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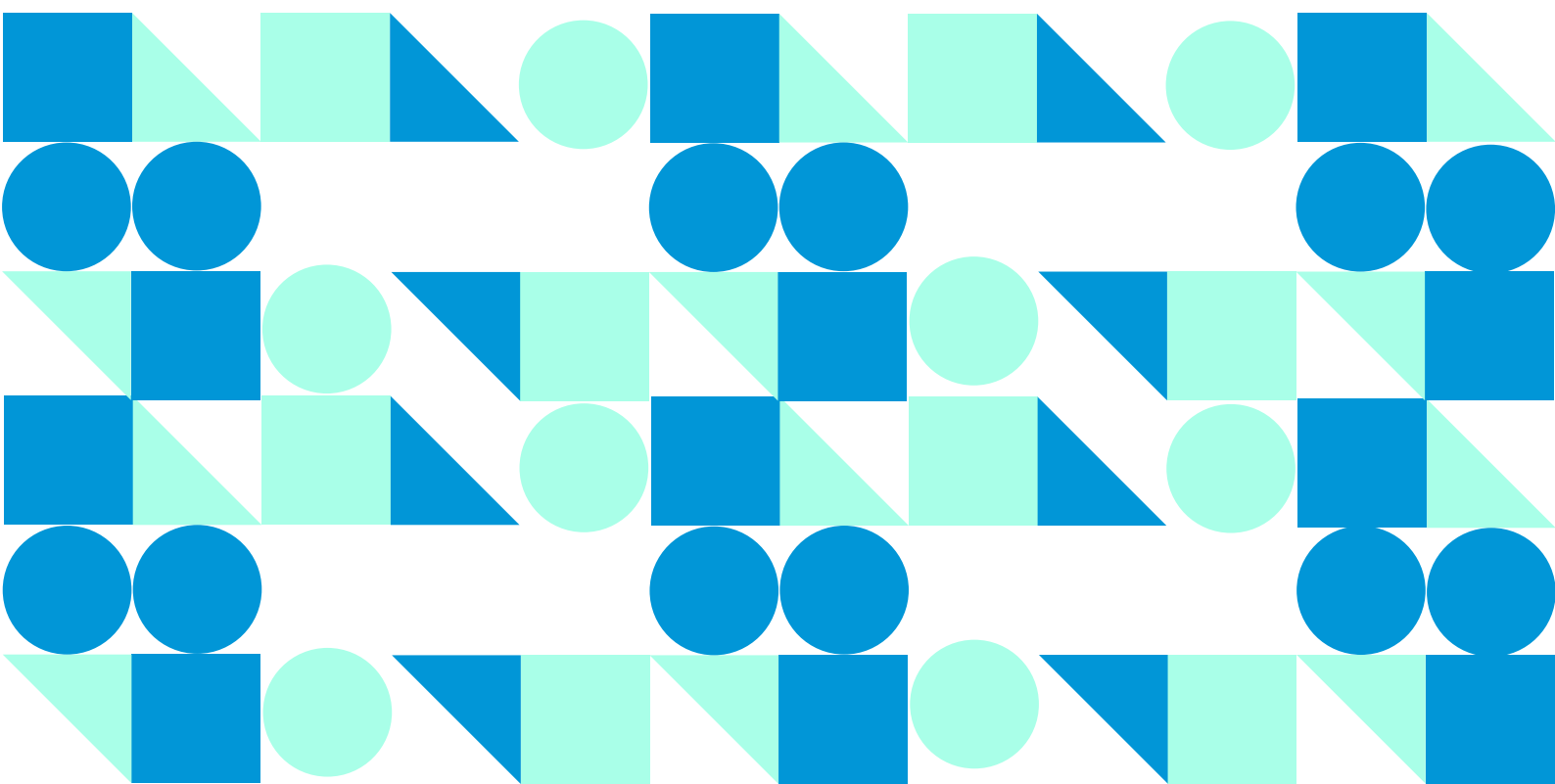of Vocational Training

Research paper

Thematic country review on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults in Italy

Key findings of the three research phases and suggestions for future action

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The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States. Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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Foreword

The *Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults,* of December 2016, laid the foundation for Cedefop's *Thematic review on upskilling pathways*. Since then, the geo-political and economic context in the EU has faced significant challenges, making the spirit of the Recommendation even more relevant. As we navigate the obstacles posed by the green transition, technological advancements, and demographic shifts, and as we move towards a tighter labour market, the importance of adult skill development has never been more crucial for Europe's competitiveness, growth, innovation, and social inclusion.

Cedefop's thematic country reviews (TCRs) on upskilling pathways (UP) demonstrate our commitment to supporting Member States in developing comprehensive, coordinated, and inclusive approaches to upskilling pathways for all adults. By conducting in-depth reviews of national strategies, identifying strengths and challenges, and proposing policy suggestions, we aim to facilitate mutual learning and inspire action across the EU.

Considering the pressing challenges posed by labour and skill shortages, facilitating transitions into employment and improving the skills of low-skilled workers have become even more urgent and relevant. The findings of this report show that, looking at the future, institutions need to work with increasingly vulnerable groups, those who are furthest away from education, training, and labour markets. At the same time, people in employment should not be forgotten. Their access to support services, training, retraining, and learning on the job through meaningful skill utilisation and career progression has the potential to leverage human capital in the EU. All stakeholders, including companies, need to take convergent and coordinated actions and measures.

This final report on the TCR on UP conducted in Italy from 2021 to 2023 serves as a valuable resource for policy-makers, social partners, and all stakeholders involved in the upskilling process. The TCR highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to upskilling pathways embedded within a shared vision and sustained by effective multi-stakeholder governance at all levels and stable and appropriate funding. TCR findings encourage the adoption of a strategic and systematic approach to outreach and guidance services, as well as better coordination between these services, skills assessment, and provision of tailored training in line with individual needs. They also reveal the pivotal role of local level stakeholders, especially for their potential to reach out and engage those most

vulnerable. The lessons learned provide valuable insights for the development and implementation of effective upskilling strategies across the EU.

As we enter a 'decade of skills' inspired by the European Year of Skills, let us seize this opportunity to champion the skills of all adults and work towards an inclusive skills revolution. By recognising the potential of every individual and making skill development a shared responsibility, we can build a future where no-one is left behind.

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Overview

Cedefop's work on the thematic country reviews (TCRs) on upskilling pathways (UP) aims at supporting Member States in the development of systematic, coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. The reviews undertake in-depth reviews of countries' national approaches to the implementation of the UP Recommendation, with the support of key national stakeholders and a common frame of analysis. They identify strengths and key challenges and formulate suggestions for policy action with relevance for the countries of the review and with the potential of wider applicability to other EU countries in their efforts to apply the principles of the UP Recommendation in their national contexts.

Cedefop implements the TCRs on UP in diverse EU countries which express interest in undergoing such a review and commit to it. Doing this develops a multi-country evidence basis and promotes cross-country policy learning. France and Italy, in 2021, were the first two countries that undertook this TCR exercise which was concluded in December 2023. Croatia joined the exercise in 2023 and it will conclude in 2025.

TCR methodology is based on three consecutive rounds of research directly involving national stakeholders. The first fieldwork round (also called the micro phase, SR1) collects opinions at the implementation level, i.e. from practitioners and beneficiaries. The meso phase (SR2), builds on findings from SR1 and collects opinions at the institutional level (e.g. from regional/local government representatives, social partners, sector organisations, representatives from local authorities and civil society organisations acting at community level) on challenges and gaps identified in SR1. In the third, macro phase (SR3), policy-makers, social partners, experts and other system level actors discuss proposed solutions and areas for actions to tackle the challenges identified.

Implementation of the TCRs on UP is based on close cooperation between Cedefop and the ministry/ies responsible for the implementation of upskilling pathways. It is carried out through an interactive and cooperative process with a steering group of national stakeholders, endorsed with a formal mandate. The steering group brings the strategic direction to the TCR, gives feedback on the documentation produced and validates the intermediate and final outputs emerging from the fieldwork rounds, including the areas for action. The national steering group for the TCR in Italy is coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and

Social policies; members include representatives from the Ministry of Education and Merit, Regions ([1]), National Association of Municipalities (ANCI), Union of Provinces (UPI), National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL), the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE) and Tecnostruttura delle Regioni ([2]).

This publication is the final one of the TCR on UP in Italy. It presents the outcomes of the three phases of the research and discusses the resulting areas for actions. This report complements the publication of the first findings of the TCR research (2023).

In the TCR for UP for Italy, the national steering group has identified the National strategic plan for the development of skills of the adult population (*Piano strategico nazionale per lo sviluppo delle competenze della popolazione adulta*) (hereafter the Plan) as the national initiative that corresponds the most to the principles and spirit of the UP Recommendation and to the Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. The Plan, approved by the State and Regions in 2021, represents the outcome of a national and interinstitutional dialogue supporting a coordinated and holistic approach to lifelong upskilling pathways.

The Plan's priorities reflect the spirit/principles of the Recommendation:
(a) outreach and guidance: improve attractiveness and effectiveness of outreach and guidance services and strengthen efforts to reach those adults not engaged in society and in the labour market;
(b) upskilling and reskilling: strengthen tailoring and personalisation of the learning offer. Specific focus is also given to provision of basic and transversal skills needed for employability and social engagement;
(c) matching skills demand and supply: strengthen partnership-based approaches for labour market intelligence. This line of work also focuses on strengthening the national validation system.

These priorities roll out at regional and local level on the architecture provided by the so-called *Reti Territoriali dei servizi* (territorial networks of services, hereafter *Rete/Reti*). Introduced by Law 92/2012 *Reti* bring together, in a coordinated and coherent manner, key stakeholders providing services in support of lifelong learning (including lifelong guidance, outreach, identification and validation of skills and competences). *Reti* work under a partnership-based model and may include local authorities, public and private employment services, public

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([1]) Represented by Veneto and Emilia Romagna Regions.
([2]) Organisation providing technical assistance and coordination in the areas of training and employability for the Regions.

and private education and training providers, adult education institutions, social partners, companies, chambers of commerce, universities, and civil society organisations.

By taking the Plan as a frame of reference, the TCR steering group for Italy chose to narrow the focus of the TCR to outreach, guidance and tailoring of the training offer. These are analysed through the cross-cutting theme of governance and the principles of personalisation of services and centrality of the individual, as enablers of coordinated services geared to supporting every adult in flexible, accessible, coherent, and personalised learning/training pathways.

In line with the target population as identified in the first programming phase of the Plan, the TCR in Italy focuses on adults aged 29-64 with a low level of skills and low educational attainment, who are not benefiting from systematic intervention at the interinstitutional level, but only from actions approved by the individual administrations at the local level.

Following from this, it has been agreed that the three rounds of fieldwork would investigate the following four topics:

(a) holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable;

(b) tailored training for adult upskilling and reskilling, building on skills assessment;

(c) companies' capacity to provide tailored training: the challenges for SMEs and low-skilled workers;

(d) implementation of *Reti Territoriali*.

Key findings

Holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable

Findings from the TCR highlight large territorial differences in the provision of outreach and guidance services, both in terms of availability and results achieved. This arises from a lack of a clear system logic (objectives, roles, responsibilities and governance mechanisms are not properly specified and agreed among the various actors) and adequate human, financial and technological resources. Results also point to lack of awareness of the strategic nature of these services among all parties. While recent policy initiatives have put emphasis on guidance services in support of a comprehensive approach aimed at enabling all adults to reach full empowerment throughout their working lives, outreach activities remain limited in scope and mostly carried out at the local level by non-institutional actors

that rely on ad hoc/project-based funding for their implementation, ultimately hindering the effectiveness of these services.

Adopting a systematic approach to guidance and outreach, embedded within clearer and innovative understanding and intervention logic for these services, requires cooperation among different stakeholders at all levels and clear roles and responsibilities for all actors involved. It also relies on the definition of clear roles and responsibilities particularly towards beneficiaries (e.g. which actor should act as first contact and support potential beneficiaries navigating training/learning offers, available support, services which may be accessed).

Raising awareness of the strategic nature of these services among all stakeholders is considered essential, as is improving cooperation in multi-actor networks with engagement of relevant local level stakeholders under clear roles and responsibilities. Investment in capacity (human, infrastructure and technological) sustained by appropriate and stable funding (including for continuous professional development of actors and practitioners whose working conditions should also be improved) are necessary to improve outreach and guidance services which are able to reach out to and engage all adults, including those most vulnerable.

Tailored training for upskilling and reskilling building on skills assessment
The provision of tailored training is still fragmented, not systematic and often not accompanied by skills assessment or individual profiling practices and processes. Despite the progress made in recent years, particularly in the contexts of adult education in the remit of the Ministry of Education (i.e. the offer provided by the CPIAs), the stakeholders who participated in the fieldwork agreed that additional steps are required for a holistic, systemic and systematic implementation of tailored learning based on skills assessment.

Lack of standardised and agreed procedures and limited human and financial resources are the most common barriers to the creation of a systematic and integrated approach entailing skills assessment and tailored learning. Strengthening the provision of services for the identification, validation and certification of competences (IVC), as well as career guidance and counselling, are considered to be additional key elements supporting the provision of tailored learning.

Effort needs to be focused on the continuous professional development of practitioners (teachers and trainers, professionals in career guidance), the implementation – throughout the county – of common standards for skills assessment, and the effective use of available resources for the provision of tailored learning pathways. Governance and coordination between services need

to be improved to ensure a more balanced distribution, as does efficient use of available financial resources and the potential of multi-stakeholder networks at local/regional levels, especially in the case of training offers addressed to most vulnerable adults.

Company capacity for tailored training: challenges for SMEs and low-skilled workers

Tailored training is still quite uncommon among companies in Italy. Its advantages and actual rationale are generally unclear to employers, especially when it comes to targeting low-skilled employees in small and medium-size enterprises. Expected advantages do not compensate for the required financial investments and organisational efforts, particularly in the case of SMEs. When implemented, tailored learning approaches are extemporary, not systematic, nor structured or embedded within the company's training policy.

Lack of familiarity with the provision of tailored training is accompanied by a low level of development of skills assessment practices. These do not follow a formalised and shared procedure, and do not lead, in most cases, to any kind of validation or certification of prior learning experiences.

Efforts should focus on fostering the development of an upskilling/reskilling culture at company level, which encompasses all the key skills for the current and future technological, environmental, and demographic challenges. This cultural shift must be underpinned by targeted and sustainable measures to ensure adequate financial support to companies offering tailored training to upskill and reskill their workforce. Complex bureaucratic procedures and uncertainties about the continuity of funding over time discourage small businesses from investing in training programmes, even when they recognise its importance for worker upskilling/reskilling and the competitiveness of the firm. Internally to the companies (SMEs in particular), the lack of specialised personnel with the right skills to navigate and manage the various sources is reported to be an additional significant obstacle to optimise the financial support to training.

Greater integration and coordination among the different existing funding sources are desirable to avoid redundancy, fragmentation, and inefficiencies. Greater coordination between the different stakeholders, to pool resources and generate additionality by fostering complementarity, can be supportive particularly for SMEs, as they often do not have the capacity (financial and human resources) in-house to provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities to their workforce.

Implementation of *Reti Territoriali*

Although the Law establishing the *Reti Territoriali per l'apprendimento permanente* (Territorial Networks for Lifelong Learning) was adopted over 10 years ago, fieldwork suggests that these networks are still rarely implemented across the country. Nonetheless, stakeholders involved in the TCR point to several existing good practices of multi-stakeholder cooperation at the local level and highlight the benefits of working in a network of integrated services. Working in *Reti* (and partnership-based approaches more generally) is regarded as extremely effective as they maximise synergies between relevant actors, support good practices and allow for comprehensive and holistic approaches.

Multi-actor networks are regarded as particularly effective in reaching and engaging vulnerable targets, and accompanying them towards integrated services with initial and continuous guidance and counselling, skills assessment, and tailored education/training offers. However, in most cases these experiences are not formalised, are limited to specific projects, and rely on ad hoc funding. Multi-actor network effectiveness is also tightly interconnected with the level of development and capacity of local actors.

All stakeholders engaged throughout the TCR agree that failed implementation of *Reti* is the biggest obstacle to effective upskilling pathways and to ensuring that all adults have the right opportunities to continuously update and upgrade their skills and to navigate frequent transitions and future-proof their careers.

Reti implementation at the local level can no longer be deferred and acknowledging their strategic importance and sustaining them by clear governance and appropriate funding are recognised as steppingstones to full implementation.

