

Report of Conference

Adult upskilling and reskilling

Balancing the labour market

Bucharest, 6-7 June 2019



Background information for the conference

Acquiring knowledge and skills does not stop when one leaves school or university. The world is changing at an extraordinary pace, making it an imperative for everyone to continue learning throughout the whole of life. This demands radical changes, both in the ways people learn, and in the ways that governments and social partners support people to upskill and reskill in order to increase their resilience and adaptability to change and ensure their full inclusion in society and the labour market.

Two years ago, Member States took a voluntary commitment to support the most fragile adult population: those who have already left initial education and training pathways, but whose levels of skills and/or educational attainment put them at risk of social and labour market exclusion. Member States adopted in December 2016 the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults. It is time now to take stock of the actions taken so far to support access to flexible pathways for acquiring a strong foundation of basic skills: like literacy, numeracy and digital - and to progress towards higher qualifications needed on the labour market.

The Conference provided a forum for discussing the key findings of the Stocktaking Report on Upskilling Pathways.

Documents

- [Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for adults](#)
- [Commission Staff Working Document: Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults - Taking stock of implementation measures](#)
- Informational factsheets:
 - [Who takes part in adult learning?](#)

[Impact of education and skills on life changes](#)

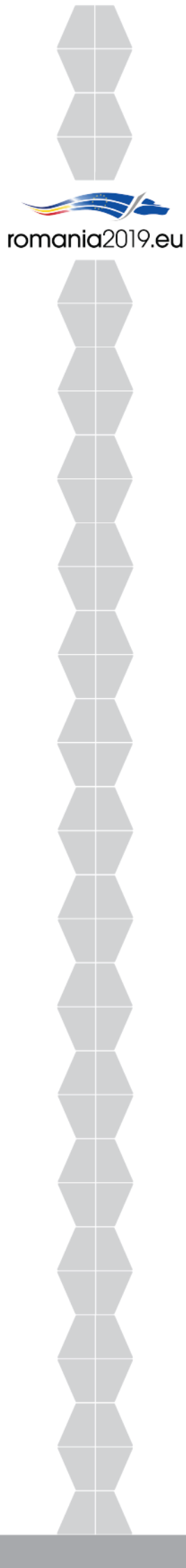
Main objectives

The Conference was aiming to provide a forum for discussing the key findings of the Stocktaking Report on Upskilling Pathways (further: report) and to generate a new momentum for sustaining implementation efforts in the future, identifying innovative solutions and financing mechanisms for the delivery of upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all.

The event objectives were:

- √ to support exchanges of existing experience gained at national level;
- √ to understand and discuss the main challenges faced in the design and implementation of upskilling pathways and adequate responses for the upskilling of adults with low levels of skills and qualifications;
- √ to explain how it is possible to move the issues of upskilling and reskilling of adults higher on the political agenda;
- √ to understand and facilitate the connection between the two worlds - education and the labour market.

The participants were specialists from education and training area from 28 member states (including UK), 5 candidate countries and 3 observer countries, representatives of CEDEFOP, ETF, OECD, social partners etc.



More details here: <https://www.romania2019.eu/event/conferinta-imbunatatirea-si-actualizarea-competentelor-adultilor-element-de-echilibru-pentru-piata-muncii/>.

Format of the conference: Keynote speeches combined with Q&A session, panel of experts, three parallel sessions.

Ms. Dana-Carmen Bachmann Head of Unit, VET, Apprenticeship and Adult Learning, European Commission presented **the key conclusions** of the Commission Staff Working Document - Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults - Taking stock of implementation measures and the key remaining challenges for the implementation of Upskilling Pathways, which are:

– **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.

– **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, advice, 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.

The **keynote speech** was addressed by Mr. Bas Derks, Deputy Director, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of Netherlands, who presented the case study of the Netherlands. In his presentation he explained to the public how it was possible to put the issue of reskilling/upskilling on the agenda (rise the political interest) and the reasons why there is now a strong political commitment in this direction. He presented also the already existing measures regarding upskilling/reskilling of adults.

The first round of three parallel sessions

❖ Session 1 - Basic skills

Aim: Present initiatives that focus on developing basic skills (literacy, numeracy, digital skills) for adults

Format: Silent conference; dialogue with the panellists

Speakers:

-Knut Becker, Department for Basic Education and Literacy Baden-Württemberg, Germany, focused on National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills 2016-26

- Mr. Jesús Campos Valdecantos, General Directorate of Vocational Training, Spain, who presented a project under the Structural Reform Support Programme to develop measures towards the design of a system for the identification, evaluation and recognition of basic competences of adults.

