessment to identify existing skills and upskilling needs;
2. a tailor-made offer of learning and mentoring, to enable them to update skills and fill important deficits; and
3. the opportunity to have their acquired knowledge and skills validated and recognised towards a qualification or access to employment.



Enabling conditions, such as outreach, guidance and financial support should be an intrinsic part of this process. Implementation of Upskilling Pathways should build on arrangements put in place in accordance with the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>33</sup>, to identify, assess and certify knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training.

## 2.1 Methodology and data sources

This stocktaking report draws on the information provided by the Member States on the measures that they have outlined for the implementation of the Recommendation. This information is supplemented with relevant data from the National Reform Programmes, European and international statistical data (Adult education Survey<sup>34</sup>, Continuing Vocational Training Survey<sup>35</sup>, Labour Force Survey<sup>36</sup>, OECD PIAAC<sup>37</sup> data and subsequent analyses, CEDEFOP studies, etc.).

The report does not aim to evaluate the impact of the Upskilling Pathways on the target group, but to provide a mapping of what actions are set in motion, or reinforced, at Member State level to support implementation of the Recommendation. The evaluation of the impact on the target group will take place within five years from the date of adoption of the Recommendation, i.e. by the end of 2021.

## 2.2 Overview of implementation plans

The Recommendation provides that, where possible, within one year of its adoption and at the latest by mid-2018, and by building on relevant existing national arrangements and existing financial frameworks, Member States should outline appropriate measures for the implementation at national level.

Member States chose a variety of ways to implement the Recommendation: often as part of existing lifelong learning, employment or national skills strategies; building on existing legislation/policy on adult education; part of wider new upskilling initiatives or as dedicated pilot projects.

<sup>33</sup> Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/adult-education-survey>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/continuing-vocational-training-survey>.

<sup>36</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey>.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>.



## Plans embedded into wider overarching strategies

In a number of Member States, the ambition is to implement the Recommendation as part of existing **lifelong learning (LLL) or employment strategies, national skills strategies** (including those developed in the context of the OECD-European Commission projects), or in the context of existing legislation/policy on adult education.

In Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Italy, Slovakia, Malta, Poland, Lithuania implementation is associated with lifelong learning strategies or legislation. Such implementation plans can also be part of broad strategies to upskill the workforce, in Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Slovenia; or linked to the strategy for education and science in Croatia. In France, upskilling pathways implementation will be pursued through a major new **Skills Investment Plan 2018-2022**<sup>38</sup>, along with the Vocational Education and Training (VET) reform.

The European Commission supports the Member States in developing their National Skills Strategies<sup>39</sup> through OECD projects. The participating countries are provided a framework to analyse their skills strengths and challenges. The process is cross-governmental with a broad stakeholder engagement, and backed by OECD comparative evidence. Austria, Belgium-NL, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Netherlands have undertaken, or are currently engaged in a National Skills Strategy project. Improving the skills of low-skilled adults and boosting their access to employment so that they are not left behind has been flagged as a challenge for most countries. The report for Belgium-NL highlights the challenge of financing adult learning, the factors behind under-representation of marginalised groups in accessing funding, and policies and practices to overcome this problem. Portugal and Slovenia skills strategies gave priority to adult learning and, catering for the specific needs of low skilled adults..

## Building on measures already in force

As encouraged by the Recommendation, in many instances implementation plans build on already existing measures.

Belgium-NL and Estonia have an incremental approach to implementation, which identifies the existing building blocks and concentrates on filling in the gaps. In Belgium-NL, this gap is considered to be validation, and in Estonia the focus is on developing flexible individualised offers of guidance and learning and the popularisation of lifelong learning.

Most Member States report on measures already in place and representing a large number of initiatives, most of them relevant and in line with the objectives of Upskilling Pathways (e.g. Poland and Croatia report 10 different actions/measures, Bulgaria 13, and Hungary 17, with different Ministries in the lead). In total, around 60 existing ESF programmes / initiatives are listed by Member States as measures to implement Upskilling Pathways, in parallel with some smaller scale Erasmus+ financed projects.

In some Member States, including Denmark, Finland, Austria, Portugal and Sweden implementation relies on comprehensive measures already in place, particularly to provide basic skills for adults and reinforcement of these measures to support upskilling (e.g. Portugal aims to reinforce its Qualifica programme<sup>40</sup> – a comprehensive strategy for low-skilled adults, including through ESF reallocations).

## Setting new ambitious agendas

In a few countries, the timing of the adoption of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways coincided with wide ranging reflections at national level around the future of work and the impact of digitalisation on people on the labour market. Thus, in these countries, the implementation of the Recommendation is part of new overarching ambitious national reform plans.

Implementation in the Netherlands is part of the Government's wider policy to achieve a breakthrough in developing lifelong learning, including support for low-skilled adults and those with the greatest learning needs. Three projects were launched in 2018 to improve flexibility between training offers, better tailoring and skills assessment and guidance for employees over 45 years in selected occupations, to empower them to take their careers on to retirement age.

<sup>38</sup> <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/grands-dossiers/plan-d-investissement-competences>.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/skills/nationalskillsstrategies/buildingeffectiveskillsstrategiesatnationalandlocallevels.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.qualifica.gov.pt/#/>.

Germany also adopted in November 2018 a new Law<sup>41</sup> aiming to provide reinforced support for upskilling low qualified people who are employed in jobs that may be at risk of displacement due to digitalisation. This is similar to a new initiative in Ireland, Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth,<sup>42</sup> targeting low skilled people in need of support to avoid job displacement or to avail of emerging new jobs opportunities.

In 2017-18, Finland introduced a number of important reforms to create a unified pathway ranging from basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills to a qualification for working life, connected with parts of labour market training and special initiatives for immigrants. Other characteristics include common vocational pathways for all age groups and specific measures and flexibility within the system to support immigrants including asylum seekers, people with low learning abilities or digital competence, or with disabilities.

Sweden and Denmark recently introduced reforms to further reinforce their already very comprehensive support system to low skilled adults, part of long-established adult learning policy and practice.

In UK (Wales) on 1 January 2019, the Employability Plan<sup>43</sup> will come into force to provide people of all ages and abilities with high quality education and skills to meet the challenges and work opportunities of tomorrow, and to instil in everyone a passion to learn throughout their lives.

## Dedicated pilot projects and initiatives

In a number of countries, the adoption of the Recommendation helped stimulate wider debates and a critical reflection on the existing support measures, leading to the development of pilot projects to test out the concept of Upskilling Pathways.

In Greece, implementation is starting with a pilot project financed under the EaSI programme. Czechia will commence a comprehensive pilot on 1 January 2019, to create a systemic environment for upskilling, based on the Recommendation, incorporating all three steps, with an emphasis on preparing for 'digital jobs'. In Bulgaria, a consultation with stakeholders is underway on "skills pathways" for those over 29, i.e. taking up where the Youth Guarantee leaves off. The results will be used to plan measures to implement Upskilling Pathways as part of an updated national strategy for lifelong learning post-2020. Poland is also testing out implementation through a new initiative for setting up Local Knowledge and Education Centres (LOWE) to provide learning opportunities for adults with difficulty in accessing educational opportunities, mainly in rural and industrial areas.

### 2.2.1 Scale of ambition varies

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*Upskilling Pathways aim to assist the adults who currently struggle with literacy, numeracy or digital skills or who did not complete their upper secondary education, representing a large and heterogeneous target group of 61 million. The scale of measures to implement Upskilling Pathways can be expected to reflect this.*

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It is difficult to give overall estimates of the numbers of adults that planned implementation measures will reach across the European Union, as such targets are not systematically mentioned in the measures outlined by the Member States.

Measures designed to have a significant impact upon the relevant population are set in a number of cases, such as:

- France - Skills Investment Plan targets **one million persons not in education, employment, or training** under 25 years and **one million low-skilled job seekers over 25 years**, from 2018 to 2022
- Portugal - aims to involve 600,000 adults and young people not in education, employment, or training by 2020 in qualification procedures planned under the Qualifica programme

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<sup>41</sup> [https://www.bqbl.de/xaver/bqbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger\\_BGBI&jumpTo=bqbl118s2651.pdf#\\_bqbl\\_%2F%2F%5B%40attr\\_id%3D%27bqbl118s2651.pdf%27%5D\\_1549553811322](https://www.bqbl.de/xaver/bqbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bqbl118s2651.pdf#_bqbl_%2F%2F%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bqbl118s2651.pdf%27%5D_1549553811322).

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.solas.ie/SkillsToAdvance/Documents/SupportingWorkingLives\\_EnterpriseGrowth\\_PolicyFramework\\_Sept2018.pdf](http://www.solas.ie/SkillsToAdvance/Documents/SupportingWorkingLives_EnterpriseGrowth_PolicyFramework_Sept2018.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> <https://beta.gov.wales/employability-plan>.