Going forward

Overall, the main findings and the suggestions collected during the dialogue with stakeholders from the three levels (micro, meso, and macro) resulted in the formulation of seven areas for reform and suggestion for action aimed at improving access, policy implementation and governance of upskilling pathways, as well as better functional integration between skills gap analysis and tailored training.

Improving transparency within the upskilling ecosystem (Recommendation 1)

Interventions at the regulatory level, investments on infrastructures and technical resources (such as web portals, repertoires, information systems, guidance and

skills assessment centres in all territories) are needed to increase the identification and portability of skills of the adult population.

The implementation of systematic skills assessment processes to track the evolution of adults' skills over time is even more necessary considering that careers can be discontinuous and consist of experiences gained in diversified sectors, territories and contexts. Effective systems for monitoring training provision and outcomes are needed to make the design of customised and flexible training paths more robust with respect to the upskilling and reskilling needs of workers and companies. Significant investments should also be allocated to increasing the active involvement of employees in the process of identifying their skills needs and defining consistent training paths, through dedicated tools and processes, such as one-to-one interviews, individual skills development plans, and continuous feedback systems.

Increasing the transparency and portability of skills is a goal that can also be achieved through the adoption of operational solutions, such as micro-credentials and the pilot implementation of digital credentials ([3]), open badges (promoted by some Regions) and electronic badges ([4]), as envisaged in the National Implementation Plan for the Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration.

Re-engineering the programme and design of the training offer according to the results of the assessment and validation of skills (Recommendation 2)

The evidence collected during the three survey rounds underlined how the integration between the skills assessment phases and the planning and delivery of personalised paths is still an episodic and non-systemic practice. In particular, the methods used to plan the training contents and the methodological choices are still anchored to principles and approaches that do not favour the introduction of flexible, permeable and adaptable curricula. It is necessary to develop and expand the adoption of innovative and more suitable practices for the design and planning of the training offer (e.g. modular training, micro-qualifications) to improve consistency with the skills assessment outcomes.

To overcome the difficulties that SMEs in particular encounter in planning and delivering training courses for their employees, it is essential to develop tools and

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([3]) Digital credentials are a documented declaration containing statements and descriptions about the educational and training experiences – and related learning outcomes – of a citizen issued by an education institution.

([4]) Electronic badges have been adopted, for example, in academic contexts or to demonstrate the acquisition of skills in the case of courses offered by private companies.

adopt organisational solutions that allow the implementation of personalised training paths, at the same time minimising possible interference with work activities.

Pursuing the optimal allocation and concentration of existing resources in a strategic vision and linking to existing national and EU programmes (Recommendation 3)

The fieldwork highlighted that the fragmentation of investments and the difficulty of planning the allocation of available resources in a coordinated and integrated way is detrimental to effective integration between the analysis of skills shortages/mismatches and the provision of flexible and tailored training offers. The problem is reasonably interconnected with the need to improve the quality and mechanisms of governance, with specific reference to the capability of devising strategic and integrated multi-annual planning (with a medium- to long-term horizon) of resources without relying only on EU funds. Reducing uncertainties about the continuity of financial flows over time and controlling the risks of duplication, inefficient allocation and non-allocation is a transversal requirement for the efficient and effective implementation of policies for upskilling and reskilling the adult population.

Increasing the effectiveness of communication to grant access to upskilling (Recommendation 4)

Increasing accessibility to upskilling opportunities for all adults requires the launch of communication campaigns on such opportunities, using multiple channels – not only digital ones – to reach a diverse target audience and be rooted in the territories, considering their specificities and needs. In conducting such campaigns, the offer of integrated services for skills assessment and personalised training must be presented to users in a simple and straightforward way, with a clear description of the steps, procedures, and benefits of tailor-made and flexible training. Languages and channels used to address potential beneficiaries (especially the most vulnerable) on services and opportunities (information and guidance, social and health protection, tailored education and training) must be better targeted to contexts and beneficiaries and framed within shared objectives and coordinated communication campaigns among the different stakeholders.

The effort to increase the effectiveness of communication towards the most vulnerable members of the population, however, must be complemented with allowing and facilitating access to counselling and career and guidance services, also for workers, a target group, that still is not systematically involved in upskilling opportunities. Institutions, chambers of commerce, employers' associations, and

industry organisations should play a key role in raising awareness of the tangible benefits, particularly in the case of SMEs, that an upskilled workforce can bring about in terms of productivity and competitiveness, through clear, non-technical, and 'attractive' language.

Involving and enabling local level stakeholders in networks for the provision of integrated services (Recommendation 5)

Multi-actor networks at the local level are regarded as pivotal to increasing the effectiveness of outreach actions while adapting the upskilling and reskilling offer to the specific needs of beneficiaries and territories. This is especially so where 'silo approaches' to policy formulation and implementation policies are failing. Actions supporting effective multi-stakeholder networks include:

(a) strengthening PES and innovating their practices to pursue the integration of lifelong guidance and training;

(b) strengthening the integration and coordination between PES and social and health services, also using the resources of the PNRR to support inter-institutional networking opportunities;

(c) increasing the quality and frequency of interactions between SMEs/micro-enterprises and trade associations;

(d) recognising and enhancing the role of the Third Sector in reaching the most vulnerable targets.

Closing the gap between policy governance and service delivery through streamlined and flexible multi-stakeholder governance at the most appropriate level (Recommendation 6)

A first step towards streamlining multi-stakeholder governance requires the identification of few, yet clear, shared and agreed rules that respect multi-level mandates, roles, and responsibilities of all players, within the framework of the different competences on education, VET, social and economic policies and labour market regulations. Bringing together regional and national governance would be positive, as it could acknowledge and value many positive territorial and regional experiences, taking into consideration that multi-level governance recognises different local experiences and regional diversity (also considering territorial specificities and diversified regional policies). In addition, public policies need to be better connected with the private sector, with specific reference to cooperation and networking between public and private actors for the integration of training policies and economic development policies in industrial clusters/districts and regional innovation systems. In this framework, collaborative approaches between companies and employer and employee associations (including Interprofessional

Funds) to promote training (also on crucial matters related to the digital and green transitions) must be supported and encouraged, with social partners playing a key-role also in promoting sectoral training initiatives.

Establishing multi-stakeholder governance to bring about virtuous cycles of programming, design and implementation (Recommendation 7)

Multi-stakeholder governance must ensure that planning of public investments is steered in a strategic way, complementing, and integrating different funding sources towards common objectives and priorities (e.g. upskilling of the adult population, reduction of unemployment, citizenship empowerment, social and economic development). It must be encouraged by the creation of feedback loops between resource planning and the evaluation of outcomes and impacts, to readdress resources and refocus efforts towards more efficient and effective policy planning and implementation. It must also ensure joint commitment and effort from stakeholders and continuity of funding to those experiences and practices that proved to be effective and functional to the implementation of the principles of the UP Recommendation.

CHAPTER 1.
Introduction

This publication is part of a Cedefop series of thematic country reviews on upskilling pathways (TCR on UP). It presents the outcomes of the TCR on UP in Italy and it accompanies the publication of the first findings (2023). Within the TCR series, Cedefop also published findings from the TCR on UP for France.

The objective of this report is to provide information on the results from the three fieldwork phases (at the micro, meso and macro levels) envisaged by the TCR and, ultimately, by the EU Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways (2016). The report summarises the main messages emerging at the macro (and final) level, reading them in close connection with the findings of the first (micro) and second (meso) phases. The report is organised as follows. The rest of Chapter 1 presents policy background and aims and steps of the TCR on UP. Chapter 2 discusses the object, scope, objectives and methodology of the TCR on UP in Italy. Chapter 3 presents main findings from the three TCR survey rounds, while Chapter 4 outlines areas for reform and suggestions for actions. Concluding remarks are presented in Chapter 5.

1.1.   Policy background

In December 2016, the European Council adopted the Recommendation on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults (Council of the European Union, 2018) (hereafter referred to as the UP Recommendation). The UP Recommendation calls on Member States to help adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences, who are not eligible for support under the Youth Guarantee, 'to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital competence and to progress towards higher European qualifications framework (EQF) levels relevant for the labour market and for active participation in society'. At the heart of the UP Recommendation is the concept of upskilling pathways, which is characterised by the centrality of the individual to the pathway (individualisation of the pathway), and by a design based on a three-step approach: skills assessment; provision of a tailored, flexible and quality learning offer; and validation and recognition of skills acquired. The UP Recommendation adds that 'those steps could be facilitated by guidance and support measures (…) and by making best use of the potential of digital technologies, if appropriate' (Council of the European Union, 2016). Developing adults' skills not only refers to training but also to information, career

choices and guidance to give individuals the means to be actors of their own professional pathways.

In designing and implementing UP for low-skilled adults, Member States should consider national circumstances, the resources available and existing national strategies, identifying priority target groups for the delivery of upskilling pathways nationally. Member States are not expected to develop anything *ex novo* but to adapt and optimise what is already in place, within a new philosophy which acknowledges the heterogeneity of the low-skilled adult population and the need for an individualised approach, encompassing more than the provision of education and training.

As Cedefop argues in its publication *Empowering adults though upskilling and reskilling pathways, Volume 2: Cedefop analytical framework for developing coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults* (Cedefop, 2020), upskilling pathways is about pulling together resources and creating the right synergies for supporting every (low-skilled) adult towards an individual path to empowerment. It is about creating a comprehensive approach to the upskilling and reskilling of the low-skilled adult population. This approach should be able to address their needs in a coordinated and coherent way between actors and services and ensure that they have all the tools and support to embark on sustainable learning pathways leading to their full potential and fulfilment.

In response to the implementation of the Recommendation by the Member States, Cedefop has developed an analytical framework aimed at supporting policy-makers and stakeholders in designing and implementing sustainable, coordinated and coherent approaches to flexible and inclusive upskilling pathways. The framework is articulated around important systemic features needed for a coherent and coordinated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. It is grounded in a lifelong learning perspective and focused on the empowerment of the individual learner/beneficiary. It comprises 10 key areas of intervention.

(a) Decision-making:
    (i) an integrated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults;
    (ii) a planning strategy for identification of target groups;
    (iii) governance (multilevel/multi-stakeholder);
    (iv) monitoring and evaluation.
(b) Support:
    (i) financial and non-financial support;
    (ii) outreach;
    (iii) lifelong guidance.
(c) Implementation:
    (i) a skills assessment;

  (ii) a tailored learning offer:

  (iii) leading to a qualification;

  (iv) with work-based learning (WBL);

  (v) validation and recognition of skills and competences.

In the TCR on UP, Cedefop's analytical framework is used as a frame of reference for data collection instruments and processes, analysis and reporting. It is also the basis for identifying the TCR scope: the TCR object and specific objectives and key areas to be reviewed during the review.

1.2. Aims and steps of the TCR on UP

Cedefop launched the first round of thematic country reviews (TCRs) in 2021 to support the implementation of the UP Recommendation nationally and to increase the evidence base which can support policy/decision-makers at European level. TCRs aim to analyse in depth the national approaches to the implementation of the UP Recommendation by understanding their strengths and weaknesses and the challenges. The first round of TCR involved France and Italy, while a second TCR round was launched in 2023 involving Croatia; it will be concluded in 2025. Preliminary findings from the TCR in Croatia will be available in early 2025.

The TCR is a country-owned and country-driven review process of its upskilling pathways approach, based on the close collaboration between Cedefop and the ministry/-ies responsible for the implementation of upskilling pathways. It is carried out through an interactive and collaborative process with a steering group of national stakeholders, endorsed with a formal mandate; it details country-specific strengths and weaknesses, and a set of policy recommendations. The steering group brings the strategic direction to the TCR and ensures relevance and ownership of its results: it gives feedback on the documentation produced and validates the intermediate and final outputs, including the policy recommendations.

Preparatory phase

Upon its appointment, the national steering group identifies the TCR scope: the object of the TCR, i.e. a national strategy/initiative that could be considered the national functional equivalent of the UP Recommendation in the country; and the key areas for review among those of the Cedefop analytical framework, i.e. which aspects of the selected national initiative the steering group members consider important to improve through the TCR exercise.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork phase is made up of three consecutive rounds of research directly involving national stakeholders.

The first fieldwork round (also called the micro phase, SR1) is aimed at collecting opinions at the implementation level, i.e. from practitioners and beneficiaries. The meso phase (SR2), builds on findings from SR1 and collects opinions at the institutional level (e.g. from regional/local government representatives, social partners, sector organisations, representatives from local authorities and civil society organisations acting at community level) on challenges and gaps identified in SR1. In the third, macro phase (SR3), policy-makers, social partners, experts and other system level actors discuss proposed solutions and recommendations for the country to tackle the challenges identified.

Final phase: policy recommendations

Findings from each fieldwork round are discussed, contextualised and validated with the national steering group. This group steers the findings in the right directions and ensures relevance and ownership of the results and of the policy recommendations developed as an outcome of the TCR.

CHAPTER 2.
TCR on UP in Italy

This chapter presents the object, scope and objectives of the Thematic country reviews on upskilling in Italy (TCR on UP in Italy). It also discusses the political landscape and state of play in relation to upskilling pathways and the key areas under revision in the TCR, as well as fieldwork strategy and methodological approach.

The TCR is a country-owned and country-driven review process of its upskilling pathways approach, based on close collaboration between Cedefop and the ministry/-ies responsible for the implementation of upskilling pathways. In the TCR for Italy, the national steering group is coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social policies; members include representatives from the Ministry of Education and Merit, Regions (represented by Veneto and Emilia Romagna Regions), National Association of Municipalities (ANCI), Union of Provinces (UPI), National Agency for Active Labour Policies (ANPAL), the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE) and *Tecnostruttura delle Regioni* (organisation providing technical assistance and coordination in the areas of training and employability for the Regions).

2.1. National strategy equivalent to the EU UP Recommendation

The national steering group has identified the National strategic plan for the development of skills of the adult population (*Piano strategico nazionale per lo sviluppo delle competenze della popolazione adulta*) (hereafter the Plan) as the object of the TCR in Italy: this is the national initiative that corresponds the most to the principles and spirit of the UP Recommendation and to the Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. The Plan is the adult learning policy document that defines approaches and objectives in line with the Upskilling pathways Recommendation. It was approved during the session of the Unified State-Regions Conference on 8 July 2021 and represents the outcome of national and interinstitutional dialogue supporting a coordinated and holistic approach to lifelong upskilling pathways.

The Plan's priorities reflect the spirit/principles of the Recommendation:

(a) outreach and guidance: improve attractiveness and effectiveness of outreach and guidance services and strengthen efforts to reach those adults not engaged in society and in the labour market;

(b) upskilling and reskilling: strengthen tailoring and personalisation of the learning offer. Specific focus is also on provision of basic and transversal skills needed for employability and social engagement;

(c) matching skills demand and supply: strengthen partnership-based approaches for labour market intelligence. This line of work also focuses on strengthening the national validation system.

2.2. Integrated approach to upskilling pathways

Reti Territoriali dei servizi (territorial networks of services, hereafter *Rete/Reti*) provide the architecture for an integrated approach to upskilling pathways at regional and local levels. Introduced by Law 92/2012, *Reti* bring together, in a coordinated and coherent manner, key stakeholders providing services in support of lifelong learning, including lifelong guidance, outreach, identification and validation of skills and competences. *Reti* should work under a partnership-based model. *Reti* may include local authorities, public and private employment services, public and private education and training providers, adult education institutions, social partners, companies, chambers of commerce, universities, and civil society organisations. Each region and autonomous province sets up its *Reti* in line with its specific territorial needs and with the general principles underpinning the establishment of *Reti* as per law. *Reti* are set up after consultation with institutional, socioeconomic and civil society organisations and aim to strengthen services of lifelong guidance and identification, validation and certification of competences.

Implementation of the Plan is also supported by the National recovery and resilience plan (PNRR), and particularly by the National new skills plan (PNNC) ([5]) which aims at strengthening the governance of the vocational training system, and the national programme Employability guarantee for workers (GOL). GOL supports an integrated approach to upskilling pathways. Under the programme, public and private employment services cooperate to provide integrated and tailored services, including outreach, skills assessment and personalisation of the training offer. Vulnerable people can avail of GOL services provided in a partnership-based approach with other services at the local level (social, health etc.). The programme

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([5]) Particularly, over the 5-year period 2021-25, the PNNC envisages at least 800 000 workers – out of the three million to benefit from GOL – to be involved in training activities; of these, 300 000 are for strengthening digital skills.

has a budget of EUR 4.4 billion (with an additional EUR 500 million from REACT-EU) for the period 2021-25.