❖ Session 2 - Delivery of the three-step approach

Aim: Present initiatives that provide coherent upskilling/reskilling support to adults struggling with basic skills

Format: dialogue with the panellists

Speakers:

-Ms. Director Tania Grigore, Director, Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Romania

-Mr. Erno Hyvonen, Special Government Advisor, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland

❖ Session 3 - Reaching out to people in employment

Aim: Present initiatives that focus on reaching out with upskilling or reskilling offer to people in employment, who struggle with basic skills or qualifications.

Format: Silent conference; dialogue between the panellists



Speakers:

-Ms. Mary Lyons, Director National Innovation, SOLAS (The State Organisation with responsibility for funding, planning and co-ordinating Further Education and Training in Ireland)

-Ms. Tamara Pavlic, Expert adviser, Employment Preparation Department, Lifelong Career Guidance Centres (CISOK), Croatia who presented the model of CISOK (Lifelong Career Guidance Centre) - is partnership-based, one-stop-shop model for lifelong career guidance where users can receive relevant information, advice and guidance on different aspects of career management skills.

Now, there are 13 CISOK centres in 12 Croatian regions. It is planned to expand and cover each of Croatia's 21 counties by 2022, to further increase availability and quality of career guidance services in the whole country.

CISOK is established to deliver lifelong career guidance quality services to all citizens who need support in increasing their competencies - students of primary and secondary schools, higher education students, unemployed persons, employed persons (who are changing jobs or careers), employers, parents, school staff, career advisers and others who have an interest in career development; in order to facilitate their access to the labour market and contribute to their social inclusion (pupils, students, the employed and the unemployed. Through CISOK's services users can receive vocational guidance: advice and counselling services aimed at improving their career management skills and information about educational, training and employment possibilities.)

Additionally, CISOK is recognized to be a central point for outreach and activation of NEETs.

CISOK centres are based upon a 'model of differentiated services' which includes various levels of support according to the assessed clients' needs: self-help and e-services, brief assisted services and individual case managed services. Services are delivered through individual and/ or group counselling, thematic workshops for career management skills, e-tools (e.g. self-assessment questionnaires, a labour market information system, statistics on-line and a job exchange portal), brochures, guides etc. The main e-tools are available through 'E-usmjeravanje' (E-guidance) web site <http://e-usmjeravanje.hzz.hr>. Regarding opportunities on the labour market, CISOK centres provide information and advice on employment opportunities, self-employment, labour market needs/forecasts, occupations and competences, as well as on active labour market policies. Regarding educational opportunities, CISOK centres provide information and advice on secondary education, higher education and adult education, as well as information on scholarships and loan opportunities.

The **next session - Taking the first step - from policy to action** was open by Ms. Glenda QUINTINI from OECD who presented how countries approach specific aspects of upskilling and reskilling of low-qualified and skilled adults, showing a bigger picture regarding national reforms and adult learning participation. The presentation included examples of six selected countries and for each country, a brief description of reform efforts that might have led to the positive outcomes and some preliminary lessons. Also Ms. Quintini draw conclusions from the reform patterns in the six countries and from the OECD general work on adult learning.

The **second day** begun with a presentation by Ms. Niamh O'Reilly of key messages from the day before and comment on them.



Key messages

- A long-term systemic approach with a corresponding allocation of resources is needed, with the implementation of social rights, measures addressing demographic challenges, aging and migration and, last but not least, combining skills training on new job requirements with regard to tolerance, respect and democratic citizenship.
- There is a need to place a stronger focus also on support to low-skilled workers in employment, who represent a significant share of the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation's target group.
- Successful approaches to the upskilling and reskilling of employees require the integration of different services /provisions grounded on a vision drawing from strong political commitment, and strong stakeholder engagement.
- A shared vision can be built promoting the benefits of upskilling and reskilling of employees and by adopting a forward looking strategy capable of anticipating changing needs enabling the creation of the necessary arrangements through consultation and partnerships with relevant stakeholders contributing to shaping a common vision (upskilling and reskilling as a common value).
- Partnership-based approaches are essential to engage both employees and companies.
- There is also a need to increase investment in skills anticipation systems.
- Strong policies and systems are needed to enable all those living in the EU to have access to a sufficiently wide range of ways to upgrade adult skills and related support services such as guidance and counselling.

The **next session - The power of adult learning - benefits that go beyond employability** included 3 keynote speech(s):

Mr. David Atchoarena, Director for UNESCO Institute of Lifelong learning, referred to the power of lifelong learning in the Strategic Development Goals context. He tried to answer the following questions: Is there any contribution and related message we (adult learning policy makers) have to take away from the SDGs for adult learning? Is there any contribution adult learning can make to the SDGs?