- Ireland - aims to support the upskilling of 40,000 employees by 2025, while over 100,000 would benefit from literacy or community education
- Lithuania - 65,000 employees and 19,500 more through investment in micro and SMEs to 2023
- Estonia - expects to upskill over 86,000 by 2020
- Cyprus - 40,000 mostly young persons not in education, employment, or training, will be upskilled
- Germany - 120,000 25-35 year olds should be offered a start qualification by 2020 along with millions who will benefit from upskilling opportunities offered at Job Centres
- Italy - 224,799 adults should pass through the reformed adult education system in 2017-18
- Denmark - 80,000 adults annually attend general education in addition to the offer of basic skills to 90,000 young adults.

At the same time, many of the other measures outlined target only a smaller number of individuals (sometimes in proportion with population size, but not always) and do not seem to add up to a significant share of the low skilled population.

## 2.2.2 Coordination of implementation measures

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*The Recommendation calls for effective coordination of implementation measures, with the engagement of relevant public and private actors in education and training, employment, social, cultural and other relevant policy areas.*

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Since the Recommendation seeks to develop a coherent strategic approach to giving adults access to upskilling opportunities, coordination of the many routes and opportunities that exist and their multiple providers is crucial. A small number of Member States refer to groups being established for this purpose, while some others add the task to the coordination work being done by national coordinators for adult learning or wider existing structures.

### Dedicated governance being set up

**Steering or working groups** led either by the education or employment ministry and including main stakeholders have been convened in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Romania.

At the same time, in most other Member States responsibility still depends on the lead ministry for individual measures with no additional coordination foreseen.

In Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia national coordinators for adult learning are prioritising Upskilling Pathways in their work plans for 2018-19. More specifically, in Hungary, a managing committee is bringing together decision-makers in relevant ministries and

In **Croatia**, additional mechanisms for effective coordination of government authorities and other stakeholders will be defined for upskilling the workforce in general.

In **Romania**, the Ministry of Labour leads a working group that includes the ministries for Education and EU funds, as well as the National Authority for Qualifications, Institute of Educational Sciences, PES, representatives of approved training providers and NGOs.

an advisory committee comprising those implementing ESF projects, social partners, Non-Governmental Organisations, agencies, practitioners and local stakeholders.

A few countries refer to **wider coordination structures**. Latvia draws on the Adult Education Management Board, which represents ministries, social partners, the Chamber of commerce, and municipalities. In Finland, a panel of experts (“Think tank for future skills”) was set up to anticipate socially significant changes in education policy and to make proposals for the development of skills and learning at all levels of education and in all forms of education. In Sweden, strong cooperation between the National Council for Adult Education and Public Employment Services (PES) will ensure implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow up. In the Netherlands, all concerned departments will work together with social partners, trade unions, providers and others to implement new measures.

In Poland, based on an Order of the Prime Minister<sup>44</sup>, the Ministry of Education is chairing an Interdepartmental Team for Lifelong Learning and the Integrated Qualification System.

The Employability Plan, led by the Welsh Government will take a cross-Government and multi-agency approach based on the partnership between the Welsh Government, local government, UK Government, and third sector partners. It makes the links between skills and training, and other policy areas that impact on employment opportunities such as health, housing, transport and care.

It is worth recalling that the European Commission has advocated integrated approaches (combining various actors vertically and horizontally) as effective ways of active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.2.3 Wide target groups addressed

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*The Recommendation provides that Member States may identify priority target groups for the delivery of Upskilling Pathways, taking into account national circumstances, available resources and existing national strategies.*

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Although the Recommendation provides clearly for the option of prioritising specific sub-groups, from the information submitted by the Member States it appears that measures currently in place do not necessarily prioritise.

In some cases, (Greece, Spain, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia) measures seem to target **all adults who lack basic skills**, whereas in other instances several target groups are listed (unemployed, economically inactive and employed individuals with low skills levels), amounting thus to an overarching approach covering all potential sub groups.

In Ireland, the Upskilling Pathways Steering group established by the Department of Education and Skills undertook a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the target group, by employment status, age groups, gender and nationality and identified people in employment as one of the priority target groups.

In **France**, the Skills Investment Plan was launched in 2018 (€15bn) to support the upskilling and employability of **one million low-qualified jobseekers and one million young people not in employment, education or training**. It is a five-year plan piloted by the Ministry of Labour and overall coordination rests with the Prime Minister's Office. €3bn are to be spent on the fight against low levels of literacy and an emphasis has also been put on digital skills. The Plan has a strong inclusive dimension, for instance a national call for proposals "100% inclusion" aims to finance innovative experimentation to reach out to, remobilise and upskill the most vulnerable groups. 16 other funding programmes are foreseen, 90% of them being directly devoted to new training paths.

In many instances, especially when different individual measures are being listed, these may be targeted to specific groups (e.g. unemployed workers), but they are bundled with other measures addressing the other target groups (employed, or older workers etc.). However, a few important groups do emerge:

- **Young adults not in education, employment, or training:** early school leavers and young adults, particularly those not in education, employment or training are a target for many countries (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE, Cyprus, Czechia, Germany, France, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, UK (Wa)), or in Denmark young adults without basic skills. Indeed, there is often a strong link to the Youth Guarantee and some countries are making concerted efforts to develop existing measures beyond the Youth Guarantee and offer progression routes to those over 25 or 29 (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE, Bulgaria, Finland, France).

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<sup>44</sup> [http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/download/Prawo\\_o\\_ZSK/Miedzyszresortowy-Zespol-do-spraw-uczenia-sie-przez-cale-zycie-i-Zintegrowanego-Sy\\_1.pdf](http://www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/download/Prawo_o_ZSK/Miedzyszresortowy-Zespol-do-spraw-uczenia-sie-przez-cale-zycie-i-Zintegrowanego-Sy_1.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Commission's Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on Active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, C(2008)5737, Social Investment Package, COM(2013) 83 final.

- **Unemployed people with low levels of qualification:** served mostly through the Public Employment Services (Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, Poland). In some cases the upskilling is part of larger active labour market policies (ALMP) and it is not clear to what extent low-qualified adults are being prioritised over other eligible groups as part of such interventions (e.g. in Croatia programmes up to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) level 6 are offered). However, the Swedish PES defines the low-skilled target group as having education lower than upper secondary school.
- **People in employment:** In Belgium-DE, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland, Croatia, Lithuania, Malta emphasis is placed on people in employment, which can include the workforce in general (e.g. new Law in Germany offers co-financing to companies and emphasises digital skills; Estonia emphasises digital skills for all); other important target groups are employed people with low or no qualifications, who are at risk of losing their job or who work in declining sectors (Czechia, Estonia, France, Ireland, Latvia), and people employed in **small and medium-sized enterprises** (SMEs) (in Germany, Hungary and Lithuania). Ireland flags SMEs and enterprises as key players in providing support for upskilling and reskilling its workforce.
- **Older workers – employed or unemployed:** in order to extend their working lives, workers normally aged over 50 are the target of numerous measures in Germany, Spain, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, UK (Wales). In Poland where low-skilled people are found predominantly among older age groups, the authorities support a targeted Senior+ Programme, including digital, sport and health and leisure-time learning.
- **Non-EU migrants** including refugees: in particular those who arrived in the EU during the most recent wave of migration (Austria, Belgium DE, Belgium-FR, Estonia, Croatia, Ireland, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden);
- **Employees, self-employed** over 45 or on disability or redundancy from very specific occupational sectors are targeted in the Netherlands;
- **Citizens at large** (Czechia), or **people not actively seeking employment** (Bulgaria, Hungary) are some of the other groups specifically mentioned;
- **prisoners** (Spain, Italy),
- **Roma** including programmes targeting women (Spain, Hungary, Slovenia),
- **people with disabilities** (Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Hungary);
- **Adult education staff** are a target in Lithuania municipalities with a view to ensure a smooth functioning of the network of adult education coordinators. Also in Ireland, one of the measures aims to **support tutors, coordinators and managers** in the further education sector and facilitate continued good practice in assessment of literacy and numeracy for learners.

## 2.3 Three-step provision

The integrated three steps approach is present in a number of initiatives, while several measures outlined by Member states embed one or two of the steps.

