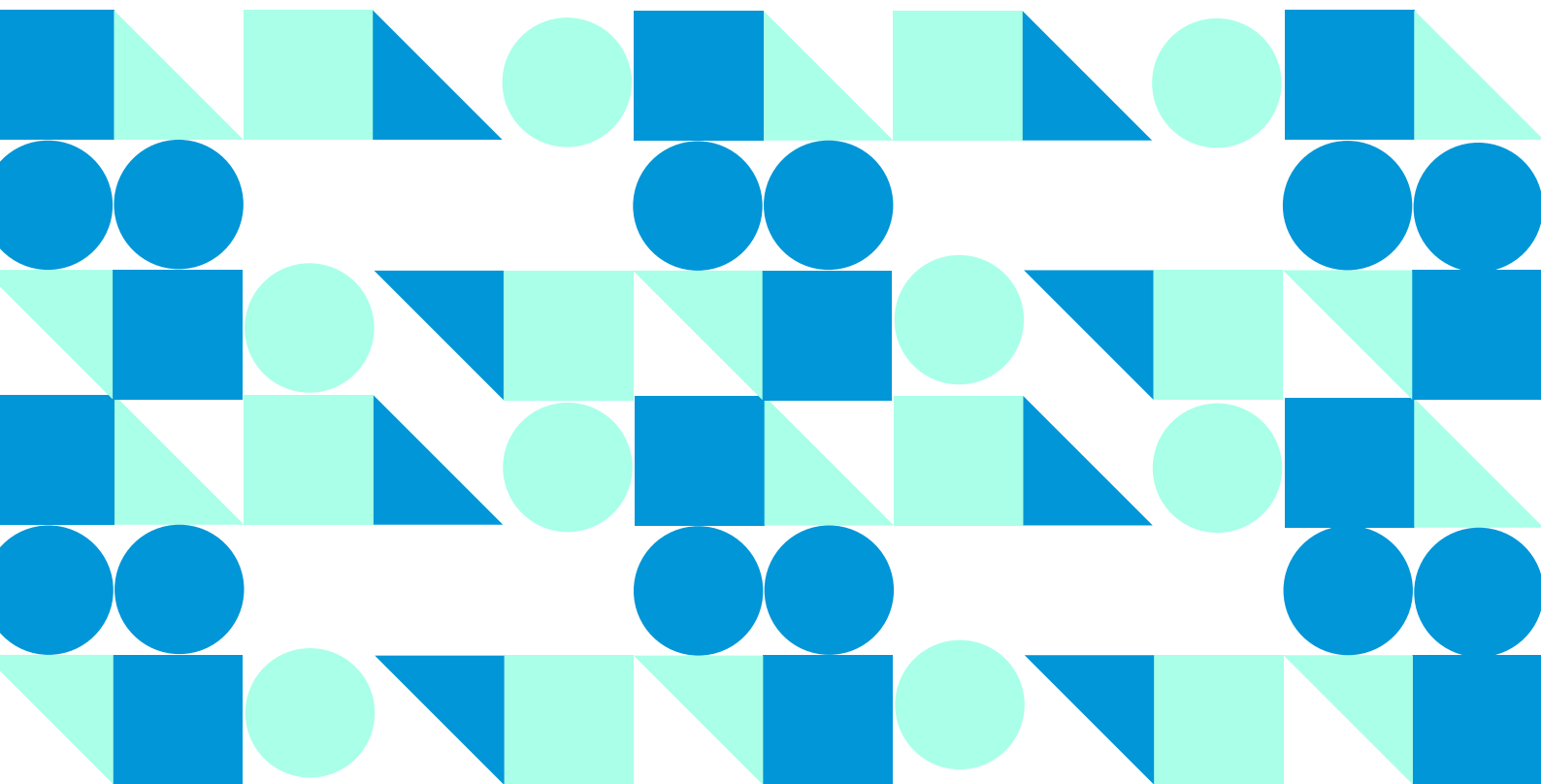




Research paper

# Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in Italy

Key findings of the first research phase







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Key findings of the first research phase

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# Foreword

Every adult deserves lifelong opportunities to update and acquire new skills, to thrive in their life and career. This applies equally, if not more so, to adults with low skills, a group that, according to estimates, accounts for almost half of the population of the EU-27 Member States, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom. Low-skilled adults often accumulate several vulnerabilities and are furthest away from the labour market or are in precarious jobs and at risk of unemployment; yet they benefit the least from upskilling and reskilling opportunities.

This publication is part of a Cedefop series of thematic country reviews on upskilling pathways (TCR on UP) and summarises the first insights into how Italy has responded to the 2016 Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways. [The Recommendation on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults](#) puts low-skilled adults into the spotlight of EU and national policies and encourages Member States to offer upskilling and reskilling opportunities for the low-skilled adult population. The Recommendation is a turning point in the way upskilling and reskilling is understood, organised and delivered. Developing adults' skills not only refers to training but also to services such as outreach, career guidance, validation of non-formal and informal learning and the removal of obstacles; together these offer a pathway to employment, to a higher qualification and to more and better skills, supporting the Recommendation's push for individualised pathways.

From the final users' point of view (low-skilled adults), it is not an easy task, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, to be conversant with their own training needs and available training options. They are often out of touch with anything that might resemble training, have little motivation, are unaware of their skills (even if they are obsolete) and, often, of what can be offered to them. For this group, the first step is to (re)kindle self-esteem, a capital of self-belief that enables them to commit to one or more short/medium-term upskilling and career projects. Outreach and guidance become central services leading towards forms of comprehensive support for the individual, interconnecting public action fields including training, medical and social services, housing, companies, transport and childcare.