The New Skills Fund ([6]) (Box 1, Section 2.5.2) provides financial support to companies offering services for the identification and validation of skills and the personalisation of the learning pathways to cope with challenges and innovations following the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3. Target groups, key areas to be reviewed and objectives

By taking the Plan as a frame of reference, the national steering group has elected from the 10 key areas of Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults, as the main focus of the analysis: outreach and guidance as well as tailoring of the learning offer (with the integration of relevant elements of skills assessment).

The object of the TCR in Italy is the capacity of the system and/or key actors and services to offer personalised, coordinated, and coherent learning pathways for adults with a low level of skills, through systematic and holistic outreach and guidance services and personalisation of the learning and training offer. The TCR aims to analyse how the actors articulate their services, and how they develop, or not, innovative, and coordinated strategies for coordinated and coherent upskilling pathways aimed at improving adults' levels of skills and competences. To meet the TCR objective, outreach, guidance and tailoring of the learning offer are analysed through the cross-cutting theme of governance and the principles of personalisation of services and centrality of the individual; these are enablers of coordinated services geared to supporting every adult in accessing flexible, accessible, coherent, and personalised learning pathways.

In line with the target population as identified in the first programming phase of the Plan, the TCR in Italy focuses on adults aged 29-64 with a low level of skills and low educational attainment, who are not benefiting from systematic intervention at the interinstitutional level but only from actions approved by individual administrations at the local level.

([6]) Foreseen in the National recovery and resilience plan (PNR, 2020) but adopted in 2021.

2.4.   Current outreach and lifelong guidance system

There is no systematic approach to outreach ([7]) in Italy: it is often provided in the framework of lifelong guidance ([8]) services, or within social services for vulnerable individuals (e.g. social, housing, income support policies).

As a result, outreach is often unstructured and provided ad hoc in the framework of specific projects or activities. The lack of a systematic approach and system logic necessarily hinders its effectiveness. It affects the capability to intercept and raise awareness among potential beneficiaries of upskilling and reskilling interventions, particularly with fragile targets (the low-skilled and low-qualified).

Similarly, guidance seems to suffer from a lack of system logic: rather than approaching it as lifelong career guidance tailored to individual needs and aimed at supporting individuals throughout their careers, guidance is approached as a simple intervention in support of labour market (re)integration.

As illustrated in Table 1 below, several actors have a mandate to design, support and/or implement outreach and guidance services at different levels (national, regional, local). As a result, provision of outreach and guidance activities and measures is heterogenous across the country.

([7])   Outreach: key area 6 in Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults (Cedefop, 2020).

([8])   Lifelong guidance system: key area 7 in Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults (Cedefop, 2020).

Table 1. **Actors with roles and responsibilities in outreach and guidance**

Actor (competent authority in brackets)	Level of operation	Main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for Outreach / Guidance (by law, political, declared mission)
Ministry of Education (Government)	National	Design Support	- Design the national guidance strategy for the formal education offer - Cooperate with other institutional/non-institutional stakeholders to design policies related to outreach and guidance - Define operational standards for guidance services in formal education institutions - Define and finance (through ESF resources) upskilling/reskilling pathways for teachers providing guidance within formal education institutions
CPIA (Ministry of Education)	Regional, local	Implementation Support	- Coordinate and implement guidance activities of the adult population. - Run information and awareness campaigns at local level to reach out to specific target groups - Guide learners in the development of tailored training pathways
CRRS&S centres (Ministry of Education)	Regional, local	Support	- Identify and analyse training and skill needs at regional level - Develop innovative teaching tools and methodologies - Carry out research activities, also in cooperation with universities, public and private research centres and training providers, to inform and support the activities of CPIA
INDIRE (Ministry of Education)	National	Design Support Implementation	- Support Ministry of Education with data production, research and monitoring in formal education
Ministry of Labour	National	Design Support	- Define operational standards for Guidance services in PES, with the support of ANPAL - Design the national guidance strategy in VET and CVET

Actor (competent authority in brackets)	Level of operation	Main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for Outreach / Guidance (by law, political, declared mission)
ANPAL (Ministry of Labour)	National	Design Support Implementation	- Monitor activities of PES - Manage the job information portal *Click Lavoro*, which also provides information on learning opportunities
ANPAL SERVIZI (ANPAL)	National	Support Implementation	- Design tools and methodologies to support public and private labour market actors
INAPP (Ministry of Labour)	National	Design Support Implementation	- Manage, also in cooperation with the Regions, two information portals relevant for guidance and outreach (*Atlante lavoro* and *Professioni e Competenze*)
UNIVERSITIES (Ministry of University and Research)	Local	Implementation	- Organise outreach and guidance activities for students - Manage job placement services for their students
RUIAP (Non-institutional network)	National	Support	- Network of 30 Universities which produces scientific evidence to support and promote guidance services for their learners
REGIONS	Regional	Design Support Implementation	- Coordinate and manage PES - Manage ALMP measures, including outreach and guidance
Tecnostruttura (Regions)	Regional	Design Support Implementation	- Support Regions in managing ESF resources, also for the implementation of outreach and guidance activities
PES (Regions)	Regional/Local	Implementation	- Carry out outreach and guidance activities especially for unemployed adults
Private training providers (private actor)	National/Regional/Local	Implementation	- Carry out outreach and guidance for VET learners
CIOFS-FP (VET provider)	Regional	Implementation	- Manage BILCO centres which carry out outreach and guidance activities targeted to fragile and vulnerable targets
Municipalities	Local	Design Support Implementation	- Coordinate local guidance services (e.g. *INFORMAGIOVANI*, see below)

Actor (competent authority in brackets)	Level of operation	Main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for Outreach / Guidance (by law, political, declared mission)
INFORMAGIOVANI (Municipalities)	Local	Implementation	- Offer training and career guidance for young adults
Interinstitutional Working Group on Lifelong Guidance (multiple institutions)	National	Design Support	- Draft general guidelines and proposals for the definition of minimum standards for guidance services - The WG on LLG is composed of representatives of the Ministries, the Regions and the local administrations (Municipalities and Provinces), supported by public research centres (such INVALSI, INDIRE and INAPP)

Source: Cedefop.

When looking at the actors engaged in outreach and guidance, the potential of municipalities is still largely unexploited. Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, they played an important role in youth guidance and adult education activities. Since then, as the Regions have acquired more expertise and political mandate in these matters, and substantial State funds, the role of municipalities has, as a result, been reduced. Municipalities, however, by intercepting the most vulnerable people within their areas, can still play an important role in outreach services. The State-Region agreement setting up *Reti* (2014) and its implementing law (92/12) acknowledges the key role played by the municipalities; however, implementation of *Reti* is still lagging in many areas, hindering the potential role of the municipalities in providing effective outreach services.

It appears that not all actors (among those with a mandate in outreach and or guidance) are well equipped (in terms of skills and adequacy of the technical equipment) to carry out outreach activities, especially when it comes to vulnerable adults. For example, there is no standard path for the professional development of actors providing outreach and guidance, to ensure they have the right skills. Working in a *Rete* with other stakeholders, which are able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable (i.e. community level civil society organisations), could help to overcome this issue.

2.5.   Current tailored training

The offer of vocational education and training rolls in Italy out through formal, non-formal and informal contexts. Despite the wide offer, training pathways are not always tailored ([9]) to the characteristics and needs of the learner.

Personalisation of the training offer necessarily relies on understanding and making visible the skills and competences already possessed, while identifying potential skill gaps and areas for improvement. In 2013 the country started working on setting up a national system of recognition and certification of skills and competences.

The rest of this section delves deeper in the main strands of tailored learning offer available.

2.5.1.   Tailored training offer in the CPIAs (provincial adult education centres)

CPIAs are formal educational institutions established in 2012 aimed at providing formal education pathways for adults ([10]).

Their offer is primarily aimed at vulnerable and disadvantaged adults, such as the low-skilled, unemployed, migrants, and those serving a prison sentence. CPIAs offer courses for adults to obtain a lower or upper secondary qualification; Italian language courses (Level A2 of the CEFR ([11])) for migrants/refugees (the certification necessary to obtain a residence permit); and training courses for digital, literacy and other employability skills.

CPIAs may also expand their training offer by signing ad hoc agreements with local authorities and other public and private VET providers within the framework of the *Reti*, with the aim of reducing the gaps and skills mismatches within local labour markets.

The training offer is flexible and structured in learning modules, which can be combined in pathways tailored to the training needs of each beneficiary; this is the case with the Individual training pact, which is formulated following the identification and recognition of prior learning, carried out by CPIA teachers.

([9])   Tailored learning offer: key area 9 in Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults.

([10]) There are about 130 CPIAs organised under a network of 4 000 education institutions across the country. According to the latest available data (Ministry of Education, 2020-21 *Anagrafe degli Studenti*), there are about 260 000 adults currently enrolled in CPIAs.

([11]) Common European framework of reference for language skills.

Activities of CPIAs are backed by the P.A.I.DE.I.A plan (Activity plan for adult education innovation) ([12]), which aims at supporting the continuing vocational training (CVT) of CPIA staff with managerial, organisational and teaching upskilling and reskilling actions.

2.5.2. Tailored training offer for workers

Tailored learning for workers comes from a multi-layered system of policies and strategies supporting CVT, which are not integrated in a single strategic framework. Tailored training for people in employment is mainly provided by in-company trainers and/or private accredited training providers, funded in most cases by ESF and interprofessional joint funds (which operate at regional and sectoral levels).

ESF resources are managed by the Regions to help finance upskilling and reskilling activities, especially for vulnerable groups to support their employability and reintegration into the labour market.

Interprofessional joint funds support in-company CVT at sectoral level ([13]). They are drawing increasing attention to the relevance of recognising prior learning in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts, in line with recent national and regional regulations, and with the aim of tailoring, in some cases, their training offer to workers' individual skills needs.

In addition to the ESF resources from the regional operational programmes and interprofessional funds, two novel policy measures are financed by national ESF resources: the 4.0 Training tax credit (*Credito d'imposta formazione 4.0,* managed by the Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy) and the New Skills Fund (*Fondo Nuove Competenze*, managed by ANPAL) described in Box 1. The former (introduced by Law 205/2017) finances training initiatives for employees with a focus on technical skills. Such skills are meant to be achieved through an individual

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([12]) The Plan (Piano di Attività per l'Innovazione Dell'Istruzione degli Adulti (P.A.I.DE.I.A.) has been developed by a national group composed of members from the Ministry of Education and its regional directorates, teachers, and managers of the CPIA. INDIRE is responsible for the dissemination of teaching materials and for the monitoring of the implementation of the plan. Activities pertaining to the P.A.I.DE.I.A Plan are funded by the Ministry of Education and are carried out by CPIA teachers in a peer learning context.

([13]) In 2018 and 2019, the interprofessional funds published 172 calls for proposals, for total funding of over EUR 970 million (XX/XXI *Rapporto nazionale sulla Formazione continua 2018-2019-2020*, 2021). In 2019 the funds financed over 50 000 training plans for more than 1 700 000 workers across 95 000 companies. 43.5% of the training plans approved in 2019 were aimed at updating the skills of workers. The training activities completed in 2019 involved 1 417 000 workers, of which 59.4% were men and 40.6% women. 30.9% of trained workers are low-qualified.

voucher allowing personalised services aimed at supporting upskilling pathways linked to innovation.

The New Skills Fund provides financial support to companies offering services for the identification and validation of skills and the personalisation of learning pathways to cope with challenges and innovations following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Box 1.　　**New Skills Fund (Fondo Nuove Competenze - FNC)**

The New Skills Fund ([14]) (*Fondo Nuove Competenze* – FNC) has been conceived to counter the economic effects of the COVID-19 epidemic. It allocates financial resources to cover for the costs of employee training hours (up to a maximum of 250 hours per worker, to be carried out within 90 to 120 days) with a twofold purpose: to provide workers with upskilling and reskilling opportunities, needed to adapt to labour market changes; and to support companies adapting to novel organisational and production models, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Fund has EUR 730 million allocated; it is jointly financed by the ESF and managed by ANPAL.

To access the FNC, the employer signs an agreement at the company or regional level with the most representative trade unions. The agreement identifies:

- skills needed in the company;
- appropriate training;
- number of workers to benefit from the training;
- number of training hours.

The company must also develop a plan specifying the learning objectives, the recipients and providers of training, the modalities and duration. Training financed by FNC must build on the three-step approach of the UP recommendation: assessment of prior skills and competences, personalised training offer building on skill assessment, and recognition and validation of the skills acquired.

So far, the Fund has supported over 6 000 companies, and trained over 350 000 workers benefiting from 45 million hours of training.

Source: Cedefop.

There are also important provisions (by national law and/or from collective agreement between the social partners) which support the implementation of tailored training, supporting individuals wishing to take advantage and companies wishing to offer such tailored opportunities.

([14]) The New Skills Fund (FNC) was introduced by the so-called Relaunch Decree (Decree Law No 34/2020), subsequently amended by Article 4 of the August Decree (Decree Law No 104/2020) and implemented based on the provisions of the inter-ministerial decree of 9 October 2020 and the supplementary inter-ministerial decree of 22 January 2021.

(a) Law 53 of 2000, which in Article 6 provides for the financing of 'leave for continuing vocational training'. The law states that the training offered must allow personalised courses, certified and recognised as training credits at national and European levels. This law is still in force but currently no funding is provided for its implementation. Law 53/2000 entrusts national and decentralised collective bargaining actors with defining the number of hours to be allocated to leave, as well as the criteria for identifying workers and the methods of working hours and remuneration related to participation in training courses.

(b) National collective agreements, which promote the individual right to training at sectoral level. With these agreements, the worker has an 'individual right to training' for a training course lasting at least 24/36 hours, which can be used by the worker in 3 years to acquire technical, managerial, transversal, linguistic or IT skills.

2.5.3. Tailored training offer belonging to civil society organisations

Another important pathway of tailored training, particularly able to reach out and engage disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, is offered by civil society organisations.

Popular universities (an association of private universities specifically addressing the skill needs of adults from a perspective of social, civic and economic empowerment) and AUSER ([15]) are the most relevant players. Their training offer is addressed to upskilling and reskilling adults according to their individual needs, covering a wide range of learning, from basic skills (English, literacy, numeracy) to technical skills (e.g. computer science) and soft skills (e.g. critical thinking, citizenship skills).

An example of a coordinated approach to upskilling pathways is described in Box 2 which illustrates the experience of CIOFS-FP, one of the most important private training providers. CIOFS-FP adopt a comprehensive approach to training provision, by linking it to guidance and assessment of skills and competences.

Box 2.   **CIOFS-FP: A comprehensive approach to training provision in the Piedmont region**

CIOFS-FP is a network of training providers, active in 12 Italian regions under national coordination, which share common objectives, pedagogies and resources. In addition to providing training, CIOFS-FP centres also run their own guidance centres

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([15]) *Associazione per l'invecchiamento attivo (AUSER)* is a civil society organisation whose mission is to promote and support active ageing also with training offers for adults.

called Bil.Co. (Table 1). In the Piedmont Region, CIOFS-FP is active with a regional headquarters, 12 training centres and seven Bilco guidance centres. These centres, owned and managed by CIOFS-FP, employ about 250 professionals (83% women) and reached 13 000 users in 2020.

Bil.Co. were established in 2007 out of the experience of the European centres of competence and the European network of *Bilan des competences* centres. Modelled on the French experience, they aim at creating an integrated system of lifelong guidance services.

The national coordination function manages training design and quality and monitors training activities. It is also responsible for the continuous training of its practitioners, teachers and trainers: by contract, CIOFS-FP and Bil.Co. employees have the right to 100 hours of upskilling/professional development per year.

Bil.Co. centres promote the development of individual autonomy and responsibility, by adopting a learner centrality approach aimed at accompanying each user in achieving lifelong learning pathways for empowerment in life and in the labour market.

Their services can be accessed through multiple channels (face-to-face, telephone, internet, social networks) and, for users lacking access to the web (digital skills or ICT devices, infrastructure), Bil.Co. centres offer, within their premises, ICT equipment and dedicated staff to support users in navigating their services.

Under its *PerformanSe* tools Bil.Co. offers assessment of users' soft skills, aptitudes and attitudes at work, as well as their strengths and areas for improvement. It also offers assessment of skills and competences, as well as a specific application matching the professional profile of users with that of companies.

Source: Cedefop.

Table 2 summarises the multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance system for the provision of tailored training in Italy.