The holistic competence-based, flexible offer of an **individualised VET pathway in Finland** includes the three steps, and fits into a broader strategy on upskilling and reskilling. The Austrian Basic Skills<sup>46</sup> programme is also built around the three steps and leads to acquisition of basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

In **Portugal**, the Qualifica initiative (building on an existing initiative from 2000), focuses on supporting less qualified adults, unemployed people and young persons not in education, employment, or training. The Qualifica centres provide information, advice and referrals on the recognition and validation of prior learning and then signpost individuals to training. There are around 300 centres in Portugal, which are mostly housed in existing public or private providers such as schools. Recent developments notably include a Qualifica passport, an online tool where qualifications and information on skills acquired are recorded. The online system also provides individuals with guidance on pathways that they could use to complete or obtain new qualifications. The national credit system is aligned to the European Credit system for VET (ECVET) and used to translate validated non-formal or informal learning into credits of a qualification. This helps ensure that learners can undertake flexible pathways which build on what they already know. The programme therefore mainstreams the Upskilling Pathways model with its three distinct stages.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at/initiative-erwachsenenbildung/was-ist-das/>.

Through the Skills Investment Plan, France expects to bring together the rich palette of existing measures that support each step of Upskilling Pathways, including generalised assessment of basic skills, guaranteed access to training for the most vulnerable, including an offer of individualised support before and throughout the training, and the strengthening of validation of experiential learning.

### 2.3.1 Skills assessment

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*Low skilled adults should be offered the opportunity to undergo an assessment, e.g. a skills audit, to identify existing skills and upskilling needs.*

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Many of the initiatives mentioned refer to methods such as skills profiling, or skills screening, as a first step in supporting low skilled/low qualified adults. However, only in few cases do they appear to be used to identify gaps in basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

The assessment of all three basic skills is mentioned explicitly in the cases of Austria, Greece, Croatia and Italy. In December 2017, an agreement signed by Government, the Regions and Autonomous Provinces on active labour policy measures enlarged profiling by PES in Italy. In a test phase the public employment agency - ANPAL has tested 3704 candidates using the OECD Education and Training Online<sup>47</sup> (an online assessment tool linked to PIAAC). Slovenia and Slovakia are also adapting this tool. Belgium-NL and Cyprus refer to developing assessment as part of the wider introduction of arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In Greece, assessment of basic skills is addressed as part of EU-funded EaSI project to support Upskilling Pathways and through the work of the National Coordinator for adult learning.

In Denmark and Finland, assessment of skills is an intrinsic part of the process of accessing general and vocational programmes; but also in the context of validation to assess the professional competence gained by employees outside the formal system, as is the case in Latvia. Skills assessment as part of adult learning programmes and the validation process is offered in Estonia and Lithuania. In Denmark, common screening tools are available for companies to assess the need to improve the basic skills of their employees.

Some other Member States refer to the assessment of one or two of the basic skills: most often literacy followed by numeracy. A project in the Netherlands (March 2018 to July 2019) provides skills assessments for people aged over 45 that steers them to a course that could lead to a job.

In **Ireland**, Skills assessment is provided across further education and training services provided by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The *Initial and ongoing assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ level 1-3 – Guidelines and Toolkit* assists learners in building and sustaining their literacy and numeracy skills. This resource provides accurate initial and ongoing assessments and responds to the complexity of literacy and numeracy skill assessment in a way that is designed to be learner-centred, rigorous, supportive, user-friendly and accountable. The toolkit is in use across the national network of ETBs and has been endorsed as the national assessment tool for NFQ Levels 1-3 (up to EQF 2).

In Czechia, the pilot project for implementing the Upskilling Pathways aims to develop online assessment of literacy, numeracy and digital skills, competence profiling and follow-up training programmes leading to a vocational qualification at EQF level 3 or 4.

### 2.3.2 Tailored offer of learning

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*The Recommendation provides that low skilled adults should be provided with an offer of education and training meeting the needs identified by the skills assessment. The learning offer should also consider, as far as possible, local, regional and national labour market needs.*

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<sup>47</sup><http://www.oecd.org/skills/ESonline-assessment/abouteducationskillsonline/>.

Implementation at national level relies in most countries on a set of parallel measures targeted towards specific sub-groups or towards the acquisition of targeted professional qualifications or types of skills. This implies that education and training provision tends to be a global offer geared towards the general situation of particular groups, rather than tailored to each individual's specific learning needs.

In **Denmark**, adults who need to supplement their basic skills (including from 2019 digital and English) have access to preparatory adult education programmes (FVU). A parallel route exists for youth and adults who did not finish lower secondary education, **general adult education (AVU)**. AVU provides access to general education certificates at EQF levels 2 and 3. In both these programmes, applicants are admitted following an assessment of their skills in the subjects they wish to improve. They can follow different subjects at different levels according to their ability and prior knowledge. Successful candidates can progress to higher preparatory single-subject courses for entry to higher education. Unemployed adults and adults who are not part of the labour force have access to almost 3,000 **adult vocational training programmes**, which are also specially adapted for immigrants. It is possible to choose one or a number of the 200 subjects fitting individual needs; vocational Danish, vocational maths or vocational foreign languages can be embedded. In addition, adult VET can be supplemented by FVU. Recognition of prior learning is also available, upon which an individual training plan can be developed. Similar credit may be obtained on completion of the plan or part of it.

In **Sweden**, the system is joined up to allow adults to combine the benefits of various programmes, e.g. unemployed adults can combine vocational training opportunities with the right to complete upper secondary education; migrants can combine language learning and VET; those who need additional preparatory learning or basic skills can do so in preparatory labour market training or the folk high schools; and subsidised employment can be combined with education and training. Folk high schools have the flexibility to tailor learning (through an individual study plan) to the needs of individuals. Long-term unemployed and newly arrived people participating in relevant PES programmes receive a tailored offer of VET in occupations with shortages.

Estonia is reforming and merging guidance services to provide a comprehensive system across levels and sectors of education and training, aiming to provide a **more tailored and flexible offer to both employed and unemployed people**, based on skills assessment, currently carried out by PES.

The reform<sup>48</sup> in Finland extends the competence-based approach to people of all ages, thus merging youth and adult VET provision in one. Clients systematically receive a skills assessment, and an offer of customised learning designed to meet their needs and those of the labour market, with an increased measure of workplace learning, and trainees are taken in throughout the year.

Tailored provision is also provided in Italy (through the adult education centres, CPIA), in Luxembourg, Slovenia and is being planned under the pilot project in Czechia.

To facilitate tailoring provision of basic skills and further learning to low-skilled learners' needs, **the Lifelong Learning Lab programme in the Netherlands** will involve learners to examine the knowledge and skills they need to become better employees; to map how they wish to acquire these skills, and to examine how best to motivate, encourage and teach them during their careers.

Belgium-FR enables learner progress from general adult education to vocational training; Belgium-NL is making arrangements to connect the certification of competence received through recognition of prior learning to progress in the formal system, e.g. in VET. Through the development of validation procedures, the aim is to link the competence certificates to the National Qualification Framework (NQF), thus giving access to further progression in the formal system. In Bulgaria, the National Agency for VET is developing a methodology to offer flexible, personalised courses to update professional qualifications at National Qualifications Framework/European Qualifications Framework (NQF/EQF) levels 2-4.

Individualised action plans for unemployed people proposed by PES in Bulgaria and Hungary have some measure of tailoring included.

<sup>48</sup> Action plan for the implementation of the key project and reforms defined in the Strategic Government Programme. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/documents/10616/1986338/Action+plan+for+the+implementation+Strategic+Government+Programme+EN.pdf/12f723ba-6f6b-4e6c-a636-4ad4175d7c4e>.

The Recommendation underlines that the offer of learning should be flexible as well as of high quality. Offering suitable learning pathways to adults depends **on the flexibility of the system** and how it enables adults to combine learning with work or a busy family life. Efforts to attract people to return to formal education are a feature in Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Malta, Poland, Romania, by offering new curricula, later opening hours in schools, regular intake of new students not just once or twice a year, while second chance schools are the preferred route in Cyprus.

Distance and Web-based learning also offer flexibility to the learners in terms of when and where they learn. In Italy, as part of the training pacts up to 20% of a programme can be in distance learning units. Open access through online and digital provision is planned in Czechia (related to the digital strategy<sup>49</sup>) and in Croatia e-teaching of the new basic skills programme will be available from 2019.

To facilitate the tailoring of learning to individual needs, in particular by giving people the opportunity to achieve the learning they need to fill gaps in their existing knowledge, without completing an entire programme, the programmes themselves must be designed in a flexible way. They can be made up of building blocks towards the desired outcome that can be studied as a whole or in part.

**Modularisation** of programmes for adults is growing; modules are widely applied across further education and training in Ireland; modular vocational training and professional development programmes for unemployed people who did not complete VET were introduced in Latvia, a modular basic skills programme in Croatia, and a modular format in both VET and second chance programmes in Romania.

What is not always obvious is how – or whether – countries link measures to other programmes or courses in order to enable learner progression. For example, it is unclear whether, when the person's status changes from unemployed to employed, there is a process of following the individual's trajectory and offering them transfer to another programme for adults in employment, or further learning combined with work, etc. Sweden provides some insights into how this can be done (see Box above). In Portugal, the National Credit System for VET, promotes greater mobility and flexibility between pathways and capitalises on individual learning.