Mr. Sorin Mîndruțescu, Director General, Oracle, Romania and Râșnov Historical Film Festival, commented on the impact of adult learning on employability and beyond employability from a digital and key competences perspective.



Mr. Menno Bart, Adecco Group, illustrated experiences related to each of the two, underlining sustainability (as societal effect and benefit) and resilience + creativity as individual contribution.

The second round of three parallel sessions

A panel of experts - Ms. Gina Ebner, President, Lifelong Learning Platform, Mr. Erno Hyvönen, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, Ms. Adela Jansen, representative of Employers' organisations, Ms. Agnes Roman, ETUC harvested the key messages of the conference.

The closing word was addressed by Ms. Dana-Carmen Bachmann, Head of Unit, VET, Apprenticeship and Adult Learning, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission and Ms. Tania Grigore, Director, Ministry of Labour and Social Justice of Romania.

- ❖ **Session 1 - Overcoming the barriers that prevent people from accessing adult learning: how can technology help?**



Aim: Present, through specific examples, how technology can overcome the barriers that prevent people from accessing adult learning

Format: Silent conference; dialogue with the panellists

Speakers:

- Mr. Iarla Flynn, Director of Public Policy, Google
- Mr. Louis-Doru Havriliuc, founder of Simbound
- Ms. Susanna Mäkela, Microsoft

❖ **Session 2 - Sustainable funding - how to maximise the use and impact of national and European funding?**

Aim: Discuss different ways how adult learning can be financed in a sustainable way

Format: dialogue with the panellists

Speakers:

- Mr. Kiril Velitchkov, Director, Directorate European Projects and Financial Institutions, KBC Group European Financial Instruments Competence Centre
- Ms. Glenda QUINTINI, OECD
- Mr. Menno Bart, Public Affairs Manager, Adecco Group

❖ **Session 3 - Outreach and guidance - how can they boost adult participation in learning?**

Aim: Present, through specific examples, how outreach and guidance to the specific needs of adults can boost their participation in learning

Format: Silent conference; dialogue with the panellists

Speakers:

- Mr. Petre BOTNARIUC, Senior Researcher, Institute of Educational Sciences - Euroguidance Romania
- Mrs. Stephanie Verhagen, National Library, the Netherlands
- Dr. Renata Kopczyk, Project coordinator, Wrocław University of Science and Technology

Conclusions

The conclusion of the discussions was that the technology is and will continue to be key element to increase adult learning participation and relevance. The key recommendation formulated after the panel was related with the importance of developing digital skills among young and adult learners as digital skills are crucial both for supporting a full participation of individuals to the social life and for supporting economies to take advantage by the technological advancements.

The lack of motivation of adults remains one of the most difficult challenges to address, as most of the participants confirmed. This is especially about inactive people. Motivation for participation is, in most cases, of a professional nature.

Conclusions on conditions for boosting participation in adult learning:

- Human contacts with adults are essential,
- Proximity of learning opportunities is needed (eg. libraries, local centres),

- Cooperation between relevant actors and listening to needs,
- Adults need to be given the right instruments,
- There should be an informal approach towards learning.

The participants of the conference confirmed the main conclusions from the stocktaking report on Upskilling Pathways. They said that more action is required from Member States if they are to achieve the objectives of the Recommendation. These are the key remaining challenges that must be still addressed:

- ensure that the initiative supports majority of people who struggle with basic skills;
- increase the focus on basic skills: literacy, numeracy and digital skills;
- ensure coherent approach that combines the three steps (skills assessment, tailored training offer and validation of prior learning)
- ensure adequate outreach, guidance and support measures;
- ensure coordination and partnerships;
- address the low skilled challenge in a long-term systemic way, accompanied by appropriate funding resources and mechanisms.

In the future, basic skills provision needs to be more strongly embedded into skills assessment and training offers targeting low skilled adults.

All the participants considered that targeted public campaigns should be used to promote the benefits of upskilling and reskilling to increase the uptake of upskilling and reskilling opportunities by people in low skilled work. Also, there is a strong need for more integrated services (ongoing information, lifelong career guidance and learning support), which are tailored and flexible to respond to employees and individuals.

The intervention of the European Social Fund must be compatible with the challenges posed by new technologies and changes in world economies and mainly aim at the insertion and maintenance on the labour market of as many people as possible, especially young and low-skilled adults, improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises and promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. Through the ESF, continuous training programs can be funded to increase workers' skills and better match labour supply with demand.

Pictures from the event can be find here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ro2019eu/albums/72157708955928806>