Table 2. **Actors with roles and responsibilities in tailored training**

Actor	Level of operation	Type of main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for tailored training offer (by law, political, declared mission)
Ministry of Education (Government)	National	Design Support	- General management and funding of CPIA - Training of CPIA directors and teaching staff - Define the standards for recognition of qualifications and certifications - Define objectives, standards and curricula for upper secondary VET, post-secondary non-tertiary VET

Actor	Level of operation	Type of main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for tailored training offer (by law, political, declared mission)
CPIA (Ministry of Education)	Regional Local	Support Implementation	- Provide learning and training offers
CRRS&S centres (Ministry of Education)	Regional Local	Support	- Identify and analyse skills and training needs of the region - Develop innovative teaching tools and methodologies - Design, in cooperation with the PAIDEIA working group, upskilling and reskilling pathways for CPIA teachers
INDIRE (Ministry of Education)	National	Support	- Support training of CPIA teachers
INVALSI (Ministry of Education)	National	Support	- Evaluate the national education system, including CPIA (quality of the training offer)
Ministry of Labour	National	Design Support	- Responsible for VET and CVT policies in the framework of active labour policies
Chambers of Commerce	Local Regional	Implementation Support	- Identify skills needs: analysis and monitoring of the local economy. - Organise short modular training courses for entrepreneurship
REGIONS AND AUTONOMOUS PROVINCES	Regional	Design Support Implementation	- Design, organise, and provide VET - Manage PES; - Set the standards and procedures for validation of skills and competences - Design and manage the regional repositories of professional qualifications - Fund private VET providers - Set the standards for VET (provided by private VET providers)

Actor	Level of operation	Type of main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for tailored training offer (by law, political, declared mission)
PES	Local Regional	Support Implementation	- Design tailored services for unemployed adults: - Provide skills assessment and profiling of the beneficiaries (upskilling and reskilling needs) - Design tailored training pathways for upskilling and reskilling (which will be provided by CPIAs and/or other training providers)
Private training providers (including CIOFS-FP)	Local Regional	Implementation	- Offer training pathways
Technical group on certification of competences (Ministry of Labour, Regions, INAPP, Tecnostruttura)	National	Design	- Design the national system for the identification, validation and certification of competences (IVC). - Design and update the National framework of regional qualifications and develop the technical and methodological specifications for the development of the National repository of education and training qualifications
Trade unions and employers' associations	National	Design Support	- Identify and analyse skills needs of workers and companies - to support the design of in-company CVT
INTERPROFESSIONAL FUNDS (Social partners)	National	Design Support	- Design CVT offer, especially for low-skilled workers - Fund CVT courses - Monitor CVT implementation and use of funds

Actor	Level of operation	Type of main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for tailored training offer (by law, political, declared mission)
AUSER (civil society)	National Local	Implementation	- Offer adult learning courses for upskilling and reskilling (basic skills, transversal skills, digital skills)

Source: Cedefop.

Table 2 above displays a complex governance model, where roles and responsibilities are shared among different actors and at different levels. While there are three well-structured tracks/opportunities for upskilling and reskilling within the Italian system, it is unclear whether the training provided is always tailored to individual needs, and whether it is constructed on a process of skills assessment and results in validation and certification of the skills acquired.

It is also unclear whether the actors providing upskilling and reskilling pathways (including companies) have the capacity (the right skills, tools and methods) to offer tailored training.

2.6. Fieldwork strategy

Based on analysis of the state of play of outreach/guidance (Section 2.4) and tailored learning offer (Section 2.5) presented above, the national steering group and research team selected the following topics as focus for the fieldwork.

(a) Strengthen holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable.
There is no strategic approach to outreach and guidance. These are often provided on a project-basis and lack system logic. Outreach particularly suffers from weak governance: it does not fall under the remit of a specific actor(s), and it is generally delivered within guidance services or in the framework of other social services. This limits its potential in reaching out and engaging the most vulnerable and disengaged. During fieldwork, these issues are investigated by looking at several factors: outreach and guidance service principles and logic; organisation and cooperation among stakeholders; and capacity.

(b) Offers of tailored learning building on skills assessment.
Learning/training opportunities for adults, especially those more at risk from social exclusion, do not systematically rely on skills assessment or profiling processes, hindering the potential of developing upskilling pathways tailored

to individual adult needs. During fieldwork, this issue is investigated by looking at skills assessment/guidance before the training/learning offer, flexibility of the training/learning offer, and capacity of practitioners and providers.

(c) Company, particularly SME, capacity to offer tailored training.

The capacity of companies, especially SMEs, to deliver tailored upskilling/reskilling pathways is one of the critical elements emerging from the above discussion. This issue, including whether companies offer tailored learning/training and whether they are supported (and by whom) in doing so, is investigated during fieldwork from several angles: companies' current experience/practices in tailored learning provision for their employees; companies' capacity (financial, pedagogical) to offer tailored learning to adults; and available support for companies, especially SMEs, to improve their capacity in providing tailored learning/training to their employees.

(d) Implementation of *Reti Territoriali* (territorial networks) at the local level.

Reti are not homogeneously set up and active across the country and within regions, resulting in differences in services provision to individuals. Fieldwork aims at identifying which factors hinder *Reti* establishment and performance by looking at their composition, cooperation among different actors, and capacity.

2.6.1.   Micro phase: methodological approach

Fieldwork for Survey Round 1 (SR1) was carried out through a range of survey methods including individual and group interviews, focus groups and online questionnaires. The rationale for the selection of the stakeholders involved in SR1, as well as the specific survey methods applied, are described in the next section. Stakeholders involved in SR1 were selected according to their role and relevance for the topic investigated and to guarantee geographic balance between three national macro-areas (north, centre, south and islands).

Bil.Co. Centres, Informagiovani and civil society organisations (CSOs) have been selected as career guidance actors (both managers and counsellors), since they are engaged in outreach, especially for vulnerable and disengaged individuals. PES carry out career guidance, but not outreach.

VET providers (both managers and trainers) have been selected among those that have specific experience in offering tailored training pathways to adults.

CPIAs (both directors and teachers) have been involved, with the formal support of the Ministry of Education and Merit. A formal letter from the Ministry has been sent to all CPIAs in the country to invite them to participate in the fieldwork.

Companies were selected among those involved in the INDACO ([16]) survey. Among these, 13 companies were selected for in-depth interviews, based on geographic balance, sector (manufacturing and service sector), and size (SMEs and large companies). Companies identified the employees to be involved in the fieldwork.

Universities were identified among those belonging to the RUIAP network (Table 1).

For each stakeholder group, managers/directors identified the relevant counsellors/teachers/trainers from their organisation to engage in fieldwork. Learners were identified by their respective education/training provider (CPIA/VET providers). Career guidance organisations identified beneficiaries for their services to involve in fieldwork, while unemployed adults were identified by the PES.

The topic of *Reti* (topic 4), was investigated also in two focus groups. Members of existing *Reti* have discussed enablers and success factors (focus group 1), while stakeholders not involved in *Reti* or experiencing difficulties in setting up *Reti* have discussed challenges and possible solutions (focus group 2). In total, 285 stakeholders were involved in SR1. Table 3 summarises, per each topic investigated, the stakeholders involved and methods used.

Table 3.   **SR1: Topics, stakeholders, methods**

Topics	Stakeholders	Methods
Topic 1: Strengthen holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable	- Outreach and guidance organisations: - PES, Bil.Co., *Informagiovani* and CSOs (Managers/Directors); - PES, Bil.Co., *Informagiovani* and CSOs (Career counsellors); - PES, Bil.Co. and CSOs (Beneficiaries). Education and training providers: - Universities; - VET providers (Managers); - CPIA (Directors); - VET providers (Trainers); - CPIA (Teachers). Beneficiaries: - VET Learners; - CPIA Learners; - Unemployed people.	- Individual interviews, - group interviews, - web survey

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([16]) The INDACO survey is carried out by INAPP and investigates CVT demand and supply within Italian companies.

Topics	Stakeholders	Methods
Topic 2: Tailored learning building on skills assessment	Education and training providers: - VET providers (Managers); - CPIA (Directors); - VET providers (Trainers); - CPIA (Teachers). Beneficiaries: - VET Learners; - CPIA Learners; - Unemployed people; - Employees.	- Individual interviews, - group interviews, - web survey
Topic 3: Company, in particular SME, capacity to offer tailored training	- Companies (already or potentially) involved in tailored training delivery; - Employees.	- Individual interviews, - web survey
Topic 4: Implementation of *Reti Territoriali* (territorial networks) at the local level	- Outreach and guidance organisations: - PES, Bil.Co., *Informagiovani* and CSOs (Managers/Directors); - PES, Bil.Co., *Informagiovani* and CSOs (Career counsellors); - PES, Bil.Co. and CSOs (Beneficiaries). Education and training providers: - Universities; - VET providers (Managers); - CPIA ([17]) (Directors); - VET providers (Trainers); - CPIA (Teachers); - Companies; - Beneficiaries.	- Individual interviews, - group interviews, - web survey,focus groups

Source: Cedefop.

2.6.2. Meso phase: methodological approach

Fieldwork was aimed at investigating, with actors from institutions at the meso-level, findings emerging from SR1. Participants were called on to contextualise and better support understanding of the challenges and gaps that had emerged.

Stakeholders in Survey Round 2 (SR2) were selected according to their role and relevance for the topic investigated and to guarantee geographic balance between three national macro-areas (north, centre, south and islands).

([17]) CPIA (*Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti*) are networks of public schools that offer learning opportunities to adult learners. CPIA belong to the Ministry of Education and Merit and offer courses for migrants to acquire linguistic competences (level A2) and courses for adult learners (15 and over) looking for certifications of first and/or second level of secondary school.

On outreach and guidance (topic 1), SR2 engaged institutional stakeholders from regional directorates (VET, Education), as well as representatives of social services directorates at the local level. The local level views were also reflected by stakeholders from ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities) and UPI (Union of Italian Provinces). This phase also involved stakeholders from CSOs with an important role in outreach and guidance such as Euroguidance, the Third Sector Forum and Unieda (Italian Union of Adult Education).

On tailored training (topic 2), SR 2 engaged stakeholders from regional directorates and departments for labour and education, representatives from the social partners and chambers of commerce, as well as those from networks of VET/training providers.

On companies' capacity to offer tailored training (topic 3), the second round of fieldwork involved representatives from 14 Fondi interprofessionali (Section 2.5.2 and Table 2).

In total, 49 stakeholders at the meso-level were engaged in SR2. These were consulted through semi-structured individual interviews conducted either face-to face or remotely. Table 4 summarises, per each topic investigated, the involved stakeholders and number of interviews.

Table 4.   **SR2: Topics, stakeholders, number of interviews**

Topics	Stakeholders	Number of interviews
Topic 1: Strengthen holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable	Social services directorates - Municipalities (Rome, Naples)	2
	Regional directorate for education (Piedmont, Latium, Sardinia)	3
	Directorates for VET (Lombardy, Lazio, Sardinia)	3
	Euroguidance	1
	GNAP (National Group for LLL)	1
	THIRD SECTOR FORUM	1
	UNITRE (National Association of Universities of the Third Age	1
	ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities)	1
	UPI (Union of Italian Provinces)	1
	UNIEDA (Italian Union of Adult Education)	1

Topics	Stakeholders	Number of interviews
	Coordination of Local Authorities, Territorial, and Mountain Policies (Autonomous Province of Trento)	1
	Anpal Servizi SpA	1
	Topic 1: total interviews conducted	**17**
Topic 2: Tailored learning building on skills assessment	Regional Department of Labour Policies (Tuscany, Marche, Veneto)	3
	Regional Directorate for Education (Veneto, Liguria, Lazio, Sicily)	4
	ESF Regional Managing Authority (Lombardy, Tuscany, Sardinia)	3
	Trade union representatives (regional/local level) (CGIL Benevento, CISL Campania)	2
	Employer representatives (regional/local level) (Sistemi formativi Confindustria Umbria, Unindustria Naples	2
	FORMA (National association of VET bodies)	1
	Chambers of Commerce (Irpinia-Sannio)	1
	RIDAP (Italian Network of Adult Education for LLL)	1
	Topic 2: total interviews conducted	**17**
Topic 3: Company, in particular SME, capacity to offer tailored training	FAPI - FONDO FORMAZIONE PMI	1
	FON.COOP	1
	FONDO ARTIGIANATO FORMAZIONE	1
	FONDIMPRESA	1
	FONDOCONOSCENZA	1

Topics	Stakeholders	Number of interviews
	FON.TER	1
	FOR.AGRI	1
	FONDIRIGENTI	1
	FOR.TE	1
	FOND.E.R.	1
	FONDIR	1
	FONDITALIA	1
	FONDOLAVORO	1
	FONDOPROFESSIONI	1
	Topic 3: total interviews conducted	**15**
SR2 total number of interviews conducted		**49**

Source: Cedefop.

2.6.3. Macro phase: methodological approach

In Survey Round 3 (SR3) eight institutional actors at the 'macro' level, such as the social partners, CSOs, and policy makers involved in policy design and decision-making, were involved to collect high-level policy reflections on the findings that emerged from fieldwork at micro and meso levels.

Based on the evidence from the previous survey rounds, actors at macro-level in SR3 discussed, in relation to upskilling pathways and the four topics of investigation more specifically, how to improve:

(a) governance and implementation;
(b) access;
(c) functional integration between skill gap analysis and tailored training.

SR3 involved both semi-structured individual interviews and one focus group. Policy makers participated in the focus group, while views of representatives from social partners and CSOs were collected through semi-structured individual

interviews conducted remotely. Table 5 below summarises the topics, stakeholders and methods pertaining to SR3.

Table 5.   **SR3: Topics, stakeholders, methods**

Topics	Stakeholders	Methods
- Governance and implementation; - Access; - Functional integration between skill gap analysis and tailored training.	- Policy makers: - Ministry of Labour and Social Policies; - Ministry of Education and Merit; - Tuscany Region; - Emilia Romagna Region.	- Focus group
- Governance and implementation; - Access; - Functional integration between skill gap analysis and tailored training.	- Social partners: - Confindustria (employer organisation representative); - Confprofessioni (Confederation of Professionals); - UIL (trade union).	- Individual interview
- Governance and implementation; - Access;	- CSOs: - Forum terzo settore (Third Sector Forum, CSO)	- Individual interview

Source: Cedefop.

CHAPTER 3.

Main findings from the TCR on UP in Italy

This section presents the main findings that emerged from the TCR on UP in Italy, organised by the four topics investigated. Findings from each survey round are discussed under each topic.

3.1. Holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable

Findings from the TCR highlight large territorial differences in the provision of outreach and guidance services, both in terms of availability and results achieved. This arises from a lack of a clear system logic (objectives, roles, responsibilities and governance mechanisms are not properly specified and agreed among the various actors) and adequate human, financial and technological resources. Results also point to lack of awareness of the strategic nature of these services among all parties.

While recent policy initiatives have put emphasis on guidance services in support of a comprehensive approach aimed at enabling all adults to achieve full empowerment throughout their working lives, outreach activities remain limited in scope and mostly carried out at the local level by non-institutional actors that rely on ad hoc/project- based funding for their implementation. This ultimately hinders the potential and effectiveness of these services. Raising awareness of the strategic nature of these services, improving cooperation in multi-actor networks with engagement of relevant local level stakeholders under clear roles and responsibilities, as well as appropriate and stable resources (including for continuous professional development), are considered essential steps to improve outreach and guidance services.

3.1.1. Strengths and challenges in practice (micro-level)

Evidence on outreach and guidance services gathered from those actors engaged in provision of these services, as well as individuals benefiting from them, point to services suffering from lack of a clear system logic and often being provided within a narrow scope. For example, guidance is mostly targeted at the unemployed (or those at risk of unemployment) and their labour market (re)integration, and less towards lifelong guidance aimed at supporting all individuals throughout their careers. Among the stakeholders surveyed, guidance is part of the institutional mandate of PES and an important task of CPIA. It is also part of the mission of

Bil.Co. and of Informagiovani, while VET providers may get involved in continuous career guidance to support beneficiaries in planning their training pathway.