The type of financing the programme receives, which may be limited to the original target group in which the individual finds her/himself can reinforce this problem. In the UK (ENG) funding for adult education was merged into one adult education budget (AEB) of £1.5 billion per annum from 2016-17, with the intention to bring more flexibility to the learner and remove barriers. In 2018-19, AEB supports a new one-year pilot to fully fund employees on low incomes, where they previously would have had to contribute approximately 50% to the cost of their learning.

**Flexibility with regard to the type of setting** in which the learning is being offered is also noted in some countries (Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Poland).

### 2.3.3 Validation and recognition of skills acquired

Many of the measures outlined by the Member States are closely related to the establishment of validation arrangements, which are being developed in line with the 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>50</sup>. There are also strong links to national qualifications frameworks and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Some countries are linking Upskilling Pathways closely with the development of arrangements for the **validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning** (Belgium-NL, Belgium-FR, Czechia, Cyprus, Estonia, Spain, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland), which provides learners with possibilities to bridge different learning routes, or to accumulate **credits and partial qualifications** to gain **access to further learning** opportunities. Some of the developments in validation are driven by the **need to upskill workers**, many of whom have no vocational qualifications but lots of work experience (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France). In Sweden, PES use validation as a labour market programme, to assess and map skills, document, and then identify further learning needs; and **validation to agreed industry standards** is procured from providers. The Swedish National Delegation for Validation is assessing how the NQF could strengthen the interaction between

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.msmt.cz/uploads/DigiStrategie.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>



education and validation. Latvia expects to have a full validation system in place by 2023 that includes individual assessment.

**Strengthening links to NQFs and hence to EQF** is increasingly on the agenda (Belgium-NL, Czechia, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden). However, while work has been completed in almost all countries to map formal qualifications, including vocational qualifications, particularly from EQF level 3 upwards, apart from countries which **link basic skills to formal education** routes (Denmark, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Romania, Sweden), there is generally no reference in the measures listed by Member States to a qualification level in relation to these skills.

In **Germany**, the "ValiKom" project developed a procedure to certify vocational skills of those who have no formal qualification (e.g. exam or certificate). Adults over 25 with work experience are eligible for the enlarged second phase, 2018-21, in which Chambers of Commerce and Industry and of Skilled Crafts, responsible for both the project and certification in the dual system of apprenticeship, assess and validate their skills against recognised vocational qualifications. Candidates are prepared through information and advice on the procedure and available assessment methods (role play, specialist interview, presentation of work results, case studies, work samples, etc.). To proceed they fill in a CV and self-assessment outlining the competences they think they have towards a qualification. At least two assessors, one from the relevant Chamber and an external expert, analyse the assessment and how skills were acquired in an interview and follow up procedures. Full or partial equivalence to the qualification may be awarded. Guidance and advice are provided on what may still be needed to achieve a certificate.

In Ireland and Portugal basic skills provision is mapped to NQFs. The Qualifica Portal in Portugal allows pooling of information on qualifications, covering EQF level 1-4. The measure on basic skills in Austria concentrates on qualifications at EQF level 1-2 only, and Bulgaria also offers basic skills programmes and vocational qualifications at NQF/EQF level 2-3.

Denmark, Estonia and Hungary also include measures to offer **access to higher education**, which are at EQF 4. Similarly, since January 2017 in Sweden where no qualifications at EQF level 3 exist, adults have a right to education to complete upper secondary level (EQF 4), making them eligible for higher education. In other countries, qualifications offered are aligned with **national standards and frameworks** (Czechia, UK (ENG); apprenticeships aligned to standards for GCSE and A-levels in UK (NI) equivalent to EQF levels 3 and 4.

## 2.4 Skills addressed

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*Upskilling Pathways should support low skilled adults to acquire a minimum level of **literacy, numeracy and digital competence**; and/or acquire a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences, relevant for the labour market and active participation in society, by making **progress towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4** depending on national circumstances.*

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Although not systematically available to low-skilled adults in general, several individual initiatives concentrate on boosting literacy, numeracy and digital skills (in Austria, Belgium-FR, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, UK (ENG)). Some countries target adults who have had very little formal education - in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Romania measures include adult education programmes at the level of primary or lower-secondary education.

In the framework of the digital literacy strategy 2015-2020, the **Czech** Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has launched in 2017 the development of an online system to promote digital competences for employees and jobseekers. The aim is to enable them to self-assess their level of digital skills based on the European Digital Competences Framework. Following this assessment, they will then be able to undertake tailored training to upskill – the project also aims to map relevant training opportunities and create regional training programmes. The online tool will also propose recommendations to improve digital competences of the workforce, for instance among senior workers. Thousands of Czech citizens are expected to benefit from this initiative up to 2021.

In Croatia, the work of the national coordinator for adult learning is contributing to the development of new modular curricula for literacy, numeracy and digital skills, as part of the programme of primary and secondary adult education. When in place this would allow customisation based on assessment of learners' existing competence, and building the foundations to attain a broader set of skills for further learning, work and social participation.

In Denmark, the tripartite agreement<sup>51</sup> on strengthening flexibility and quality in adult education and training (October 2017) expands preparatory adult education programmes to **include digital technology (and English language skills)**, in view of keeping labour force skills up with the pace of rapid changes on the labour market.

A growing **emphasis on digital skills** is apparent in many countries. This often goes beyond basic digital literacy and many additional measures designed for the workforce and future jobs requirements, or for the population as a whole, in response to technological change or digitalisation are highlighted (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, UK (ENG)). In UK (ENG), from 2020 adults (19+) with low or no basic digital skills will have an entitlement to assess their skills and to enrol on qualifications regulated by Ofqual and approved as part of the publicly-funded basic digital skills offer. In Finland, a new programme for adults with low basic digital skills is being provided through the liberal adult education providers and NGOs.

Many of the initiatives mapped by Member States **concentrate on vocational skills and employment**, notably through apprenticeship (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Portugal, UK(NI)), with the aim of supporting the acquisition of vocational qualifications for employment or updating outdated qualifications. However, it is not clear to what extent these programmes offer opportunities to improve the three basic skills that are the focus of the Recommendation.

Some measures target boosting skills and qualifications of low-skilled jobseekers (Bulgaria, Hungary) or employees with outdated qualifications or skills (Germany, Estonia, Italy) to prepare them to make the transition to sectors with labour shortages. UK (Wales) will pilot an individual learning account for workers to fund personal vocational retraining in sectors where there is a skills shortage. Another example is the provision in Hungary of professional driver training and ICT skills to alleviate a shortage of truck drivers.

## 2.5 Reaching out to target groups, guiding and supporting them throughout

### 2.5.1 Types of guidance and support services to support the target groups

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*The Recommendation calls for motivation and outreach measures that include raising awareness on the benefits of upskilling, and making available information on existing guidance. Guidance and/or mentoring services should be provided to support learners' progression through all steps of the upskilling process.*

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Belgium-NL, Estonia, Finland, and Ireland address guidance as a crosscutting activity that is undergoing improvements or reforms, also to target low-skilled adults as the GOAL<sup>52</sup> project shows. Finland is rolling out 50 one-stop-shops offering guidance to youth, a service that by 2025 will be extended to offer low-threshold, cross-sectoral information, advice and guidance to people of all ages. In Portugal, Qualifica runs a programme call line and the Qualifica Centres offer individual guidance. In Italy, adult education centres (CPIA) are defining individual pathways as part of guidance activities and adult education centres (VUC) in Denmark provide guidance and counselling to learners to ensure they make a good choice on entry and to support them to complete their programme.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.star.dk/en/social-partners/tripartite-discussions-in-2016-and-2017>.

<sup>52</sup> GOAL stands for **Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners**. It is one of the projects under the Erasmus+ programme Key Action 3, European Policy Experimentation. The project sought to develop or expand educational guidance services for low-educated adults in 6 countries across Europe: Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, Iceland, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Slovenia.

In the provision of guidance services, a heavy reliance on PES is found in many countries (Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Croatia, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta). Municipalities are responsible for guidance and outreach in Sweden, and since 2018 they can apply for a state grant to carry out outreach, information and guidance measures. In Sweden, PES also play an important role and have developed a career guidance strategy to support more people to enrol in education and training. PES can also assign unemployed individuals to a three-month motivation course at a folk high school, with the aim to help 25% of programme participants continue onto regular education; participants receive a study plan on how to achieve educational progression or access to work. The Unemployment Insurance Fund in Estonia is providing guidance that includes individual assessment to the whole population; this service is being merged with other guidance services and e-tools are being developed. In Germany, job centres increasingly serve employed as well as unemployed clients, offering career guidance for the former. Guidance services in Belgium-DE offer competence profiling, using the German ProfilPASS method, as part of the process of orientation towards suitable continuing training options.

