



**PACT FOR
SKILLS**

BOOSTING UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING OF ADULTS THROUGH BETTER OUTREACH AND GUIDANCE SERVICES

Webinar | 23 February 2023

The European Commission organised its third webinar as part of a series of events for Pact for Skills members to discuss and exchange with experts and with the Pact for Skills Community. The webinar presented key EU initiatives to strengthen the outreach of upskilling and reskilling measures. Moreover, the event was an opportunity to learn about existing projects and practices supporting groups further away from the labour market, and share experiences on challenges and success factors related to guidance and outreach measures.

Key messages

Outreach and guidance services play a vital role in boosting the attractiveness of upskilling and reskilling measures, including among the most disadvantaged groups, and ensuring that no one is left behind. There is great potential for the Pact for Skills to ensure that lifelong learning opportunities are accessible to all and to tackle barriers faced by vulnerable target groups by building sustainable multi-stakeholder collaborations and promoting mutual and peer learning opportunities.

The EU has a long history of promoting guidance and outreach in upskilling and reskilling. Key initiatives underlining the importance of outreach, guidance and personal support include, among others, the European Skills Agenda¹, the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways² and the Council Recommendation on Individual learning accounts³. The European Year of Skills represents another opportunity to showcase best practice examples on how to boost participation in upskilling and reskilling through effective outreach and guidance measures.

The experiences shared by Pact Members from implementing upskilling and reskilling projects on the ground present valuable learning opportunities for the wider Pact for Skills community. Holistic approaches based on robust multi-stakeholder collaboration are required to effectively reach vulnerable and marginalised target groups, which may face intersecting barriers, and to provide tailored guidance to ensure long term engagement. Delivering guidance services centred around the target group's needs through multiple channels, for example, by establishing a direct relationship with members of the target group and their communities, is also vital to making upskilling and reskilling accessible to all potential beneficiaries.

Call for action

The European Commission is keen for Pact members to share experiences from the ground in engaging vulnerable groups in upskilling and reskilling measures through guidance and outreach measures:

- Submit your ongoing projects and activities on the website of the [European Year of Skills](#).
- Share examples of projects and initiatives by reaching out to EC-PACT-FOR-SKILLS@ec.europa.eu.

¹ [European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience](#)

² [Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults](#)

³ [Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on individual learning accounts](#)

EU initiatives to boost upskilling and reskilling with a focus on outreach and guidance services

Adult skills policies

The European Commission supports upskilling and reskilling through a wide range of initiatives such as the [Pact for Skills](#) and the [European Year of Skills](#) and by setting a framework for adult skills policies, including, among others, the [European Skills Agenda](#), the European Pillar of Social Rights and its [Action Plan](#). The latter sets out an ambitious goal for the EU: To ensure that at least 60% of adults participate in adult learning by 2030; which makes the engagement with vulnerable and low-skilled adults in upskilling and reskilling measures even more crucial.

A number of key initiatives are in place to achieve these objective. For instance, the [Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways](#) is targeted at low skilled adults and aims to provide them with skills including basic literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or to support them in progressing towards an upper secondary qualification. Outreach, guidance and support measures are an important element of the recommendation, as they are pivotal to informing key target groups on the value of learning and supporting them to stay engaged and maintain their motivation to participate in upskilling and reskilling opportunities. Another initiative underlining the importance of outreach and guidance is the [Council Recommendation on individual learning accounts](#), which aims to support all working-age adults to access training and to increase individuals' incentives and motivation to seek training. The initiative aims to tackle barriers to participation in training activities, such as insufficient financial support and time constraints and underlines the importance of both universal and differentiated personal support to individuals.

Career guidance

The term career guidance and life-long guidance can be used interchangeably and covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills.⁴ To design guidance services that are equipped to engage low-skilled and vulnerable adults in up- and reskilling measures, different elements need to be considered.⁵ The first element is **user centrality**, which requires individualised and personalised guidance fostering long-term individual autonomy of the beneficiaries. Secondly, there is a need for **holistic and adapted services**, supported by interdisciplinary teams which are equipped to address intersecting issues the beneficiaries may be facing, such as housing, integration, and mental health⁶. Thirdly, the correct **identification of target groups** is vital, as the guidance must focus on the target group's needs, and take into intersectionality into account (i.e. the intersection between different personal characteristics, including gender, disability, nationality,

⁴ For complete definition see Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (2008).

⁵ See also the European Commission study on [Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU:Trends challenges and opportunities](#), which examined features making national guidance systems effective, key guidance trends and innovative practices from all over Europe.

immigration or refugee status, which can lead to greater barriers).⁷ Lastly, guidance services need to be delivered in a **multi-channel** way to be accessible, for example, by opting for telephone or in-person meetings to accommodate the needs of the beneficiaries.⁸

The role of Pact Members in boosting upskilling and reskilling through better guidance and outreach: experiences from the ground

The webinar was an opportunity for the participants to learn about existing projects and practices from the ground, focused on attracting groups further away from the labour market to participate in upskilling and reskilling measures.