In contrast, no actor has the specific mandate for outreach. It is generally carried out within ad-hoc projects or specific initiatives limited in space and time (mostly at the local level and in the framework of guidance activities or other social services). As a result, outreach is not developed in a systematic and integrated way, roles and responsibilities among the different institutional and non-institutional actors are not clearly defined, substantially hindering potential reach and effectiveness. While potential beneficiaries of outreach services may include a wide range of individuals (low-skilled and low-qualified adults, both employed and unemployed, vulnerable groups such as migrants, people with disabilities, and other individuals in conditions of social exclusion and/or experiencing disadvantaged social and family situations), their effective outreach and engagement largely depends on the capacity of individual actors to get in contact with them. Among the stakeholders involved in SR1 it is reported that some outreach activities are organised by PES, Bil.Co. and Informagiovani as part of their guidance mandate. Few CPIAs (about 28%) carry out outreach, and when they do, these activities are mainly run by teachers who have received ad hoc training; in very few cases are outreach activities within CPIA provided through the support of external consultants and experts. Similarly, VET providers carry out outreach activities only in the context of pathways aiming to support entrepreneurship and self-employment. Generally, most learners are directed to a VET centre by PES, municipal social services and CSOs. This kind of cooperation is effective in territorial contexts where PES are well-functioning, offering a fundamental synergy with other relevant local stakeholders.

What is clear from fieldwork is the key role played by CSOs at the local level, especially in reaching out and engaging fragile and more vulnerable subjects. All stakeholders surveyed agreed that tighter cooperation with local socioeconomic and institutional actors is the pivotal element that would contribute to implementing and developing extensive and systematic outreach activities. In this context, stakeholders regarded multi-actor networks/partnerships as particularly effective in reaching and engaging vulnerable targets with integrated services that bring together initial and continuous guidance and counselling, education and training offers, employment opportunities, and other kinds of social services. For example, VET trainers argue that activating and strengthening networks with other socioeconomic and institutional actors operating in the territory is a strategy that pays back in terms of effectiveness of outreach services. Similarly, CPIA teachers underlined how synergies, sharing of information and cooperation with the social services of the municipalities, CSOs and other local stakeholders proved to be

effective in reaching out to potential beneficiaries in the margins of society. However, many teachers also consider 'red tape' an element discouraging the activation of synergies and common initiatives/partnerships when it comes to engaging institutional partners.

Where they are carried out, outreach and guidance activities are implemented through a variety of methods and tools. For outreach, digital channels (social media, websites and online information, cross-posting) are more common than traditional tools (flyers, posters, events) and are considered particularly useful in reaching people located in distant or disadvantaged geographic contexts. Nevertheless, they are reported to be less effective when contacting inactive adult users (who in some cases do not possess the necessary digital skills) or vulnerable targets, who tend to be more open to word of mouth and direct contact. In the case of CPIA, surveyed teachers report a plurality of tools and channels used to reach out to potential beneficiaries including leaflets, press articles (also on the web), posters, social media channels as well as institutional websites.

Despite a plurality of tools being deployed, beneficiaries of CPIAs became aware of the learning opportunities mainly through social and personal relationships (friends and relatives who have already attended training courses offered by the CPIAs). None of the interviewed had access to information on the training offer provided by CPIAs through work-related channels (i.e., the employer in the case of beneficiaries currently in employment) or institutional channels (e.g. PES). Beneficiaries of outreach and guidance actions implemented by PES, Bil.Co., Informagiovani and CSOs stated that they became aware of upskilling and reskilling opportunities through different channels: social services, information found on social media, word of mouth. Among them, digital tools were the most common (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic), yet they stated that face-to-face interviews/contacts were more effective, also considering that some of the beneficiaries have low levels of digital skills or might be experiencing language barriers.

Face-to-face guidance meetings are preferred by all the stakeholders: direct interaction proves more appropriate in welcoming the needs of the individual user, helping guarantee quality of service and better supporting the target in facing the challenges posed by new technologies. The tools and methods used in guidance and career counselling are adapted to the needs of the different target groups and individuals (tailored personal and group guidance and career counselling activities, individual support to the drafting of CVs, coaching, mentoring, and professional psychological support in the case of users in social distress). For example, CPIA teachers report the use of a variety of techniques for individual and professional empowerment and reinforcement of motivation: counselling in small groups,

workshops, brainstorming, cooperative learning, and role play. Beneficiaries of Bil.Co. centres who received guidance before attending training offered by CIOFS (Box 2), reported a high level of satisfaction at various levels: this applied to training (new skills acquired); work (greater employment opportunities); and personal growth and well-being (resilience, motivation, self-esteem, autonomy, renewed interest in studying). It is clear, especially for guidance, that the role of the counsellor is of fundamental importance, particularly for vulnerable individuals who may lack self-confidence and self-esteem and may have prior negative experiences with formal education.

Limited funding, obsolete infrastructure and technologies, as well as staff and skills shortages are cited as the most common factors preventing the implementation of systematic outreach and guidance activities. CPIA directors also cite geographic distribution of CPIA centres as an additional barrier to effective outreach and guidance; such centres are generally located in larger cities, which may be difficult to reach by adults coming from remote areas, especially those most vulnerable/unemployed.

Limited financial resources are a critical challenge identified by all stakeholders. Bil.Co. and CSOs report that they rely, for their activities, solely on project-based funding, and this dramatically hinders sustainability over the medium and longer term activities, and ultimately their potential and effectiveness.

In terms of human capacity, CPIA staff (directors and teachers) argue that their teachers have the right skills to carry out outreach activities, but more upskilling opportunities for teaching staff are considered by many respondents to be a key enabler in making outreach activities effective and organising them in an efficient way. Similarly, PES practitioners stress limitations in their capacity, both in terms of physical and technological infrastructure and of staff shortages and skills. They underline the need for their further continuous skill development in relation to psychological and emotional dimensions, so they can better support and serve beneficiaries, especially vulnerable individuals with low self-esteem and self-confidence. Investment in continuous vocational training is considered to be strategic to overcome fragmentation (among actors and territories) and to bring outreach and guidance to a systemic level.

3.1.2. Understanding challenges and gaps (meso-level)

Stakeholders involved in the second phase of fieldwork confirmed most of the findings emerging from the implementation/practice level and helped better understanding and contextualising of these. Guidance is confirmed as a 'reactive' service carried out at the direct request of an individual user or as a statutory condition in the context of measures to subsidise low-income and unemployed

people. This narrow understanding of guidance services is little oriented towards lifelong career guidance and supporting individuals throughout their careers, and necessarily results in outreach services which are implemented unevenly throughout the country.

However, stakeholders surveyed acknowledged that under the impetus of initiatives such as GOL and the PNRR (Section 2.2) guidance activities are becoming more widespread and their intervention logic is broadening to incorporate a more comprehensive vision which looks at enabling all adults to reach full empowerment throughout their working lives. But, in the context of limited resources, the increased focus on guidance is not accompanied by equal attention to outreach activities, which remain limited in scope and mostly carried out at the local level by non-institutional actors which rely on ad-hoc/project- based funding for their implementation, largely confirming findings emerging from stakeholders at the implementation level.

Stakeholders also confirmed that lack of a systematic approach and of a clear intervention logic for guidance and outreach translates into huge differences across the country depending on the specific actors involved and their relationships/cooperation. Adopting a systematic approach to guidance and outreach, embedded within clearer and innovative understanding and intervention logic for these services, requires cooperation among different stakeholders at all levels and clear roles and responsibilities for all actors involved. Stakeholders identified lack of clear roles and responsibilities, particularly towards beneficiaries, as a critical gap in provision of these services: which actor should act as first contact and support potential beneficiaries navigating training/learning offers, available support, services which may be accessed.

Despite large differences across the country, several good practices exist at the local level and these are often cemented with the activation of multi-stakeholder networks/partnerships where CSOs play a key role. For example, in the municipality of Naples, an area characterised by high unemployment and social exclusion, outreach and guidance activities are carried out through a network which comprises the municipality, other social and welfare services as well as local CSOs to contact and activate the most excluded and disengaged, using approaches that are tailored to the needs and characteristics of the target users. Potential beneficiaries often lack digital skills and ease of access to the web, and/or face linguistic and cultural barriers; therefore, rather than using social media and other digital tools, practitioners take to the streets and visit social care centres where potential beneficiaries gather. While the benefits of this multi-stakeholder cooperation in the Municipality of Naples are widely praised and acknowledged by stakeholders, this cooperation is neither continuous nor institutionalised. This

means that, rather than establishing a network with permanent stakeholders, the Municipality contracts out provision of these services to various CSOs according to specific funding and project cycles. This results in high turnover and apparent discontinuity in provision from the beneficiaries' perspective. While services may continue to be provided, change of provider often involves a change of location which may lead to the impression that the service is discontinued rather than transferred. This impacts negatively on effectiveness and reach of these services: as time is needed to reach out to potential beneficiaries and to re-establish mutual trust in the context of an area characterised by high social exclusion and vulnerability. Designating permanent locations (headquarters, offices) may contribute to reassure beneficiaries that services are continued even in case of changes in providers.

While among all surveyed stakeholders the role of CSOs and other local level actors is widely acknowledged, especially in the context of vulnerable people, public authorities (e.g. Municipality, Province, Region) stressed that visibility of public institutions within these services should be improved. They argue that beneficiaries often perceive these services as provided by CSOs and do not see the institutional role of public authorities. In the context of vulnerable and disengaged people, this may contribute to more disengagement from society, lack of trust in institutions, and further social exclusion.

Stakeholders also argue that limited awareness of the importance of investment in skill development among all actors, including potential beneficiaries, is another factor hindering the potential and effectiveness of guidance and outreach. Participation in learning and training remains low and representatives from networks of training providers (RIDAP and FORMA) stressed their challenges in attracting participants who are not obliged to participate in these activities in some way, such as needing them to meet some requirements or to avail of support/services (e.g. language courses to obtain a residence permit, or to attend courses in order not to lose the right to financial support). In several cases, potential beneficiaries may also struggle to understand the benefits of skill development: impact may not always be immediately evident or responding to immediate needs.

In terms of capacity and support, stakeholders reflected on two areas: funding and human capital/skills. Diverging views emerged on funding: some stakeholders, especially in the North, reported an excess of funding in the framework of the PNRR; in their opinion, the current challenge is monitoring and making efficient use of available resources in a strategic manner where the use of different funding sources is coordinated and unlocks synergies among different stakeholders. A more strategic approach to funding, however, also embeds sustainability and

continuity of funding streams. While current funding may be considered generous by some, efficient use of funding also entails funding becoming structural, systematic and earmarked. Still, in many cases outreach and guidance activities almost exclusively rely on EU funds complemented by regional joint financing. Municipalities and other local level actors also at this level report lack systematic funding for their outreach and guidance activities which are financed exclusively by ad-hoc project-based funding and therefore result in patchy and ineffective provisions.

The second area of reflection concerned capacity related to the skills of practitioners involved in guidance and outreach. In particular, stakeholders from municipalities and national networks (Naples, Ruiap, and Euroguidance) remarked how lack of understanding of the value of outreach and guidance activities hinders potential and effectiveness. Within this context, they argue that the pivotal role of career guidance counsellors remains neither fully acknowledged nor supported. Lack of a national certification to become career guidance counsellor and lack of professional standards and requirements for those working as career guidance counsellors contribute to the uneven quality and effectiveness of these services.

To capitalise on existing successful experiences, representatives from municipalities (ANCI) suggested a mentoring programme where best practice regions or areas support / mentor areas are lagging behind.

3.1.3. High-level policy considerations and suggestions (macro-level)

The last phase of fieldwork (SR3) was aimed at discussing with macro-level stakeholders how to address the identified challenges and gaps that emerged in previous fieldwork rounds. Stakeholders started their discussions by acknowledging that, if demand for outreach and guidance services remains low due to the limitations and gaps that emerged in the fieldwork, investments to strengthen and improve the quality of these services may not be considered strategic, despite their crucial role in reaching out and supporting individuals and their upskilling pathways opportunities. This is especially critical for vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals. They noted the importance of raising awareness on the benefits of investing in skill development for all, and overcoming the negative connotation often associated with skill development/upskilling/reskilling rooted in the misconception that these are for people with low levels of skills or lacking skills. This type of rhetoric is dangerous not only in the context of the triple transitions (green, digital, demographic) where continuing skill development is essential to future proof all adults' careers. It also brings those most in need, and with prior negative education and training experiences, even further from these

opportunities, trapping them into a cycle of deprivation, dissatisfaction and disengagement.

Stakeholders recommended developing an extensive but clear communication campaign to raise awareness and increase visibility and accessibility of available opportunities for upskilling and reskilling. This campaign would use multiple channels to reach a diversified target audience and tailor it to their specific needs. It would rely on continuous professional development across all stakeholders, to ensure they have the right skills to approach, engage and serve potential users in line with their specific needs and characteristics.

Another area for improvement concerns better coordination and cooperation among stakeholders, and to unlock and sustain multi-stakeholder partnerships and cooperation. During the fieldwork, it emerged that even when services exist, lack of clear roles and responsibilities, and particularly lack of a key focal point able to support potential beneficials in navigating the different services/resources available, is a major barrier for those most vulnerable. In this context, within the PNRR, PES have been identified as the main entry point for vulnerable individuals needing comprehensive support. Efforts to capitalise on this initiative and improve integration between PES and other public services for vulnerable and fragile people (e.g. social services and healthcare services) are another area deserving further attention.

Acknowledging the pivotal role played by CSOs in effective and efficient guidance and outreach, social partners and representatives of the national forum of the third sector at the macro-level insisted that CSOs should be further formalised. Some stakeholders also mentioned professionalisation within the third sector as a key area deserving more attention. These jobs are often subject to poor working conditions (e.g. low pay, temporary contracts), which make these professions unattractive. CSOs often rely on volunteers, which hinders their capacity. In this context, better working conditions, validation and recognition of skills and competences, as well as opportunities for continuing professional development, could be a way forward to ensure that these key stakeholders have the (human capital) capacity to provide their services.

3.2.   Upskilling and reskilling tailored training

The provision of tailored training is still fragmented, not systematic and often not accompanied by skills assessment or individual profiling practices and processes. Despite the progress made in recent years, particularly in the contexts of adult education in the remit of the Ministry of Education (i.e. the offer provided by the CPIAs), the stakeholders who participated in the fieldwork agreed that additional

steps are required for a holistic, systemic and systematic implementation of tailored learning based on skills assessment. Effort must be focused on the continuous professional development of practitioners (teachers and trainers, professionals in career guidance), the implementation – throughout all the county – of common standards for skills assessment, and the effective use of available resources for the provision of tailored learning pathways.

3.2.1. Strengths and challenges in practice (micro-level)

Evidence gathered from the surveys and in-depth interviews at micro-level (Survey Round 1) reported a multi-faceted picture about tailored learning provision building on skills assessment. Even though tailored learning is, all elements considered, judged positively from different perspectives and dimensions, grounding its design and provision on skills assessment practices and processes is not always the rule. Lack of standardised and agreed procedures and limited human and financial resources are the most common barriers to the creation of a systematic and integrated approach entailing skills assessment and tailored learning.

The results from the SR1 fieldwork show that CPIAs are the bodies with most familiarity with processes and practices in assessing the skills developed during experiences in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. In practical terms, based on identification of those skills, the CPIA drafts the Individual training pact, which is the document stating the training needs of the beneficiary and guiding the design of the tailored learning pathway. Teachers and trainers are reported to play a key role across the whole process, from the identification of skills to the design of the tailored learning paths.

Despite a standardised procedure not having been set up, some methods and tools are reported to be commonly used in skills assessment practices: examination of documentation from formal learning experiences; interviews, tests and trials when it comes to the skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. Teachers and trainers consider these tools as effective and functional to support the skills assessment process and most feel confident with the reliability of the information outlined in the individual training pacts. However, some concerns are discussed with respect to the lack of uniformity in the evaluation parameters adopted by different teachers and CPIAs. The creation of specialised job profiles, adequately trained on skills assessment methodologies, is a priority to harmonise skills assessment processes and practices.

Among the factors frustrating the efforts towards a standardised and systematic approach to the integration of skills assessment and tailored learning, CPIA managers reported limited resources, in terms of available funds and staff, and rigid organisational models, which are not always responsive and adaptive to

innovation. Opportunities for teacher continuous professional development – to strengthen their skills and stay up to date with methodological developments and innovation – are considered as strategic to make skills assessment processes a structural component of the pathways for low-skilled adults. According to many of the teachers surveyed, experiential learning, hybrid learning, work-based learning, and peer learning are considered to be supportive to tailoring the learning experience. Teachers stress that the adoption of innovative methods would also require more training opportunities for continuous professional development. Digital skills and English language skills are also common among the training needs expressed by CPIAs teaching professionals.