Wales has a national, all-age, impartial and fully bilingual careers information, advice and guidance service delivered by Careers Wales digitally and in person. This service has a key role to play in supporting individuals to make sound choices in respect of their education, training and work. Careers Wales will operate the Employment Advice Gateway (EAG) to provide a common approach to identifying the needs of the individual, as part of reshaping employability support in Wales.

From 2020, Croatia plans to offer new, non-formal programmes to very low-skilled and socially marginalised people, disabled, older and retired people and migrants, by extending the network of lifelong guidance centres (run by PES) to adult education centres. In Ireland, PES deliver employment supports and entitlement services, including accessing education / training opportunities. Through a gateway that signposts users to advice, information and access to programmes, a one-stop shop model called Intreo. Job centres in Denmark also provide a one-stop-shop service, and similar developments are evident in Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Croatia, Malta. In France, personalised guidance is available since the 2014 reform, which established the Career Development Counselling. The service is available to job seekers through Pôles Emploi (PES), APEC for executive employees, CAP for people with disabilities and Mission Locales for young people, and intermediary bodies for those availing of training leave. The regional pacts should outline how this will be developed in the context of the 2018 Skills Investment Plan.

### 2.5.2 Specific outreach activities planned

Media campaigns are planned in Croatia to promote lifelong learning, including outreach, also at regional and local level through schools and local communities to motivate target groups. They are accompanied by plans to launch a financial instrument targeting people with lower levels of education, including disadvantaged group and people with disabilities, to stimulate them to participate in learning. In Estonia, there is a campaign to popularise lifelong learning and 19 adult learning networks are attracting low-skilled adults back to learning, while in Cyprus awareness raising is woven into the activities of the national coordinator for adult learning. In Portugal mobilisation campaigns on qualifications and the importance of adult participation in learning are organised; Qualifica is reaching out and guiding adults to the centres. The tripartite agreement in Denmark earmarks funding for outreach activities and incentives aimed at workers who lack basic skills.

Outreach in particular through the traditional media and social media networks is happening in Latvia each time a call is launched and the national coordinator for adult learning is reaching out to local authorities to develop awareness raising and information to motivate adults in the municipalities. Municipalities are responsible for guidance and outreach in Sweden; since 2018 they can apply for a state grant to carry out outreach, information and guidance measures, and the Swedish study associations were granted funding to provide outreach and motivation, in particular to non-EU born women. Hungary is making a video to promote the benefits of Upskilling Pathways among potential learners; videos will be used in Czechia to promote digital skills. Colleges and learning providers have their own outreach and guidance processes in place in UK (ENG).

### 2.5.3 Financial resources allocated

*Most countries list the ESF-funded projects that support low-skilled adults, along with national co-funding and some additional programmes funded only from national funds that are usually in the education sector.*

With very few exceptions, all countries have indicated that much of the activity to support low-skilled adults is co-funded through the European Social Fund. At the end of 2016, the ESF and the Youth Employment Initiative<sup>53</sup> had supported 3.4 million people with lower than upper secondary education attainment. Under the education objective in particular 1.1 million low-qualified participants had been supported, which corresponds to 57% of all participants. Most of this EU funding is invested in active labour market policies (ALMP) and while it is being used in part of support low-skilled adults, it cannot be seen as dedicated funding for this group. In fact, much of it supports unemployed people in general, and increasingly those in employment whose jobs are threatened. Among the countries which receive large sums from ESF for ALMP are Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Malta, Poland. To support Upskilling Pathways related measures in particular, Portugal is channelling €61 million of these funds to the Qualifica programme and Poland €12 million to the LOWE centres and €6.8 million to a **new opportunities pilot project** that will be introduced in 2019, directly linked to Upskilling Pathways.

Other countries also benefit from significant ESF allocations to support upskilling and reskilling, even though the amounts are not specified in the replies. This is the case for Czechia, Spain, France, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.

Only national funding sources to support upskilling measures are mentioned in Ireland (allocated to the National Skills Strategy<sup>54</sup> and Further Education and Training strategy<sup>55</sup>), Germany (related to active labour market policy), and Sweden ('entry grants' from 2017). France, and the Netherlands have also not referred to ESF spending in their reply to the questionnaire. This however, does not imply that some ESF or other funds might not have been used in the implementation measures. Recent legislation in Italy<sup>56</sup> pave the way for greater investment in training activities for adults, see box below.

In 2017, Sweden introduced a new form of financial aid – 'education entry grant', to make it easier for unemployed adults with short previous education and substantial educational needs to study at basic or upper-secondary level, hence improving their prospects of becoming established in the labour market. Circa €48 million have been earmarked to cover this right to upper secondary education. Labour market integration training is free of charge and jobseekers over 25 years are entitled to their unemployment benefits for a maximum of 24 months to take part in self-motivated full-time education and training. Croatia is also planning individualised incentives.

In **Italy**, recent legislation that improves conditions concerning benefits for unemployed people enables them to receive support during steps one (skills assessment) and two (tailored offer of learning) of Upskilling Pathways, as well as during guidance sessions. Legislation enabling tax credits for companies undertaking training activities to support the Business 4.0 Plan, is endorsed in a national social partner agreement. 19 Inter-professional funds exist, in particular to develop the skills of the workforce across sectors, targeting those at risk of skills obsolescence, which are often low or medium skilled workers.

Securing funding for the **upskilling of people in employment** remains the greatest challenge. Two countries in particular are starting to address this problem. In France, for employees who have not achieved an EQF 3 qualification that is lower secondary education, **their entitlement to a personal training account** will increase to 1.6 times the basic right. Germany has introduced draft legislation that will enable employees, regardless of their qualification, age or company size, whose jobs are at risk to have financial support for continuing education or training. It will be funded from the €3 billion annually earmarked for PES and the job centres.

<sup>53</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1176>.

<sup>54</sup> [https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub\\_national\\_skills\\_strategy\\_2025.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Law No. 205 of 27 December 2017 (Budget 2018 including tax incentives for firms' investment in employees as laid down in Business 4.0 National Plan ([https://www.mise.gov.it/images/stories/documenti/INDUSTRIA-40-NATIONAL%20PLAN\\_EN-def.pdf](https://www.mise.gov.it/images/stories/documenti/INDUSTRIA-40-NATIONAL%20PLAN_EN-def.pdf)); Inter-ministerial Decree of 4 May 2018 (tax credit for training expenditure).

## 2.6 Timeline for implementation and regular evaluation

With the exception of countries that have in place a type of mainstreamed provision of basic skills education for adults, the majority of implementation measures seem to be primarily driven by access to EU funds and tied in with their planning periods. Hence, many initiatives are running until 2020 or at best to 2022, and there are no obvious plans on how to sustain them beyond this date. Some exceptions can also be noted, like in the case of Estonia, where a post-2020 lifelong learning strategy is being developed, and in Bulgaria and Slovakia where a similar strategy is in the pipeline.

Dedicated new initiatives, e.g. in Czechia or Greece, are short term or pilot projects; this can be explained by their nature, which is to test out a new innovative approach and only after that would they proceed to further large-scale deployment. Systems which have an overarching approach (including in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Belgium-NL) have a long-term impact and are mainstreamed as part of regular provision.

The Recommendation includes also a commitment to evaluate all implementing measures and their impact on the progress of the target group towards the acquisition of literacy, numeracy and digital competences and/or towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4 depending on national circumstances. However, with few exceptions, evaluation by Member States is only mentioned in terms of the evaluation of EU-funded or individual national projects that are being undertaken, and no overarching approach to such evaluation seems to be pursued for the moment.

Latvia is working closely with OECD and the European Commission on the initial assessment for the design of a National Skills Strategy and plans to assess the impact of upskilling through the next round of PIAAC. In the case of France, the Skills Investment Plan regional pacts include a systematic evaluation approach, supported by a scientific evaluation committee to feedback and disseminate positive results to speed up the transformation and adaptation of existing training pathways.

An interesting approach is also in place in Ireland, through its Learner Support System that provides an integrated approach to data collection in all further education and training programmes, and is linked to other national datasets to allow monitoring the progression of learners to further education and/or into employment, data that will also serve evaluation purposes.

## 2.7 Partners delivering Upskilling Pathways

In addition to the coordination bodies, that in most of the cases are steered by the Ministry of labour or the Ministry of Education, a multitude of actors are involved in the delivery of the three steps or the accompanying guidance and outreach measures.

Schools, community centres, VET providers, both public and private, all play an important role in the delivery of the skills assessment, learning opportunities or guidance services that are part of the Upskilling Pathways.

In Denmark, the various adult education programmes are provided by **the adult education centres (VUC)**, which also provide guidance and counselling services.