First, **DIGITALEUROPE** presented the **WOMEN4IT** pilot project created with the mission of supporting young women at the risk of exclusion from the labour market in developing digital competences and improving their employability. The goal of the project was to train women and girls aged 8 to 29 in specific IT job profiles high in demand in the seven countries in which the project was implemented⁹. The project followed a collaborative approach by working with employers in the IT sector, offering training and mentoring sessions and empowerment seminars and ensuring that the training process would account for the participants' needs, such as conflicting obligations and commuting. One of the key success factors was **tailoring the training programme to national realities** and delivering the programmes in national languages. The programme also focused on **empowering messages** to convey confidence and support. Translating the online media outreach activities into local languages and broadening the **outreach channels** by building partnerships with stakeholders at local level, such as employment agencies and youth centres, which could further disseminate the message, was another key success factor. Lastly, involving women who participated in the project as **ambassadors** proved to be highly effective in promoting the project and contributing to women's empowerment in the IT sector.

Next, **Asociatia GEYC** (European Youth for Change) presented **good practice examples from Romania to reach vulnerable young adults**. GEYC's mission is to empower young people to create positive change in their community in the areas of democracy and human rights, digitalisation, sustainability and entrepreneurship, and employability. To do so, GEYC follows a three-step strategy to engage young adults that are difficult to reach. The first step is **providing information** through local and national in-person awareness events and directly engaging with the most vulnerable target groups, which cannot be reached through online communication channels. In a second step, local, national and international **upskilling, reskilling and training opportunities** are delivered. The third step is centred around **community building** to keep the young adults engaged in the long term. Examples of activities and projects that successfully engaged the Romanian youth are the regional youth caravans, the **European Fellowships** and the **SMARTER Academy**. Other important activities include the

⁷ For an overview of target groups please see <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices>

⁸ See Cedefop (2020), Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways:, available at <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3082>

⁹ The project was piloted in Ireland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Spain.

EDU.GEYC.RO network and a new initiative to empower local actors to improve their outreach and promotion activities.

The **GrantXpert Consulting Ltd** based in Cyprus, presented two projects and the lessons learned from the outreach activities related to their implementation. The [Entrepreneurial education for creative self-employed women \(EASEWE\)](#) project aimed to encourage the self-entrepreneurship of migrant women in the cultural and creative field and to increase their employability with tools that strengthen digital and entrepreneurial skills. Migrant women interested in entrepreneurial education in the cultural and creative field were not only difficult to identify and reach, but they also faced additional barriers, such as difficulties in finding opportunities to apply the acquired knowledge and skills on the labour market. Compared to the EASEWE project, it was much easier to engage the target group of the [ArtCRelief](#) project. The ArtCRelief project focused on the entrepreneurial empowerment of artists, cultural and creative professionals and equipping them with the skills and tools to address the challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused to the sector. The target group members tended to proactively search for training opportunities and ways to enhance their entrepreneurial skills, without facing the same barriers as migrant women.

Looking for a project partner? Check the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE)

The [EPALE platform](#) provides a space for stakeholders across Europe to access resources, and exchange and discuss ideas on adult learning. For example, the [EPALE Communities of Practice](#) offer a space to share project ideas with other adult learning professionals. Furthermore, the [Partner Search](#) tool can help you find organisations who are interested in collaborating with you on projects. You can also register your own organisation to post partner finding announcements, and allow other users to reach out to you to share opportunities for cooperation.

Key messages from the plenary

During the plenary discussion, the presenters shared **inspiring examples** of participants who became ambassadors for projects, started their own businesses, became experts in their field and started to work full-time for the organisation which implemented the project. In order to effectively reach vulnerable and marginalised target groups, such as refugees and migrants, it is vital to move beyond digital outreach channels and to **establish direct contact with the communities**, for example by proactively visiting locations known to be frequented by the target group or by establishing partnerships with community leaders. Moreover, to continuously engage target groups in reskilling and upskilling measures beyond pilot projects, **sustainable funding, long-term perspectives, and robust partnerships** involving different types of committed stakeholders are necessary. Successful pilot projects, for example, need ongoing support and can only be scaled up if funding is provided by national and local authorities and close collaboration with universities, companies and other stakeholders. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration**, moreover, is key to build sustainable networks, which are able to implement and update the outputs and methodology developed by pilot upskilling and reskilling projects in line with

the needs of the target group and the specific geographical realities. Overall, a holistic approach to outreach and guidance services built around the needs of the beneficiaries is the best guarantee to engage marginalised and vulnerable groups in upskilling and reskilling measures and to help them develop their full potential and reach their professional and personal aspirations.

The European Year of Skills can help you showcase your work on upskilling and reskilling

The dedicated [European Year of Skills website](#) includes an interactive 'Events Map', where you can register skills-related activities you are organising or find other activities and events near you. You can also download a [Communications Toolkit](#) to help you prepare your communication activities, events and media relations.