The outcomes of tailored training – in terms of skills acquisition and empowerment of the individual – are generally judged positively by teachers, though several challenges and concerns over the low level of flexibility of the current training settings are shared. There is a reported need for additional spaces and staff to go beyond the traditional approach of learning within the rigid borders of the class group, which are not functional to the modularisation of the pathway, and which may not be appropriate for adults. Also, the availability should be extended of appropriate equipment to perform practical and laboratory activities for assessment of skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

With respect to VET providers, managers reported that learners usually have their skills and previous learning experiences assessed before designing a learning pathway profiled to their needs. However, VET trainers specify that, in practice, the design and provision of tailored learning does not systematically build on skills assessment. From the perspective of both managers and trainers, a high level of heterogeneity characterises skills assessment processes due to the lack of a common framework (agreed procedures and tools). Even though the trainers report possessing the right skills to perform assessment practices properly, staff shortages – and, consequently, lack of dedicated personnel – are reported to be the main barrier to carrying out skills assessment in a regular, standardised way. Participatory approach in the design phase, where the learners are also involved in devising the training contents according to their training needs, is still underdeveloped due to a generalised scepticism – expressed by managers – towards its actual added value; this is particularly so when the participatory approach is supposed to involve learners with low levels of basic skills.

The perspectives of CPIA and VET centre learners partly confirm the views expressed by managers and teachers, while shedding light on additional strengths and challenges related to the provision of tailored learning building on skills assessment. In line with reports from other key actors interviewed, the connections between the design of the training pathway and the assessment of the skills

developed in previous learning experiences is unclear, while approaches and methods adopted for the assessment do not seem to respond to shared standards. As also reported by VET providers (managers) limitations in the development of skills assessment practices are also affecting the final phase of the training pathway, the certification of the learning outcomes (in terms of skills acquired), which rarely takes place.

Further to that, CPIA learners show a lack of clarity and understanding about the rationale for skills assessment, its purposes and expected benefits for the design of a learning pathway tailored to their skills needs. Learners from VET centres show a higher level of understanding and recognise more clearly how learning pathways can ground on the identification of the skills already possessed by the individual. An interpretative key of such difference rests on the different training objectives of CPIAs – whose offer is mainly focused on basic language skills – and VET providers, which are more labour market oriented and offer training more oriented to technical skills for specific job profiles. In any case, skills assessment processes and methods are confirmed to be little standardised or harmonised.

Most learners are satisfied with the quality of the tailored learning provision, particularly with respect to the teaching staff, who are perceived as very attentive to the specific skills needs of individuals as well as their abilities, aspirations, expectations and socio-cultural backgrounds. Consistency of training content with the learning objectives, adequacy of teaching methodologies, materials and equipment, and flexibility of calendars are also considered among the dimensions contributing to overall quality and favouring a learning-conducive environment. Satisfaction with learning outcomes is also considerable and transversal to the training objectives (basic language skills, skills for self-employment or specific job profiles).

There are challenges that may jeopardise the effectiveness of tailored training provision. Learners agreed that approaches too much unbalanced in favour of the theoretical dimensions (i.e. formal training in learning classes) may have a very limited impact on learning outcomes. Participatory methodologies, laboratories, dual learning experiences are instead reported to have a positive impact on the motivation of the learner and personal and professional empowerment.

3.2.2. Understanding challenges and gaps (meso-level)

Meso-level stakeholders delved into the findings gathered in SR1 with a particular analytical focus on practitioner and teacher/trainer capacity-building and financial/non-financial support measures.

The interviewees substantially agreed on the priorities against which to invest for better support of diffusion quality and effectiveness of skills assessment practices and tailored learning. Continuous professional development of staff (both administrative staff and teachers/trainers) must adapted to provide for the competences and skills needed for the shift from more traditional approaches to adult learning. At the same time, investments are needed to recruit additional personnel in the CPIAs to ensure quality and effective tailored training.

Representatives from the regional administrations also underlined that governance and coordination between services need to be improved to ensure a more balanced distribution and efficient use of the available financial resources. In this perspective, it is noted that the management of the ESF+ regional programmes is more efficient and effective when jointly steered with other socioeconomic actors in the territory (social partners, training providers, institutional actors responsible for the policies on territorial development). The need for horizontal governance and greater level of coordination among interventions is also discussed by the representatives of training providers, who suggest increasing coordination and channels of communication among regional administrations to reduce the gaps and help standardise the practices for skills assessment and tailored training provisions throughout the national territory. With respect to funding sources and mechanisms, respondents, especially those representing the social partners, agreed that existing mechanisms cannot ensure sustainability to long-term interventions. Consistently with the findings of SR1, representatives state that strategic allocation should ensure continuity of funding, while pursuing mid/long-term objectives in terms of adult upskilling/reskilling and economic and industrial development priorities. Representatives from the regional administrations highlighted how a tighter integration of the funding sources and mechanisms would significantly reduce inefficiencies related to duplication, fragmentation and non-allocation.

In considering governance mechanisms, respondents agreed on the enormous potential of multi-stakeholder networks at local/regional level, especially in the case of training offers addressed to most vulnerable adults. The Emilia-Romagna region reports virtuous examples where networking is supported and facilitated by a considerable commitment and involvement of the public administration at municipal and regional level. Horizontal governance and cooperation are consolidated practices also in Lombardy, where the different institutional and non-institutional actors usually team up for shared governance and effective implementation of specific programmes (e.g. PNRR and GOL).

Nevertheless, meso-level actors pointed out that bringing informal and bottom-up best practices at systemic level is challenging. As discussed during SR1

the involvement of the right actors, creating shared goals within a clear framework and responsibilities, and building mutual trust are not always simple and natural processes. Such objectives can be pursued through the support of programmes that explicitly target multi-actor coordination like the Pacts for employment and VET, which promote closer cooperation among stakeholders for the design of training offers well-grounded on the skills needs of the territory.

In the perspective of holistic approaches and seamless interventions for upskilling and reskilling the adult population, the meso-level representatives also underlined that the provision of tailored learning building on assessment of the skills of the individual must be connected to the skills needs of the territory. The Sardinia region reported how the involvement of actors providing labour market analysis and intelligence helped reduce the skills shortages and mismatch in the territory, making tailored training more effective and attractive. Better targeted governance, informed by synergy and consistency among training offers and local skills need/shortages, was pursued also by Lombardy and Toscana regions with the integration of education, training and labour market policies in a single department of the Regional Administration.

3.2.3. High-level policy considerations and suggestions (macro-level)

The challenges and areas of improvement identified at micro- and meso-level for the implementation of tailored learning offers building on skills assessment set the ground for the discussion of high-level solutions and recommendations in Survey Round 3 (SR3). Results from SR1 and SR2 reported a picture where training offers tailored to the needs of the individual coexist with rigid paths, anchored to fixed and largely predefined programmes, formats, contents, and methodologies. In this context, SR3 stakeholders were stimulated to discuss possible systemic solutions for the functional integration of the training offer with the assessment of the skills needs of the individual.

Macro-level representatives agreed that, also considering the present and forecast skill shortages, imbalances and mismatches in the labour market, skills assessment is pivotal to designing and planning upskilling and reskilling offers that can provide the right skills, building on the past formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences of the individual.

Strengthening the provision of services for the identification, validation and certification of competences (IVC) is considered a pre-requisite to making skills portability a standardised and systemic practice throughout the national territory. Permeability between training and work – hence systematic dialogue and joint planning of training contents between training providers, workers, employers and their representatives – as well as flexibility in training provision (in terms of content,

methods, tools, schedules) clearly stems, according to macro-level stakeholders, from effective and accessible IVC services. Another important action to improve the provision of and access to IVC services is streamlining regulation, which is considered to be to complex and discouraging beneficiaries, training providers and companies from taking advantage of the services. It also affects the development of common standards at national level to grant equal access to IVC services and effective portability of the competences among all the Italian regions.

Career guidance and counselling is considered to be an additional key element to support the provision of tailored learning. Macro-level representatives underlined how adults, particularly the low-skilled and most vulnerable, would benefit from targeted interventions to help them navigate the complex provisions and procedures regulating access to training and conceive and develop upskilling and reskilling projects in line with their needs, expectations, aspirations, abilities, skills and competences.

Social partner and CSO representatives also focused on the importance of raising awareness, especially among SMEs and very low-skilled adults, on the existence, advantages and access channels and procedures concerning upskilling and reskilling strategies and measures based on training offers that actually build on clearly identified and recognised skills needs.

According to stakeholders interviewed, the shift from a course-based approach to training to a skills-based and learning outcomes-oriented system, and consequently the provision of flexible and modular training, effectively adaptable to individual skills needs, follows the implementation of the discussed enabling factors regarding IVC services and career guidance. It is important to take stock and learn from the virtuous experiences and good practices consolidated to date, as in the case of the planning and implementation of the GOL programme.

3.3. Company capacity for tailored training: challenges for SMEs and the low-skilled

This section considers the current position, challenges and enabling factors for employers to provide workers with training opportunities calibrated to their skills needs and consistent with company strategies for technological change and competitiveness. The results and discussions of the three survey rounds generally indicated that tailored training is still quite uncommon among companies in Italy; its advantages and rationale are generally unclear to employers, especially when it comes to targeting low-skilled employees in small and medium-size enterprises.

3.3.1. Strengths and challenges in practice (micro-level)

One of the key points highlighted by the survey outcomes is that the organisational and financial efforts required to implement tailored training are not negligible, especially for small and medium-size enterprises. The survey revealed that less than half of the companies dealt in the past with the offer of personalised and modular forms of training, one third only rely on more traditional training practices, and the remaining share of companies declared they have no interest in training for worker upskilling and reskilling. Also, about one in five employers declare that they have no knowledge about tailored training.

The quantitative evidence was complemented with in-depth interviews with employers, who confirmed the limited space attributed to tailored upskilling and reskilling mostly because of the magnitude of the financial investments and organisational efforts required. When implemented, tailored learning measures are not systematic, unstructured and largely disengaged from the company's innovation and technological development strategy. The interviews also revealed that employers are not properly aware of the key-enabling factors for effective provision of tailored training. Employers acknowledge that the design and provision of tailored training requires specialised profiles (e.g. experts in skills assessment, specialised trainers, careers guidance practitioners), but such resources are not part of their recruitment plans. However, in-depth interviews highlighted that employer interest in tailored training has grown recently, especially following the technological challenges of the twin transitions.

The lack of familiarity with the provision of tailored training is accompanied by the low level of development of skills assessment practices. These are not common among most of the companies and, when implemented, do not follow a standardised approach but rely on not well formalised practices and unstructured methodologies. This evidence was also confirmed by the perspective offered by employees, who reported how the assessment of their skill needs is mostly carried out only through individual interviews and limited to the induction phase following their recruitment.

In terms of cooperation with other actors at local level (e.g. VET providers, employment services, social partners) in the design and implementation of tailored learning offers, only one out of four companies report engagement in networks (usually informal) with other relevant socioeconomic actors. Some respondents expressed a lack of trust due to the heterogeneity in the missions, mandates and objective of the actors involved in the networks. Difficulties in finding and agreeing coordination mechanisms and – when it comes to institutional/public actors – bureaucracy, are also reported to be barriers to networking.

From a perspective of inter-organisational cooperation, VET providers suggested that tailored training can be effectively integrated with 'multi-company' interventions, leading to the design and implementation of joint training offers addressed to staff working for different companies. This kind of approach is reported to be particularly beneficial to SMEs, whose individual capabilities and resources for employee upskilling and reskilling are limited.

Experiences reported by the employers in relation to methodological, technical and organisational solutions adopted at company level, show how a varying degree of course flexibility from company to company. In some cases the methods, tools, contents and schedules are profiled to the identified training needs; in other situations most aspects of the training offer are formulated in a pre-defined format. Companies offering tailored training are generally more familiar with traditional on-site group lessons, while other methodologies, like work-based learning, peer-learning and adaptive learning, are implemented by a minority (less than one third). The use of traditional, face-to-face approaches is still the norm, but in some cases e-learning tools are also reported to be functional to the provision of tailored training.

Most of the employees were satisfied with the flexibility (in terms of time, tools, and methodologies) of the tailored training offers they received. In particular, hybrid solutions (combining on site and remote participation) allowed them to better conciliate the training schedule with their work and personal/family needs. With respect to the training contents and outcomes, employees reported tangible benefits in terms of upskilling and reskilling, with clear improvements of the levels of professional development, self-efficacy, motivation and safety at work. The common opinion among workers is that personalised learning is more effective than traditional 'one size fits all' training both in terms of skills acquisition and on the motivational level, where interests and involvement are more stimulated by the tailor-made solution.

Some challenges, and areas for improvement were also discussed during interviews with employees; these included concerns regarding the composition of the learning groups. Interviewees reported that highly heterogeneous groups – involving people with different backgrounds, levels of experience, skill needs – can be detrimental to the quality of the learning outcomes. However, when personalisation implies individual lessons, the relational dimension of the learning process – which is central to triggering collective learning mechanisms through exchanges, discussions, peer learning – is absent.

3.3.2.   Understanding challenges and gaps (meso-level)

The findings consolidated during the micro-level fieldwork were investigated and discussed in greater depth during Survey Round 2 (SR2) with meso-level actors (representatives of the Joint Interprofessional Funds for Continuing Training ([18])).

Meso-level actors generally confirmed the gaps and challenges identified during the first phase of the investigation and reflected on a perspective that would inform the solutions to fill in the gaps and face the challenges. They also gave particular attention to the importance of fostering the development of an upskilling/reskilling culture at company level, encompassing all key skills for current and future technological, environmental, and demographic challenges. This cultural shift, according to the interviewees, must be underpinned by targeted and sustainable measures to ensure adequate financial support to companies offering tailored training to upskill and reskill their workforce.

From the interviews it emerged more clearly that, currently, no financing mechanisms in Italy can support the implementation of a mid/long-term strategy or systemic interventions, due to the uncertainty and discontinuity of funding flows. Greater integration and coordination among the different funding sources are desirable to avoid redundancy, fragmentation, and inefficiencies. Internally to the companies (SMEs in particular), the lack of specialised personnel with the right skills to navigate and manage the various sources is reported to be an additional significant obstacle to optimise the financial support to training. Consequently, complex bureaucratic procedures and uncertainties about the continuity of funding over time are discouraging small businesses from investing in training programmes, even when they recognise the importance for worker upskilling/reskilling and the competitiveness of the firm. A supportive role is, however, played by training providers in guiding entrepreneurs towards effective training strategies.

Considering arrangements for multi-stakeholder cooperation, meso-level actors underlined how the challenges preventing a systemic, systematic and strategic tailored training offer must be addressed with greater coordination between the different stakeholders, to pool resources and generate additionality by fostering complementarity. Meso-level interlocutors generally agree on the fact that the creation of inter-organisational networks can be supportive, particularly for

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([18]) According to art. 118 of Law n.388/2000 and C.M 71/2003, the Interprofessional Joint Funds for Continuing Training are bodies of an associative nature promoted and co-managed by the social partners. Companies can allocate the 0.30% of the contributions paid to the National Social Insurance Agency (INPS) to one of the existing Joint Interprofessional Funds.

SMEs, as they often have limited financial and human resources in-house to provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities to their workforce.

Summarising, the first two survey rounds identified several gaps to be filled and challenges to be faced to pave the way to an efficient and effective provision of tailored training to workers. In particular:

(a) the rationale informing tailored learning practices and competitive advantages that would stem from personalising the upskilling and reskilling processes are still unclear to the employers;

(b) external public funding for training is affected by uncertainties in terms of timing and continuity and most companies do not have the resources provide tailored training in-house. Lack of specialised personnel able to design and implement tailored training and rigid organisational models or limited organisational resources are a barrier, in particular for SMEs;

(c) companies are unwilling to 'buy' training solutions from the market as financial investments are deemed to be not profitable;

(d) companies are reluctant to 'ally' with other actors and engage in formal or informal networks. Lack of definition of shared objectives generates mistrust among the players and red tape hinders cooperation with other actors.

3.3.3. High-level policy considerations and suggestions (macro-level)

Survey Round 3 (SR3) brought the discussion at macro-level and invited national representatives of the social partners to reflect and contribute to the identification to solutions to the gaps and challenges presented above.

With respect to the awareness of the rationale and advantages of tailored learning for workers, high-level stakeholders reflected on how ineffective communication strategies and approaches are contributing to determining the limited participation of small enterprises in tools and programmes that could support the activation of upskilling paths for their employees and managers. Their opinion is that the use of languages and channels to spread the information among all potential beneficiaries needs to be better targeted, with a particular focus on raising awareness among SMEs and most vulnerable workers. Government institutions, business and industrial associations should play a key role in raising awareness among firms through clear, non-bureaucratic, and attractive language about the tangible benefits of training.