In Ireland, NALA – the National Association for Adult Literacy and the **community education system** are pioneering development in basic skills provision. In Portugal, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education is responsible for implementing Qualifica and delivery of all services is carried out by a network of over 300 Qualifica centres that are based into various types of institutions.

The Hungarian NYITOK – **Open Learning Centres** – which has been extended to a network of 50 centres nationwide, provides a flexible alternative that has a regional and community dimension. The centres offer literacy, numeracy, and minimum digital competence, as well as programmes leading to qualifications at EQF levels 3 and 4, but so far, they do not offer. By the end of 2018, they should design and offer a programme of basic skills, a skills guarantee, to 3000 SME employees.

**Local Knowledge and Education Centres (LOWE)** in Poland facilitate access to learning opportunities for adults in rural or industrial areas and **competency assessment centres** will be responsible for validation in Lithuania from 2022.

In many countries, **Public Employment Services** and their local antennas play a key role through the support they provide to unemployed and increasingly to people in employment.

Responsibilities for adult education in several countries is delegated to regional and local levels in several countries, triggering strong involvement of **municipal authorities** (Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Greece, Spain, Italy).

In France, regional actors will also play a central role in the new Skills Investment Plan, e.g. the adoption of regional pacts between the representatives of the central government (Prefecture) and the regional councils. The aim is to work on a coordination involving the state, the region, trade unions and employers organisations, but also involving the PES structures, sectoral bodies etc.

In some countries, the implementing measures are delivered through strong tripartite cooperation. The recent **tripartite agreement** in Denmark (October 2017) aims to strengthen the access to, quality and flexibility of adult learning provision. New actions put in place on the basis of this pact include expanding the basic skills provision to include digital technologies and English as a foreign language, setting up a financial fund to support labour market transitions and earmarking funds for outreach to low skilled adults.

In addition, other actors contribute significantly to achieving the goals of upskilling. Social enterprises are actively engaged in the upskilling of persons who have lost their job or have difficulty in entering or re-entering the labour market, or are at risk of social exclusion, or are socially excluded (among many others). The association "Réseau d'Entreprises Sociales" in Belgium offers support to social enterprises through the training of workers, support to staff, individual and collective supervision of social workers, support for the relocation of workers at the end of a job placement period.

As part of the Digital Skills and Job Coalition<sup>57</sup>, Google through its Digital Workshop programme<sup>58</sup> trained more than 1.5 million people across the EU in basic digital skills. Organisations like AllDigital<sup>59</sup> have at the core of their mission supporting Europeans with low levels of digital skills and through a network of 25 000 digital competence centres support 3 million people every year.

## 2.8 EU actively supports implementation of Upskilling Pathways

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*The EU supports the implementation through funding, mutual learning, generating evidence and building synergies with other existing initiatives.*

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### 2.8.1 Funding

On the basis of the information provided by the Member States, **the European Social Fund**<sup>60</sup> is playing a key role in the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways. In addition, the Erasmus+ programme<sup>61</sup> finances the activities of the national coordinators for the EU adult learning agenda with a strong focus on coordination of adult learning measures, outreach, guidance and awareness raising. The **European Regional Development Fund** also supports investments in education infrastructure, including for vocational education and training and adult learning, with EUR 1 billion programmed in the 2014-2020 period.

The Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS)<sup>62</sup> helps EU countries to design and carry out structural reforms as part of their efforts to support job creation and sustainable growth. In 2018, Portugal

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<sup>57</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-skills-jobs-coalition>.

<sup>58</sup> [https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalworkshop-mt/about\\_us](https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalworkshop-mt/about_us).

<sup>59</sup> <https://all-digital.org/>.

<sup>60</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>.

<sup>61</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en).

<sup>62</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes/overview-funding-programmes/structural-reform-support-programme-srsp\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes/overview-funding-programmes/structural-reform-support-programme-srsp_en).

benefitted from SRSS funding for a project to grow its adult learning system. In 2019, three projects that develop policies for low-skilled or low-qualified adults are to be supported.

Dedicated calls under the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme<sup>63</sup> support the mapping of existing provision, piloting the concept of Upskilling Pathways or federating efforts for implementation, in Greece, Italy and the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Education is taking stock of existing opportunities and good practices and identifying remaining gaps and barriers to lay the ground for implementation. The project outcomes are meant to feed into broader policy-making on adult learning. In Italy, the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies (INAPP) working together with key stakeholders aims to develop an implementation model based on pilot implementation at regional level. In Greece, the Public Employment Service, in a consortium with the Ministry of Education and social partners, is developing a priority-setting tool to categorise target groups, map existing provision but also review assessment tools for recent upskilling measures, as well as existing adult learning methodologies. The project would experiment with tailored pedagogical approaches and strengthen the arrangements for validation of prior learning.

All projects intend to build on the work of the National Coordinator for the European Agenda on Adult Learning. In 2018, another call for proposals was launched to support Upskilling Pathways implementation, this time specifically focused on skills assessments. Publication of a third call is foreseen early in 2019.

The **microfinance and social entrepreneurship axis of the EaSI Programme** supports projects by public and private bodies working on the integration of vulnerable people and persons in social exclusion situations. Many of those projects aim at providing basic, soft or transversal skills. Business development services often involve work placement accompanied by job coaching, mentoring, identification of an individual career path, job shadowing, on the job training, up to inclusion in classical companies of the market.

#### **Digital Competences Development System (DCDS) 2018-2019**

The DCDS being developed by a consortium of All-Digital members will consist of:

- The Digital Competences Development Methodology (DCDM) for the development of digital competences and related transversal skills of adults
- The online Digital Competences Development Environment (DCDE) consisting of the following modules:
  - Self-assessment tool that allows adults identify gaps in basic digital competences;
  - Recommender tool that enables trainees to identify the training offers that best match their needs;
  - Online tools for the management of trainees' profiles and the definition of flexible learning pathways that combine training modules;
  - Online learning application with gamification features;
  - Multilingual digital Open Educational Resources; and
  - Validation and certification of digital and transversal competences
  - Personalised blended non-formal training composed of training modules to meet individual learning needs.

Example of an Erasmus+ project that supports Upskilling Pathways

Every year, the Erasmus+ programme co-finances cooperation projects (strategic partnerships) in the adult learning sector, aimed at improving and extending the supply of high quality learning opportunities, and developing mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of adult learning policies. These projects support the design of and access to Upskilling Pathways, place a specific emphasis on basic skills provision and increased participation in learning for adults. Large scale projects, like Policy Experimentation and Forward-looking Cooperation Projects aim to identify, test, develop or assess innovative approaches in the fields of education, training and youth that have the potential of becoming mainstreamed and of improving education and training systems and youth policies.. The Digital Competence Development System (see box above) is an example of a forward-looking project

<sup>63</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081>.

that supports Upskilling Pathways implementation. It builds on the European Digital Competences Framework<sup>64</sup> (DigComp), which was created by the Joint Research Centre (Saville).

### 2.8.2 Mutual learning

In addition to the funding, another powerful support tool is the **mutual learning and sharing of experiences**. The Commission developed an innovative concept for targeted mutual learning programme with multi-actor teams from clusters of countries. This was piloted with seven countries in a first stage (Romania, Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Poland and Greece) and is now ongoing with a second cluster of countries (Belgium-NL, Belgium-FR, Czechia, Finland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Portugal).

The added value of the mutual learning is that it is bringing together multi actor country delegations, involving the main organisations supporting the implementation of Upskilling Pathways. To build their capacities to take on implementation tasks: ministries of education and labour, social partners, public employment service, ESF managing authorities, providers, and regional authorities work together in country teams to map out existing provision, identify main gaps in delivering the three steps to learners and agreeing on joined up follow up actions.

### 2.8.3 Evidence

Building up evidence on the benefits of investing in adult learning, efficiency of various policy measures, skills levels of adult population are targets of EU support. Thus the Commission, through the Erasmus + programme, is helping EU Member States take part in the second cycle of the OECD PIAAC survey and is working closely with OECD on the further analysis of the PIAAC data. The Adult Education Survey and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey, managed by Eurostat provide further valuable comparative data in this field.

Adult skills are increasingly gaining in importance in the context of **the European Semester**, and given a stronger focus in the National Reform Programmes. The 2019 Annual Growth Survey<sup>65</sup> calls for stepping up efforts to provide access to upskilling for low-skilled adults (including transversal and digital skills), helping them acquire labour market relevant qualifications. The benchmarking on adult skills and adult learning agreed upon by the Employment Committee (EMCO) will strengthen the cross-country monitoring within the European Semester, by providing an analytical underpinning in this particular policy area.

