

EAEA INFONOTE: “UPSKILLING PATHWAYS: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS”

According to data of the OECD, close to 70 million Europeans lack basic reading and writing skills. Even more cannot use numbers or digital tools effectively in daily life. Without these skills they are at high risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, and, as a further concern of the European Union, it increases the risk of lower productivity and loss of competitiveness.

In the framework of the New Skills Agenda, the European Commission proposed a “Skills Guarantee” called *Upskilling Pathways*. It aims to help adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards an upper secondary qualification or equivalent (level 3 or 4 in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) depending on national circumstances). The initiative proposes three steps:

Step 1 – Skills assessment: Enable adults to identify their existing skills and their upskilling needs.

Step 2 – Learning offer: Provision of education and training opportunities meeting the needs identified by the skills assessment.

Step 3 – Validation and recognition: Validation and recognition of the skills acquired.

Upskilling Pathways targets adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences, for example those who have left initial education or training without completing upper secondary education or equivalent, and who are not eligible for support under the Youth Guarantee. Regardless of their working status (unemployed, in employment or inactive), they have a need to strengthen basic skills as well as generic and transversal skills (such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork and emotional intelligence).

What’s happened so far:

10 June 2016:

The European Commission published a Proposal for a Council Recommendation on establishing a *Skills Guarantee*.

21 November 2016:

The Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council (EYCS) reached an (internal) political agreement on the Commission's proposal for a Recommendation on a Skills Guarantee. A new title for the Recommendation was endorsed: *Upskilling pathways*. The key principles for delivering the initiative were confirmed, including outreach, guidance and support measures.

19 December 2016:

The Council of the EU adopted the Council Recommendation on *Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*.

Every Education Minister in the EU agreed to implement this recommendation at the national level.

What will happen next:

Beginning/mid-2018:

Within one year from the proposal’s adoption, Member States, where possible, should have a plan for the implementation of the policy. They need to determine the EQF level they want to target (level 3 or 4) as well as identify priority target groups and available financial resources for the national context. They should also have appropriate coordination arrangements in place.

Member States should put in place flexible pathways for upskilling in cooperation with social partners, education and training providers, and local and regional authorities. Systems need to build on national structures and may vary across Member States. Many countries already offer elements of *Upskilling Pathways* and can build on this.

What does it mean for you?

With *Upskilling Pathways*, the European Commission has presented an ambitious strategy for improving skills of adults all around Europe. It recognises the pivotal role of adult education and learning not only for the labour market, but also to become critical, confident and independent individuals who can achieve their full potential and be active citizens.

Upskilling Pathways ties in with the basic skills strategy of Education and Training 2020. For adult education, this opens up a space to contribute to and support this strategy. As an advocacy tool, *Upskilling Pathways* can be used to raise awareness about non-formal adult education and basic skills education. This creates a momentum for non-formal adult education and lifelong learning to create equitable, inclusive and innovative learning opportunities for everyone that contribute to social inclusion and personal development.

All Member States of the European Union should develop and implement national plans for *Upskilling Pathways* in close cooperation with social partners as well as education and training providers. The involvement of civil society and other stakeholders will be crucial to ensure that *Upskilling Pathways* takes into account the full potential of adult education that goes beyond learning for employment. The national level – i.e. your level or the level of your national umbrellas – is decisive for the implementation of *Upskilling Pathways*.

Adult education can use the driving force of *Upskilling Pathways* to play its best card: its responsiveness to the needs of the learners by putting them at the centre of all learning efforts. Non-formal adult education and learning reaches out to those most disadvantaged in society and fosters empowerment and solidarity while valuing the diversity of learners' backgrounds. This can help learners to break cycles of poverty, improve their personal and professional well-being and increase their engagement in society.

Your work in non-formal adult education will therefore be fundamental in making *Upskilling Pathways* a reality!

How will the strategy be supported?

As distinct from the Youth Guarantee, *Upskilling Pathways* will not be supported with additional financial means – one of the main reasons why the name was changed from the initially proposed “Skills Guarantee”. However, implementing bodies will be invited to exploit already existing support systems, such as the ESF, Erasmus+, EaSi, ERDF and others.



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What can you do?

Every Member State agrees to implement the policy in line with national circumstances. You could

- familiarise yourself with *Upskilling Pathways* (the legal text can be found on http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2016_484_R_0001)
- find out who will be responsible for *Upskilling Pathways* in your country and contact them
- possibly you can advise / work with your ministry on the planning and implementation of the strategy in your country / region
- find out whether there are any plans to bring all stakeholders together and make sure you are on the list of these stakeholders - this is an occasion to lobby for non-formal adult education at national and regional level!
- find out whether similar policies are already in place at the national or regional level (if so, do they include all 3 steps of *Upskilling Pathways*?)
- identify where your organisation could step in - talk to your Ministries about how your experience in adult education can support their work
- participate in the consultation that EAEA will launch in mid-2017
- help us monitor what is happening at national and regional level
- send feedback about the implementation process in your country to EAEA - EAEA will give feedback to EU institutions and inform you about any developments at the EU level