In parallel, it is considered pivotal to promote an evidence-based approach according to which regular monitoring allows organisations to evaluate the outcomes, impacts, and effectiveness of employee training, identify areas for improvement, and adjust strategies. Raising awareness among SME owners about the connection between worker training and business competitiveness could help

change the perception of training from a financial burden to a strategic investment. Demonstrating how training can help improve productivity, quality of work, and employee retention can be central to fostering a company culture that values continuous learning.

In relation to the challenges summarised in points b) and c) above (the financial sources and strategies to support the implementation of tailored training strategies and measures), macro-level stakeholders acknowledged that existing funding sources – such as the FNC, GOL programme, ESF, Interprofessional Funds – proved in many cases to be effective and supportive, when selection criteria for receiving the funding criteria were specifically targeted to the provision of tailored learning. At the same time, it is essential that access procedures to funding are streamlined and, within clear and well-specified terms of reference, the use of the funds adapted to the specific organisational setting of the companies, with particular reference to micro and small enterprises and compatible with their limited resources ([19]).

In parallel to streamlining and simplifying the access to and use of the different sources of financing, it is necessary to strengthen companies' in-house training capacity. The SR3 stakeholders agreed that this would not be an easy task, especially in the case of micro enterprises, as the introduction of organisational innovations can be challenging with respect to financial and HR management aspects. Nevertheless, they underline how some companies are expressing the need for novel emerging profiles, such as the 'on-the-job trainer-tutor' and the training/innovation manager (introduced in Italy as part of the Industry 4.0 programme) who can steer training investments within a single company, or in cooperation with other companies. The representatives, during the interviews, also suggested that the introduction of the training manager in small companies may be supported with dedicated financial incentives by relevant actors (including regional administrations and training funds).

In multi-stakeholders governance and implementation of tailored training (the challenge in point d), above), the interviewed representatives reflected on the fact that coordination difficulties are also to be found at institutional and national levels, which makes even more challenging the effective implementation of the set of policies, devices and legislative acts that are aimed at financing the development of tailored training among companies (PNRR and PNNC, GOL, DUAL and FNC; FSE+ 2021-27). SR3 representatives also agreed that collaboration between

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([19]) As also confirmed by the results of the fourth edition of the INDACO-Enterprises Survey by INAPP, 25.6% of companies with more than five employees consider the FNC programme a useful and decisive tool in a complex period, but characterised by a high burden of use (INAPP, 2023).

various actors at local level, including education and training institutions, enterprises, and local communities, is crucial to fill the gaps and face the challenges to the implementation and diffusion of tailored training offers. The creation of multi-stakeholder networks is deemed pivotal to facilitate the exchange and pooling of knowledge, resources, and skills to foster effective and systematic upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, technological innovation and competitiveness.

Several positive experiences and good practices of multi-stakeholder cooperation and coordination are reported in different areas of the country. One instance is the Pact for work and climate (in the Emilia-Romagna region), which involves 59 relevant regional actors (companies, employer and employee associations, universities and research organisations, local and regional authorities) cooperating in the joint design and implementation of policies and initiatives for the green transition. Another relevant and innovative regional-level initiative discussed by macro-level representatives is aimed at supporting value-chain industrial/business clusters in different sectors (e.g. tourism, urban economy, construction, AI, agri-food, mechanics, cultural and creative enterprises) bringing together, in a partnership-based approach, companies, training providers and research organisations to foster innovation-oriented sectoral training initiatives, support and address common challenges and anticipate skill needs.

3.4.   Implementation of *Reti Territoriali*

Although the Law establishing the *Reti Territoriali per l'apprendimento permanente* (Territorial networks for lifelong learning) was adopted over 10 years ago, fieldwork suggests that these networks are still rarely implemented across the country. Nonetheless, stakeholders involved in the TCR point to several existing good examples of multi-stakeholder cooperation at the local level and highlight several benefits of working in a network of integrated services, particularly for reaching out and engaging vulnerable groups. Working in *Reti* (and partnership-based approaches more generally) is regarded as extremely effective as they maximise synergies between relevant actors, support good practices and allow for comprehensive and holistic approaches. However, in most cases these experiences are not formalised, are limited to specific projects, and rely on ad hoc funding.

All stakeholders engaged throughout the TCR agree that failed implementation of *Reti* is the biggest obstacle to effective upskilling pathways and to ensure that all adults have the right opportunities to continuously update and upgrade their skills and to navigate transitions and future-proof their careers.

Reti implementation at the local level can no longer be deferred and acknowledging their strategic importance and sustaining them by clear governance and appropriate funding are recognised as key steppingstones going towards Reti full implementation.

3.4.1. Strengths and challenges in practice (micro-level)

The most striking result emerging from the consultation with stakeholders at the implementation level is that most of them do not belong to a *Rete*: many are not even aware of their existence or what *Reti* are.

Despite not belonging to a *Rete*, most stakeholders engaged in the first phase of fieldwork reported that they cooperate with other actors in the provision of their services. All the managers/directors of outreach and guidance services reported that their organisations operate in partnerships with other stakeholders. For example, PES, are involved in two types of networks of integrated services at the local level: one bringing together actors in employment services and one with actors in training services. However, no cooperation between these two types of networks is implemented nor foreseen. Managers of other outreach and guidance stakeholders such as Bil.Co. report similar experiences and state that, while they cooperate in partnership-based approaches with both public and private actors (e.g. PES, local health services, social services, training centres, other civil society organisations) these approaches are rarely formalised through any agreement nor under formal *Reti* as prescribed by law. These forms of cooperation, particularly with CSOs active at the local level, help in reaching and engaging vulnerable groups. CSOs are better placed to reach the most vulnerable citizens and are regarded by all stakeholders consulted during the fieldwork as being an essential partner for the effective functioning of a *Rete* or other network of integrated services.

Similar to their managers, career and guidance counsellors from PES, Bil.Co., Informagiovani and CSOs reported that their organisations often belong to networks of integrated services (at the local level), run by municipalities in the framework of social inclusion measures. These networks operate through formal agreements (protocols) and are run by the social/labour inclusion services of municipalities. In addition to guidance organisations, these networks include stakeholders such as public services (e.g. health service, social and housing services), VET providers, CPIAs, public and/or private employment services. Career/LLG organisations also cooperate at the local/ community level, on a voluntary basis, with other CSOs that work with specific vulnerable/fragile individuals, such as low-income families, minors and migrants.

Micro-level practitioners overall agree that *Reti* and other networks of integrated services prove particularly effective at reaching out and engaging vulnerable groups. They agree that involving the actors who know the local level well, along with the socioeconomic features and needs of the population, is essential for establishing effective *Reti*, as is dedicated funding to implement the necessary interventions/policies in a timely manner. In this context it is widely acknowledged that CSOs play a crucial role in well-functioning integrated services networks, especially to reach vulnerable citizens.

Working in *Reti* (and partnership-based approaches more generally) is regarded as extremely effective as they maximise synergies between relevant actors, support good practices and allow for comprehensive and holistic approaches. According to managers of VET providers, cooperation between training providers, companies and chambers of commerce is very effective for quality internships and training courses. Partnership-based approaches (and multi-stakeholder cooperation) are also particularly useful for understanding and anticipating training and professional needs, and subsequently designing and developing relevant training courses. This argument is largely shared by VET trainers: they believe that working in partnerships facilitates better understanding of the skills needs of potential learners, with the consequent opportunity to create the most appropriate and tailored training offer, and the engagement of hard-to-reach learners. Some trainers in VET providers, as well as CPIA directors and teachers, also believe that partnership-based approaches facilitate peer-learning and development of innovative methods and tools.

Beneficiaries, on their side, highlighted their positive experience when receiving different services in an integrated manner and ad hoc individualised advice and support; this occurred when career guidance was integrated with analysis of skills needs and provision of training opportunities, or support in finding a job. For more vulnerable or disengaged adults, with complex past experiences in education and/or in the labour market, this integrated approach can contribute to improving their self-esteem, motivation and further engagement in learning, training and/or the labour market. Box 3 reports the example of a network of comprehensive and integrated services called Family District (*Distretto famiglia*).

Box 3.   **Family District (*Distretto Famiglia*)**

Family District (*Distretto Famiglia*) is a network of integrated economic, social, cultural, and environmental services active in the Autonomous Province of Trento. The network (settled under a formal agreement signed by all interested parties) brings together, with well-defined roles, objectives, and activities, stakeholders from public, private and civil society organisations, to work together and design and implement policies, services and initiatives, at the local level, aimed at promoting

> social and economic support of households. According to fieldwork results, Family District has proved particularly effective in supporting public and private actors in offering a wide variety of services that meet the needs of households, contributing to beneficiaries' economic and social empowerment, and strengthening social cohesion.

Source: Cedefop.

In terms of the most important challenges to establishing and sustaining a *Rete*, CPIA directors identified lack of resources (financial, technological, time) as well as lack of visibility and awareness among relevant stakeholders (including trainers in VET providers and CPIA teachers). PES counsellors also cited several additional challenges specific to their organisation, such as limited staff numbers and lack of relevant skills for engaging the most vulnerable. They also mentioned lack of opportunities for continuous professional development of staff as well as inadequate infrastructure and tools for sharing, managing, and exchanging data: there is no single platform or tool which provides a comprehensive picture of each beneficiary's pathway in terms of support accessed, skills assessed and validated, and upskilling/reskilling undertaken.

Representatives from CSOs highlighted that improving *Reti* relies on a combination of interventions, including upskilling of the relevant stakeholders, secure funding, managerial support, flexibility (e.g. in relation to the delivery of the services to beneficiaries), and sharing of information between public and private employment services. They also call for local administrations to identify and approach CSOs to understand their areas of work and how they can best partner-up with other stakeholders at the local level to reach out to and engage individuals, especially those most in need and hardest to reach. They also seek learner-centred approaches and the promotion and dissemination of good practices in *Reti* to increase the potential pool of partners to be involved in them.

3.4.2. Understanding challenges and gaps (meso-level)

Working in partnerships is seen as a 'multiplier of opportunities' for beneficiaries, who are considered central to the process and whose needs should be met holistically in a multidisciplinary way. However, despite the shared understanding of the benefits of *Reti*, stakeholders involved in SR2 reported how efforts to strengthen coordination and cooperation among stakeholders, at all levels, struggle to become systematic. This is clearly linked to the issue of fragmented and unclear governance: according to some stakeholders involved in this fieldwork phase, the current governance of the lifelong learning system in Italy is too complex and responsibilities fall under the remit of several institutional actors, hindering policy coherence and effectiveness. This translates into unclear distribution of

roles and responsibilities, lack of accountability, lack of shared goals and vision, and ultimate lack of mutual trust.

Stakeholders stressed a general need for a strategic approach to *Reti,* with some attributing this to limited awareness of their relevance and potential. This is reflected in the absence of a national agreed vision and lack of strategic leadership or coordinating body, as well as lack of integration and coordination among relevant policy areas. As detailed in the fieldwork at the implementation level (SR1), a shared vision, agreed objectives, common language, mutual trust and clear roles and responsibilities for which each member is fully accountable are key elements for the success of a *Rete*.

Stakeholders also discussed challenges related to limited resources and capacity. Outside of formal *Reti*, partnership-based approaches/other networks often tend to be project-based and to rely on ad hoc funding. This hinders *Reti*/network sustainability and effectiveness. Lack of strategic allocated and dedicated funding at all appropriate levels (including for capacity building), hinders sustainability and efficiency over time. Many networks are created on the basis of ad hoc need and projects, and maintaining continuity without stable and secure funding is difficult. Absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation of these experiences also prevents exploitation and dissemination of their results and possible positive spillovers and unlocking of synergies, such as development of good practices and innovation in tools and methods, and/or pooling of appropriate skills and resources.

Other important challenges to their effective implementation are the limited number of actors involved in *Reti* and limited opportunities for staff professional development against a large pool of potential beneficiaries of services to be offered, together with inadequate infrastructures and tools and methodologies to work in a *Rete*. Within this context, stakeholders from the Forum of the Third Sector confirmed the pivotal role of CSOs whose capillary presence in the territory (even in the most remote and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas) makes them a key actor within *Reti*, to ensure adequate and fair access to upskilling pathways opportunities for all, even the most vulnerable or disadvantaged.

3.4.3. High-level policy considerations and suggestions (macro-level)

The last phase of the TCR work brought together stakeholders at the macro-level to discuss possible solutions to the challenges and gaps discussed during SR1 and SR2. Stakeholders recalled that across the country there are already several multi-stakeholder networks offering good practice examples on which to model implementation of *Reti Territoriali per l'Apprendimento Permanente*. For example, in Emilia-Romagna the Pact for Work and Climate involves 59 actors at the

regional level, including companies, associations, universities, local authorities, and research organisations which cooperate with regional authorities in the design and implementation of policies and initiatives related to the just green transition. A similar regional initiative is represented by chain clusters which are set-up in different fields (e.g. tourism, urban economy, construction, AI, agri-food, mechanics, cultural and creative enterprises). These bring together, in a partnership-based approach, companies, training organisations/providers and research organisations to foster cooperation, synergies and innovative approaches. Similarly, third sector organisations, play a key role in reaching out, understanding, and supporting the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups. Third Sector Competence Districts, for example, bring together several third sector organisations active in the same area to cooperate and coordinate their services, in a holistic and efficient way. It is also recognised that partnership-based approaches among CSOs and companies and/or employers' associations can lead to innovative entrepreneurial experiences tailored to both the specific needs of the company and the local communities (i.e., social economy, energy communities), providing also for the labour market integration of vulnerable individuals (e.g. migrants, drug addicts).

Macro-level stakeholders argue that the time has come to step up these positive but local initiatives, which too often rely on limited and ad-hoc funding, towards full implementation of *Reti*. Effective implementation of *Reti* relies on engaging the right stakeholders at the right levels, as well as enabling them (with clear roles and responsibilities, but also tools and financial, human, technological, resources) to offer their services effectively.

However, the issue of implementation of *Reti* is closely connected with the need to improve multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance. The adoption of the recent strategic policy initiatives supporting upskilling pathways, such as the PNRR, the PNNC, and the GOL (Section 2.2), have brought governance mechanisms back into the spotlight. Lack of a clear governance approach coordinating several policy areas and bringing together, with clear roles and responsibilities, relevant stakeholders at all levels, proved to be the biggest obstacle to the swift implementation of the actions foreseen in the PNRR. It is clear that coordination and cooperation among stakeholders can support the effectiveness of upskilling pathways approaches. It also guarantees broader reach, including vulnerable individuals/groups, and more sustainable and efficient use of funding. However, it needs to be anchored on a shared strategic vision, going beyond political cycles, and therefore guaranteeing policy continuity and sustainability.

Lack of strategic and efficient funding allocation embedded in public-private partnerships and over-reliance on European funds hinders initiative effectiveness and sustainability. Within the complex Italian landscape, strengthening governance mechanisms requires streamlining the governance process by identifying several strategic bodies for multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, with clear mandates, roles, and responsibilities at all levels. Bringing together local, regional and national stakeholders acknowledges local/regional specificities and values the many positive good practices existing at the implementation level.

CHAPTER 4.
Areas for reform and suggestions for actions

The main findings and the suggestions collected during the dialogue with actors from the three levels (micro, meso, and macro) seemed to converge – albeit from different perspectives – on three main policy areas: functional integration between skills gap analysis and tailored and flexible learning paths; accessibility; and policy implementation and governance ([20]). Within each of these areas, different and complementary lines of intervention (policy recommendations) can be identified, and their integrated implementation would make it possible to respond effectively to the problems identified.

Regarding the policy area Functional integration between skills gap analysis and tailored and flexible learning paths, the first recommendation is to improve transparency within the upskilling ecosystem (Recommendation 1).

Adoption of the term 'ecosystem' refers to the need to take into consideration all the factors and components, as well as their inter-dependencies, to enhance the recognition and portability of skills. Interventions at the regulatory level (e.g. defining standards and descriptors), investments in tools and technical resources (such as web portals, repertoires, information systems, guidance and skills assessment centres in all territories), must be complemented by active stakeholder commitment. Such commitment should also invest in effective systems for monitoring training provision and outcomes, to show small businesses the benefits and results of employee training. The availability of data would make the design of customised and flexible training paths more robust with respect to the needs of workers and firms. Offering more convincing arguments when promoting awareness among SMEs on the link between training and business competitiveness is key to transforming the perception of training from a financial burden to a strategic investment.