The proposals that the Commission put forward for the **next Multiannual Financial Framework (2020-2027)**, and in particular Erasmus, ESF + and InvestEU foresee a renewed and reinforced support for adult upskilling and reskilling, providing thus a stable basis on which to rely beyond 2020, subject to its adoption by the co-legislators. Under the InvestEU Programme, the Commission is also proposing a dedicated “Social Investments and Skills Window” to facilitate access to finance in support of, *inter alia*, demand for and supply of skills as well as education, training and related services.

### 2.8.4 Synergies with other initiatives

Synergies between programmes in countries that use ESF for skills development, etc. are encouraged through the ESF transnational network on Learning and Skills. The network brings together ESF managing authorities, social partners and representatives from the civil society and has created a link between the Upskilling Pathways and EU funding and provided valuable input on how the ESF supports this initiative.

Since the **2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL)**<sup>66</sup>, substantial progress on policies to implement validation can be noted and were flagged as an important step forward in national implementation of Upskilling Pathways. The national descriptions show the central role validation plays in individual pathways.

Most Member States have now established national mechanisms to coordinate validation across the broad sectors of education and training, labour market and the third sector (civil society, NGOs etc.).

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<sup>64</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1315&langId=en>.

<sup>65</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-annual-growth-survey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2019-european-semester-annual-growth-survey_en).

<sup>66</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>.



Skills assessment in Upskilling Pathways covers the first two steps in validation, identification and documentation. This analysis of existing skills and prior learning is the starting point for both recommendations. Following this analysis, it is expected that many candidates for validation of NFIL will continue and have the skills and competences identified assessed towards a qualification. In Upskilling Pathways, it is expected that the low-skilled/qualified adult will need a tailored offer of learning to build up his/her skills, including literary, numeracy and digital skills, before being considered for a qualification. Depending on his/her level of prior learning and experience, the low-skilled adult might be awarded credit towards a qualification or course but would still need the tailored offer of learning to fill the gaps. It is likely that many learners will return to formal learning settings and have their learning outcomes assessed and certified in that setting. If part of the tailored offer takes place at work or outside formal education and training, the learning pathway could lead the learner back to the validation process to have his/her learning outcomes assessed and certified (validation process) or in the terminology of Upskilling Pathways to have the learning outcomes validated and recognised.

In other words, Upskilling Pathways inserts a vital intermediary step, which is a period of learning, between the identification and documentation stages and the assessment and certification stages of validation.

A recent study carried out for the Commission shows that there has been a significant increase in the number of countries and situations in which skills assessments are offered, and “many of the skills audit examples leading to certification follow the three steps suggested by the ‘Upskilling Pathways’, where the outcomes of the Skills Assessment are used to tailor and/or shorten the training pathway, and the training ultimately leads to a qualification”.<sup>67</sup> Progress is still required, therefore, to make it standard practice to offer a skills “audit” (assessment) to people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment.

Validation arrangements often go hand in hand with guidance services with the individual learner at the core. Guidance is a requirement in most countries but is not yet a common practice and is most commonly offered in education, in initial and continuing VET and higher education, or by PES, but less so for lower skilled adults. There is a lot of scope for policies on validation, guidance and upskilling pathways to converge in national strategies, creating a win-win situation all-round.

In order for PES to strengthen their guidance and lifelong learning systems and services, the **European Network of Public Employment Services** (PES Network) published in 2017 a practitioner’s toolkit “For PES building career guidance and lifelong learning”<sup>68</sup>. Furthermore, the PES Network Board adopted a position paper in 2017 presenting a proposal for structured co-operation between PES and education for better school-to-work transitions<sup>69</sup>. While focused on those aged under 25, the paper includes, for example, what PES can offer in terms of career guidance and counselling, and calls on PES and the education systems throughout the EU to strengthen their cooperation.

**The Youth Guarantee<sup>70</sup> is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years<sup>71</sup>, within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship.**

As mentioned earlier, due to the different target age, Upskilling Pathways can take up where the Youth Guarantee leaves off, and these two initiatives can be implemented through very similar measures. As the Member State consultation shows, in some countries the same measures target both low-skilled adults and young persons not in education, employment, or training (e.g. the Skills Investment Plan in France). Similar methods and structures can be used for e.g. outreach and activation, or for the provision of training offers, under both initiatives. A recent series of five reports on the Youth Guarantee delivery<sup>72</sup> present successful practices, but can also provide inspiration for the implementation of Upskilling Pathways.

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<sup>67</sup> European Commission 2018. “Skills audit: a tool to identify talent”, here section 6.3.2. Cf <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8167&furtherPubs=yes>.

<sup>68</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=18611&langId=en>.

<sup>69</sup> [ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=18867&langId=en](https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=18867&langId=en) (for members).

<sup>70</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>.

<sup>71</sup> Some Member States have chosen to raise the age limit to 29 years.

<sup>72</sup> These reports focus on outreach, activation, employment and entrepreneurship, education offers and traineeships under the Youth Guarantee. In addition, evidence has been gathered on outreach under the Youth Guarantee through a series of events focussing on this theme. All this material can be downloaded through Europa website.

For low skilled young persons not in education, employment, or training, the aims of the Upskilling Pathways can be met by the Youth Guarantee, through the provision of a quality offer of education or training. The Upskilling Pathways initiative can be seen as a complementary measure targeting those adults who are no longer in the target group of the Youth Guarantee, and who have at best achieved a lower secondary education qualification. There is an obvious potential to harvest many of the measures developed for this group and to extend the age limit and adapt content rather than reinvent the wheel. This has been the approach in Finland in recent years, where new reforms are currently being put in place in which provision for youth and adults is unified.

**Long-term unemployment** is three times higher among low qualified workers than among those with high qualifications. The Council Recommendation on the integration of long term unemployed workers into the Labour Market<sup>73</sup> aims to trigger an increase in the transition rates from long-term unemployment to employment by making the services and support provided to the long-term unemployed more effective. Part of the target group of the Recommendation on long-term unemployment is therefore the same as that of Upskilling Pathways. The Recommendation calls, amongst other provisions, for long-term unemployed workers to be offered a Job Integration Agreement that combines relevant services needed for the person to get back into work – including education, training or requalification measures where necessary. Such training measures could be based on the Upskilling Pathways concept and be tailored to address also basic skills gaps, as often experienced by those out of work for prolonged periods.

In 2016-2018, a specific European Commission Action Plan<sup>74</sup> supported **integration of third-country nationals** in the EU Member States. It set out policy priorities and tools to support their integration, in particular through education and access to vocational training and the labour market. More than 50 actions have been implemented a number of which had a 'skills dimension'. They include online language assessment and learning for newly arrived third country nationals, especially refugees, through the Erasmus+ online linguistic support; peer learning events on key policy measures such as welcome classes, skills and language assessment, and recognition of academic qualifications. Specific support for early recognition of academic qualifications of third country nationals including refugees includes enhanced cooperation between National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) and specific projects (under AMIF, ESF and EaSI) promote labour market integration of refugees including through 'fast track' insertion into labour market and vocational training.

Some specific actions mentioned in the Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals were developed under the New Skills Agenda for Europe: a) The Skills Profile tool to support timely identification of skills and qualifications for newly arrived third country nationals; b) better information about qualification recognition practices and decisions in different countries through the Europass portal; c) and the improvement of the transparency and understanding of qualifications acquired in third-countries, through the revision of the European Qualifications Framework.

Over the period 2014-2020, the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund**<sup>75</sup> (AMIF) is supporting Member States to fund **upskilling measures for third-country immigrants**, aimed at:

- assessing skills and qualifications, as well as enhancement of transparency and compatibility of skills with those in the host Member State;
- comprehensive civic orientation courses and language tuition;
- education and training, including language training and preparatory actions to facilitate access to the labour market.

To date, AMIF is co-funding measures to upskill third-country immigrants residing in the EU. They cover both linguistic skills to ease the integration into work and soft skills related to knowledge of the country culture, labour market functioning, access to services and building formal and informal networks.

For example, in France, the OFII (Office français de l'immigration et de l'intégration) has mobilised €10 million from AMIF since 2016 to provide an integrated training package (civic training, access to employment) to newly arrived third-country nationals, in the context of the Integration contract. In

<sup>73</sup> OJ C 67, 20.2.2016. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016H0220%2801%29>.

<sup>74</sup> COM(2016) 377 final, Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals.

<sup>75</sup> REGULATION (EU) No 516/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 16 April 2014 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, amending Council Decision 2008/381/EC and repealing Decisions No 573/2007/EC and No 575/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Decision 2007/435/EC.

Sweden, €5 million from AMIF have been invested (under the project "Systematisert kompetensforvaltning" running over 2016-2018) to provide early validation of newcomers' skills and identification of matching employers' needs. In Italy, the project 'Conoscere Apprendere e Comunicare per Vivere l'Integrazione' in Lombardia (launched in 2017) aims to train 8,000 third-country nationals (€1.2 million AMIF). It promotes learning Italian through an enhanced training offer from the CPIA and the implementation of an integrated educational offer.