Maximising the utilisation of the skills and competences of workers and citizens in general, in order to facilitate their mobility and adaptation to the labour market, is a focus of national policies and one of the guidelines for action included in the main programming documents for the coming years (particularly the PNNR, *Piano Nuove Competenze* and GOL, *Garanzia Orientamento Lavoro*, see also Section 2.2) where monitoring and tracking of learners, learning offers, and

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([20]) These policy areas have also been identified as a result of the reflections formulated on the subject by the members of the National steering group during the Meeting held on 26 January 2024.

evaluation of outcomes and impacts are also considered a priority. To consolidate a transparent upskilling ecosystem, the various stakeholders are expected to contribute to the creation of conditions for mutual trust; common understanding and recognition of roles and competences; shared languages; and pooling processes and tools to promote the portability of skills and transparency of skills assessment results. Fostering networking and cooperative approaches (also involving local stakeholders) to share experiences and resources for tailored training design and provision is of crucial importance, particularly for small businesses. Significant investment should also be allocated to increasing the active involvement of employees in the process of identifying their skills needs and defining consistent training paths, through dedicated tools and processes such as one-to-one interviews, individual skills development plans, and continuous feedback systems.

A parallel area of action is the implementation of periodic skills assessment processes to track the evolution of employees' skills over time. This is necessary considering that careers can be discontinuous and consist of experiences gained in diversified sectors, territories and contexts. From this perspective, it is vitally important – and of mutual interest – for workers and employers to be able to track their learning outcomes throughout their lives for an exhaustive definition of the educational and training background of the beneficiaries and to plan tailored training paths accordingly.

Increasing the transparency and portability of skills is a goal that can also be achieved through the adoption of operational solutions, such as micro-credentials. Efforts in that direction can also build upon the pilot implementation of digital credentials [21], open badges (promoted by some regions) and electronic badges [22], as envisaged in the National Implementation Plan for the Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration.

The suggestion to proceed decisively towards re-engineering the programming and design of the training offer according to the results of the assessment and validation of skills (Recommendation 2) is the second policy action identified to support the functional integration between skills gap analysis and tailored and flexible learning paths. The evidence collected during the three survey rounds underlined how the integration between the skills assessment

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[21] Digital credentials are a documented declaration containing statements and descriptions about the education and training experiences – and related learning outcomes – of a citizen issued by an educational institution.

[22] Electronic badges have been adopted, for example, in academic contexts or to demonstrate the acquisition of skills in the case of courses offered by private companies.

phases and the planning and delivery of personalised paths is still an episodic and non-systemic practice. The methods used to plan the training contents and the methodological choices are still anchored to principles and approaches that do not favour the introduction of flexible, permeable and adaptable curricula. It is therefore necessary to develop and expand the adoption of innovative and more suitable practices for training offer design and planning (e.g. modular training, micro-qualifications) to enhance consistency with the skills assessment outcomes.

This recommendation already finds partial operational answers within specific policies being implemented. We refer specifically to the GOL programme and the PNRR, within which skills assessment processes are already a mandatory step to define personalised training paths for beneficiaries. To overcome the difficulties that SMEs, in particular, encounter in planning and delivering training courses for their employees, it is essential to develop tools and adopt organisational solutions that allow the implementation of personalised training paths, at the same time minimising possible interference with work activities.

These two policy recommendations are complemented by an effort to pursue the optimal allocation and concentration of existing resources in a strategic vision linked to existing national and EU programmes (Recommendation 3). The fieldwork highlighted that the fragmentation of investments and the difficulty in planning the allocation of available resources in a coordinated and integrated way is detrimental to effective integration between the analysis of skills shortages/mismatches and the provision of flexible and tailored training offers. The problem is interconnected with the need to improve the quality and mechanisms of governance, with reference to the capability of devising strategic and integrated multi-annual planning (with a medium- to long-term horizon) of resources without relying on EU funds. Reducing the uncertainties about the continuity of financial flows over time and controlling the risks of duplication, inefficient allocation and non-allocation is a transversal requirement for the efficient and effective implementation of policies for upskilling and reskilling the adult population.

The second policy area with respect to which two recommendations can be formulated concerns access to existing upskilling and reskilling opportunities and services. Fieldwork during the three survey rounds showed that, notwithstanding the development of an extensive and diversified training offer as an outcome of the reform processes that modernised the adult learning system during the last

two decades ([23]), the levels of literacy, educational attainment and participation of Italian adults in training are still very low.

The situation is yet more challenging considering that those adults who are most in need of strengthening their skills are often those who are unable to take full advantage of the upskilling opportunities offered. Vulnerable adults, often living in conditions of socioeconomic marginality and/or in remote areas, are the hardest to reach from outreach and guidance services and may not be very receptive to, or aware of, the advantages of upskilling, also considering that the provision of outreach services is neither systemic nor systematic across the territories and segments of target population. The use of social media and other web channels to facilitate accessibility by most vulnerable adults to guidance, education and training opportunities was discussed and questioned during the interviews, especially by practitioners (outreach and guidance operators, experts from PES, teachers and trainers), who highlighted how digital channels can be ineffective in reaching potential beneficiaries with low levels of digital skills.

With respect to this policy area, therefore, the first suggestion for action concerns the need to invest in increasing the effectiveness of communication to grant access to upskilling (Recommendation 4). Enhancing accessibility for all adults to upskilling opportunities requires the launch of communication campaigns on upskilling opportunities which must use multiple channels – not only the digital ones - to reach a diverse target audience and be rooted in the territories, considering their specificities and needs. In conducting such campaigns, the offer of integrated services for skills assessment and personalised training must be presented to users in a simple and straightforward way, with a clear description of the steps, procedures, and benefits of tailor-made and flexible training. Languages and channels used to address potential beneficiaries (especially the most vulnerable) on services and opportunities (information and guidance, social and health protection, tailored education and training) must be better targeted to contexts and beneficiaries and framed within shared objectives and coordinated communication campaigns among the different stakeholders.

The effort to increase the effectiveness of communication towards the most vulnerable members of the population, however, must be complemented with allowing and facilitating access to counselling and career and guidance services for workers, a target group, that still is not systematically involved in upskilling opportunities. Institutions, chambers of commerce, employer associations, and

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([23]) Processes that have involved identification, enhancement, and certification of skills; guidance; the provision of education for the adult population (mainly through the establishment of provincial centres for adult education, CPIA); and job placement through the strengthening of PES.

industry organisations should play a key role in raising awareness of the tangible benefits, specifically the case of SMEs, that an upskilled workforce can bring about in terms of productivity and competitiveness, through clear, non-technical, and 'attractive' language.

A second line of policy action to enhance accessibility to upskilling opportunities and services is aimed at involving and enabling local level stakeholders in networks for providing integrated services (Recommendation 5).

During the three survey rounds respondents widely agreed on the strategic function that multi-stakeholder networks can play at local level to increase the effectiveness of outreach actions. This complements adapting the upskilling and reskilling offer to the specific needs of beneficiaries and territories, especially where 'silo approaches' to policy formulation and implementation policies are failing. Some specific and targeted actions have been identified to support effective multi-stakeholder networks:

(a) strengthening PES and innovating their practices to pursue the integration of lifelong guidance and training;

(b) strengthening the integration and coordination between PES and social and health services, also using the resources of the PNRR to support inter-institutional networking opportunities;

(c) increasing the quality and frequency of interactions between SMEs/micro-enterprises and trade associations;

(d) recognising and enhancing the role of the third sector in reaching the most vulnerable targets.

Recommendations for effective policy implementation and governance were discussed by the National Steering Group in the light of the fieldwork results, particularly during the focus groups with institutional representatives at the macro level and in interviews with representatives of the social partners and CSOs. The reflections focused on the need for mitigating inter-institutional coordination difficulties at macro-level, while enhancing the potential of local experiences; as well as improving the efficiency and effectiveness of resources management, this also drives the scalability of successful experiences and initiatives to interventions with a systemic dimension.

The first recommendation is to work on closing the gap between policy governance and service delivery through streamlined and flexible multi-stakeholder governance at the most appropriate level (Recommendation 6). A first step towards streamlining multi-stakeholder governance implies the identification of few, yet clear, shared and agreed rules that respect multi-level mandates, roles, and responsibilities of all players, within the framework of the different competences on education, VET, social and economic policies and labour market

regulations. Bringing together regional and national governance would be positive, as it could acknowledge and value many positive territorial and regional experiences, taking into consideration that multi-level governance recognises different local experiences and regional diversity (also considering territorial specificities and diversified regional policies). Public policies need to be better connected with the private sector, so that cooperation and networking between public and private actors aids the integration of training and economic development policies in industrial clusters/districts and regional innovation systems. Collaborative approaches between companies and employer and employee associations (including interprofessional funds) to promote training (also on crucial matters related to the digital and green transitions) need to be encouraged, with social partners playing a key role also in promoting sectoral training initiatives.

Effective policy implementation and governance is also supported by establishing multi-stakeholder governance to bring about virtuous cycles of programming, design and implementation (Recommendation 7)**.** Multi-stakeholder governance would ensure that planning of public investments is steered in a strategic way, complementing and integrating different funding sources towards common objectives and priorities (e.g. upskilling of the adult population, reduction of unemployment, citizenship empowerment, social and economic development). This would support the creation of feedback loops between resource planning and the evaluation of outcomes and impacts to readdress resources and refocus efforts. More efficient and effective policy planning and implementation would result, while ensuring joint commitment and effort from stakeholders and continuity of funding to those experiences and practices that proved to be effective and functional to the implementation of the principles of the UP Recommendation.

CHAPTER 5.
Concluding remarks

The TCR on the implementation of the Upskilling pathways Recommendation in Italy was carried out over a 3-year period (2021-23) characterised by significant dynamism and several adjustments in the policy areas related to upskilling and reskilling of the adult population.

The three survey rounds stemmed from the National strategic plan for the development of the skills of the adult population, approved in July 2021, which targets low-skilled adults (aged 29-64) and aims at strengthening, streamlining and consolidating the different services, provisions, and resources for adult upskilling and reskilling in Italy. The Plan, consistent with the UP Recommendation, grounds on a holistic and coordinated (integrated) approach to lifelong learning, also fostering synergies and vertical/horizontal cooperation and coordination among the various institutional and non-institutional stakeholders.

The TCR aimed to grasp a changing framework of public policies on training provision and skills assessment, providing a multi-dimensional analysis of the evolving strategies, stakeholder arrangements and financial investments, to identify strengths, opportunities, gaps and challenges to the implementation of the UP Recommendation in Italy. A range of policy measures and actions (such as the PNNC, GOL, FNC, and Decree No. 59/2020, described and discussed in this report) were introduced in the last 3 years in coordination with the support provided by national and regional ESF+ programming (2021-27).

The policy changes and adjustments analysed during the TCR also follow the novel socioeconomic and technological context generated by the post-COVID-19 recovery and the twin transitions (green and digital). In this context, the National recovery and resilience plan (PNRR) is providing for significant investments targeting adult upskilling and reskilling within the Italian lifelong learning system. Significant resources from the PNRR are being allocated to supporting the coverage and improving the quality of outreach and guidance services and fostering the systemic integration of flexible and tailored training provision with the assessment of upskilling and reskilling needs of the target population. Additional support is being provided to companies to make employee upskilling and reskilling more effective and consistent with the challenges of the ongoing technological changes, specifically the right skills for the digital and green transitions.

On the regulatory side, new provisions and implementing guidelines are being formulated and issued to complete the implementation of the system for the

identification, validation and certification of skills, as well as to support the introduction of micro-credentials and individual learning accounts. It is also planned to strengthen the skills intelligence tools and activities for worker training to be more responsive to novel skills needs and functional to the reduction of skills shortages and mismatch, while properly supporting the recent revision of the regulation on CVET funded by the inter-professional training funds.

Against this background, the TCR provided an opportunity to observe and critically discuss with the most relevant stakeholders the strengths, gaps and challenges – at different governance and implementation levels – characterising and impacting on the shift from a silo-based approach to the implementation of a shared vision building upon the integration of outreach and guidance and skills assessment services, as well as training provisions tailored to the upskilling and reskilling needs of the individual.

Looking back at the evidence collected by the TCR, and beyond the recommendations formulated by the National Steering Group, it is possible to conclude that, besides the significant financial investment and regulatory changes introduced in the recent years and those ones planned for the near future, an extensive implementation of the upskilling pathways recommendation in Italy is still not systemic nor systematic. Successful and effective practices for multistakeholder governance are still limited to certain territories, standards and provisions of dedicated and integrated services are not harmonised throughout the national territory, and accessibility to guidance and skills assessment services – as well tailored training opportunities – still deserves major financial and non-financial support measures, with particular reference to most vulnerable groups.

The TCR on UP is a tool for gathering and analysing stakeholders' points of view and taking a holistic understanding of how a national upskilling system works, considering its challenges, its strengths, and its ways to progress. It can be a useful tool for national stakeholders, enabling them to revisit familiar issues from a different angle and with a different perspective, providing fresh food for thought and action. It can also be useful for European stakeholders, drawing on feedback and lessons learned from a national case study. This dual purpose implies finding a good balance between a sufficiently in-depth analysis of a national system for the benefit of national stakeholders, and a descriptive approach sufficiently distanced from national considerations and singularities to extract instructive indications for the reflection and action of European UP stakeholders. The TCR on UP in Italy has thus sought, as far as possible, to convey the contours and challenges of upskilling to an audience unfamiliar with its system, without succumbing to the oversimplification that would have watered down its results.

Acronyms

ANCI	National Association of Municipalities (*Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani*)
ANPAL	National Agency for Active Labour Policies (*Agenzia Nazionale Politiche Attive del Lavoro*)
AUSER	Active Aging Association (*Associazione per l'invecchiamento attivo*)
Bil.Co.	Centres for skills assessment (*Centri per Bilancio delle Competenze*)
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CIOFS- FP	Italian Centre for Vocational Training (*Centro Italiano Opere Femminili Salesiane – Formazione Professionale*)
COR	Regional guidance centres (*Centri di Orientamento Regionali*)
CRRS&S	Regional centres for research, experimentation and development (*Centro Regionale di Ricerca, Sperimentazione & Sviluppo*)
CU	Unified Conference State-Region and Autonomous Provinces (*ConferenzaUnificata Stato Regioni e province Autonome*)
CPIA	Provincial Centres for Adult Education (*Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti*)
DUAL	Dual system of investment plan
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
EUMS	European Union Member States
FNC	New Skills Fund
GOL	Employability of Workers Guarantee (*Garanzia Occupabilità Lavoratori*)
INAPP	National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (*Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche*)
INDIRE	National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Istituto nazionale,innovazione, ricerca educativa)
ILA	individual learning accounts
IVC	identification, validation and certification
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MIUR	Ministry of Education, University and Research (*Ministro dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca*)

NIP	National implementation plan
P.A.I.DE.I.A	Activity plan for adult education innovation (*Piano di Attività per l'Innovazione dell'Istruzione degli Adulti*)
PES	Public employment service (*Centri Per l'Impiego, CPI*)
PNNC	National new skills plan (*Piano Nazionale Nuove Competenze*)
PNRR	National recovery and resilience plan (*Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*)
PSN	National strategic plan (*Piano Strategico Nazionale*)
Reti	Territorial networks (*Reti territoriali*)
RIDAP	Network for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning (*Rete Istruzione degli Adulti per l'Apprendimento Permanente*)
RUIAP	Network of Italian Universities for Lifelong Learning (*Rete università italiane per l'apprendimento permanente*)
SC	steering committee
SR	survey round
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
TCR	thematic country review
TIAP	Interinstitutional Table on Lifelong Learning
UP	upskilling
UPI	Union of Italian Provinces (*Unione Province d'Italia*)

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Thematic country review on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults in Italy

Key findings of the three research phases and suggestions for future action

This final report on the thematic country reviews (TCRs) on upskilling pathways conducted in Italy from 2021 to 2023 serves as a valuable resource for policy-makers, social partners, and all stakeholders involved in the upskilling process. It summarises the outcomes of the three phases of the research and discusses areas for actions. This report complements the publication of the first findings of the TCR research (2023).

The report examines upskilling pathways from the perspectives of outreach, guidance and tailoring of the training offer. These aspects are analysed through the cross-cutting theme of governance and the principles of personalisation of services and centrality of the individual. These principles enable coordinated services to support every adult in flexible, accessible, coherent, and personalised learning/training pathways.

Designed for an audience unfamiliar with the Italian system, the report avoids oversimplification. For national stakeholders, it offers a fresh perspective on familiar issues, encouraging new insights and actions.