In addition to AMIF national programmes (shared management), the directly managed strand of AMIF ("Union action") has also been used to co-fund projects supporting integration of third-country nationals including through upskilling.

The Social Protection Committee thematic reporting shows that many Member States offer additional measures and services for people of working age who are furthest away from the labour market. To this end, integrated delivery of services has been recognized as an effective way of increasing outreach. Some Member States implement these approaches through governmental strategies or action plans that imply vertical coordination. In other Member States, some services are delivered jointly (through formal, informal cooperation, or as mentioned earlier one-stop-shops). Some other Member States undertake needs assessment by joint, interdisciplinary teams. Such approaches not only allow for increased outreach and broader needs assessment, but also for more targeted interventions and holistic support (addressing various other needs, such as motivation, health or family and personal problems that prevent people from participating in upskilling activities).

In addition, the Recommendation on the integrated approach to active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market<sup>76</sup> promotes investing in human capital through the implementation of effective lifelong learning strategies in the Member States.

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<sup>76</sup> Commission Recommendation 2008/867/EC.

### 3. Adult upskilling and reskilling: the broader picture

The overall rate of adult participation in learning in the EU has changed little in the past years. In all countries, the majority of adult learning is of a non-formal nature, usually work-related and provided as well as financed by employers or individuals themselves. Such learning often targets those employees who already have the highest levels of skills and are performing the most complex jobs, while for the rest of employees, opportunities to access training are often much more limited. The fact that most learning is of a non-formal nature also implies that it is often of only short duration and aims to develop company-specific skills. This results in a situation where most adult learning is not able to help adults develop skills that are more transferable across companies including the basic skills – literacy, numeracy or ICT.

The Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) **adult learning benchmark**, defined as recent participation (during the 4 weeks prior to the interview) in any institutionalised learning activity, has been stagnant in the EU for the last decade. In 2017, only 10.9% of adults had undertaken any recent learning activity (LFS, 2018).

Weaknesses in the overall sector are indicative of challenges in implementing Upskilling Pathways, for low-skilled adults, the group most in need of learning opportunities.

One of the greatest challenges in adult learning is fragmentation and lack of coherent governance that brings together the profusion of offers in formal, non-formal and informal adult learning. Recent analysis by Ecorys<sup>77</sup> found that “fragmented policy frameworks are those where adult learning is not considered to be one sector and where there is generally no coordination concerning the governance of adult learning between different sectors in which adult learning takes place (i.e. VET, Higher Education, non-formal, public/private, PES, in-company etc.)”. It can also mean that policy frameworks relate to different levels of governance whereby certain aspects are arranged at national level, and others at regional or municipality level. In Slovenia, the National Skills Strategy is trying to address this and improve the governance and coherence of adult learning. The framework for adult learning is at present spread over 10 ministries and 212 municipalities. It is essential for all these actors to be better coordinated, in order to improve the performance of Slovenia’s adult learning system to ensure coherence and minimise fragmentation in responsibilities, initiatives and spending. This pattern is reflected in the reports on implementing Upskilling Pathways.

The disparate offer has implications in particular for the learner, as measures, programmes, guidance, etc. are not linked in a way the learner can easily navigate them. This hinders the development of flexible, individualised learning pathways and only in a few cases is there any attempt to overcome it.

The adult learning sector is not generally characterised by alignment and coordination, which is also borne out by the national reports. The existence of many pieces of legislation, both sectoral and regional can contribute to the complex situation. Where a policy framework or lifelong learning strategy exists to coordinate the constituent parts, there tends to be less fragmentation, and also in smaller centralised countries. Good coordination and governance seems to go hand-in-hand with high participation, for example in Nordic countries; Estonia where the EU benchmark of 15% was reached in 2016 and Austria achieved 15.8% in 2017.

This has large implications for investment in adult learning, which is equally heterogeneous and often very piecemeal, reflecting the scattered and project-based approach with many funding sources, rather than a holistic learner-support approach.

Public funding for adult learning is often included within broader budget lines for education investments as a whole. Hence, a lack of funding breakdowns by adult learning or aspects of adult learning limit the degree to which consistent and direct comparisons can be made between Member States. Often national governments or statistical offices are not easily able to ascertain exactly what has been spent in their own country on adult learning.

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<sup>77</sup> European Commission (2019) Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU. A synthesis of reports by country experts (Forthcoming).

## 4. Conclusions

This section draws conclusions about the measures that Member States are taking to give effect to their responsibilities under the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. It first points to the positive developments and secondly highlights the key challenges that still need to be addressed in order to ensure an effective implementation of the Council Recommendation to lead to the desired impact.

The accelerating changes on the labour market, the demand for higher skills and the penetration of digital technologies in all aspects of daily life, give added urgency to the need to upskill people who have not mastered basic skills and have not gained a qualification to ensure their employability. The European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>78</sup> acknowledges their right to lifelong learning, as a way to acquire the skills necessary to participate fully in society and successfully manage work transitions.

### 4.1 Positive developments

A number of countries are **setting in motion new ambitious agendas** to support the upskilling and reskilling of the adult population, showing thus a strong convergence between national policy agendas and the objectives pursued by Upskilling Pathways. These include: France and its new Skills Investment Plan; Germany and Ireland and their new focus on supporting the upskilling of people in employment whose jobs are at risk of displacement through automation; the Nordic countries that are further improving their already rather good system and the Baltic countries that follow the same pattern.

While most of the measures focus on unemployed adults, countries seem to have started to place a stronger focus also on support to low skilled workers in employment, who represent a significant share of the target group.

In some countries, the Recommendation triggered a national debate and a critical review of existing programmes. The aim is to better coordinate the existing offer, to link the various support measures to the benefit of individuals and to embed basic skills in skills profiling and training measures; **pilots to support implementation are taking place** in Italy, Poland, Greece and Czechia.

**ESF supports many of the implementing measures**, ensuring thus a good matching of the EU funds to the key European and national policy challenges.

**Validation** is the measure around which many of the actions evolve, probably also due to the deadline (2018) set by the 2012 Recommendation for having in place validation arrangements.

**Digital skills** are prioritised in a number of countries and interventions, as a direct response to the challenges deriving from the impact of digitalisation on jobs, tasks and occupations.

### 4.2 Remaining challenges

#### Scale

The scale of the challenge facing all Member States cannot be underestimated: latest data show that still 61 million adults aged 25 to 64 – many of them in employment and most of them native Europeans – are low-qualified.

Obviously, the size of the target group is greater in some Member States than in others. There are some examples of Member States that have ambitions that match the scale of the challenge. However, in the vast majority of cases, the measures outlined by Member States target only a few thousand individuals.

It is therefore not possible to calculate with any precision how many low-skilled adults will benefit from an Upskilling Pathway. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the measures proposed by Member States would not reach a significant proportion of the 61 million adults in need of upskilling.

More action is required from Member States if they are to achieve the objectives of the Recommendation.

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<sup>78</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en).

## Three basic skills

In a large majority of the measures described by Member States, the three basic skills on which the Upskilling Pathway focuses, namely literacy, numeracy and digital skills are not explicitly addressed. Instead, vocational and job specific skills for employment emerge most prominently. In the future, basic skills provision needs to be more strongly embedded into skills assessment and training offers targeting low skilled adults.

## A coherent pathway with three steps

The crucial three-step approach set out in the Recommendation (skills assessment, tailor learning offer, validation and recognition of skills) is present in only a small number of initiatives. What is needed now is development of the missing elements.

A large number of implementing measures rely on block offers or generic training, which may raise challenges in meeting the objectives set in the Council Recommendation in terms of individualised, tailored offers based on assessment.

## Outreach, guidance and support measures

The Adult Education Survey shows that lack of motivation and lack of understanding of the need for learning are important barriers to participation. The Recommendation makes specific proposals on outreach and guidance, which are key factors upon which the success or failure of the initiative will depend.

Lack of emphasis on outreach and guidance is a problem because they are essential to inform, advise, co-manage and design learning, and mentor learners, who are often reluctant or not motivated to successfully get through a learning pathway. Involving a wider range of actors is important, including social services for people furthest away from the labour market who face multiple barriers.

## Coordination and partnerships

The main aim of the Recommendation is to bring a coherent strategic approach to addressing the challenge of adult upskilling. As demonstrated by the initiatives reported on by Member States, many small-scale, disparate initiatives (largely already existing ESF projects) exist without evidence of mechanisms for coordination or partnership between providers and other stakeholders.

## Sustainability

Addressing the low skilled challenge requires a long-term systemic approach and needs to be accompanied by appropriate funding resources and mechanisms. However, the timeline of some initiatives seems to be primarily driven by access to EU funds and tied in with their planning periods, with no evidence of plans to sustain them beyond this date.