The Italian response to the UP Recommendation is a complex one, grounded in the 2021 [National strategic plan for the development of skills of the adult population](#). Unsurprisingly, the focus of the TCR on UP for Italy, as decided by national stakeholders, is on outreach, guidance and tailored learning, and on the crosscutting dimension of governance of these three focus areas.

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# Executive summary

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 aim is to undertake in-depth reviews of countries' national approaches to the implementation of the UP Recommendation, with the support of key national stakeholders. France and Italy, in 2021, were the first two countries that undertook this TCR exercise. Its implementation is expected to last until the end of 2023.

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 strategic direction to the TCR, gives feedback on the documentation produced and validates the intermediate and final outputs, including the policy recommendations.

This report summarises the outcomes of the first phase of the TCR on UP in Italy. The next two phases of the research will build on these results and will eventually lead to the formulation of proposed solutions and recommendations for the country to tackle the challenges identified. A final report will be published in 2024.

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 [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 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 learning 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 pathways. Following from that, it has been agreed that the topics that constitute the object of the fieldwork in Survey round 1 (micro level) are:

- (a) strengthen holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable;
- (b) offer tailored learning building on skills assessment;
- (c) companies', particularly SMEs', capacity to offer tailored training;
- (d) implement *Reti Territoriali* at local level.

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.

Fieldwork for SR1 was carried out through a range of survey methods including individual and group interviews, focus groups and online questionnaires. Stakeholders involved in SR1 have been identified according to their role and relevance for the topic to be investigated and to guarantee geographic balance between three national macro-areas (north, centre, south and islands). Career guidance actors (both managers and counsellors) from public employment services, civil society organisations, academic institutions and low-skilled unemployed adults have been selected as they are engaged/targeted by outreach

and career guidance interventions. VET and adult education providers (both managers and teachers/trainers) and low-skilled adult learners have been selected among those that have specific experience in offering/benefitting from tailored training pathways for adults. Employers and employees have been selected based on geographic balance, sector (manufacturing and service sector) and size of the company (SMEs and large companies) to investigate companies' capacity in the provision of tailored learning pathways for upskilling and reskilling adult workers.

## Strengthen holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable

The micro phase highlights 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.

With respect to objectives, roles and responsibilities, it is a shared opinion that the mandate on outreach is not attributed to specific actors. Guidance' objectives are limited to the unemployed (or those at risk of unemployment) and their labour market (re)integration and less towards lifelong career guidance aimed at supporting all individuals throughout their careers.

In terms of methods and tools used, both beneficiaries and service providers underline that face-to-face contacts can make the difference, particularly in the case of outreach strategies targeted to more vulnerable groups. The role of civil society organisations – which operate directly in the territory and can build trust-based relationships with potential beneficiaries – is considered pivotal to well-functioning outreach. Digital channels proved to be more effective when reaching out to people living in remote areas. Face-to-face guidance interaction proves more appropriate in welcoming the needs of the individual user: better supporting beneficiaries challenged by new technologies and improving the ability to plan their professional future.

With resource needs, practitioners point out that the implementation of systematic strategies for outreach and guidance require multi-dimensional responses that might not always be reflected in their human, financial and technological resources capacity. Although practitioners have the right skills to carry out outreach activities, more upskilling opportunities for teachers and trainers are considered a key enabler to make outreach activities effective and organise them in an efficient way. It is also commonly agreed that financial resources and infrastructure adaptation (both physical and technological) deserve additional

investments to increase the provision of outreach services, which often rely only on ad hoc funded projects that do not support investments over the medium/long term.

Cooperation in multi-actor networks (the *Reti Territoriali* and other kinds of less formalised or non-institutional networks) is considered strategic for reaching out to all adults (including the most vulnerable) and conveying them towards continuous guidance and counselling, tailored education and training pathways, employment opportunities. Nevertheless, the lack of resources, clear roles and responsibilities and well-specified coordination mechanisms is preventing the creation of stable cooperation practices among institutional and non-institutional actors in many territories.

## Tailored learning building on skills assessment

Evidence gathered from the quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews paints a multi-faceted picture of the ways tailored learning provision builds on skills assessment. Even though tailored learning is 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 a standardised framework and agreed procedures, rigid organisational models – not always responsive and adaptive to the introduction of innovations – as well as 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.

Despite the lack of common standards and uniformity in the evaluation parameters adopted by skills assessment practitioners, certain methods and tools are reported to be regularly used in skills assessment practices: examination of documentation, in the case of formal learning experiences, and interviews, practical tests and trials when it comes to the skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

In designing and implementing tailored learning pathways, most teachers/trainers feel they have the right skills to carry out valid skills assessment processes and design well-grounded tailored learning pathways, though opportunities for their continuous professional development are still not sufficient. Teachers and trainers stress the need to strengthen their skills and stay up to date with methodological developments and innovation regarding methods like experiential learning, hybrid learning, work-based learning, and peer learning; these are considered to be supportive of the actual tailoring of the learning experience. The creation of specialised job profiles, adequately trained on skills



assessment methodologies, is also considered to be a priority in harmonising skills assessment processes and practices. Continuous professional training could also boost the adoption of learner/trainer participatory approaches in the tailored training design phase; these are still underdeveloped.

Further, not all learners are made aware of the rationale of skills assessment, its purposes and expected benefits for the design of a learning pathway tailored to their actual skills needs. This finding is common among the beneficiaries of adult education providers, whose learning offer is mainly focused on basic language skills. Learners from VET centres, in contrast, show a higher level of understanding and recognise more clearly how learning pathways can be based on identifying the skills already possessed by the individual.

Despite these limitations, the outcomes of the tailored training in terms of skills acquisition and empowerment of the individual are, in general, judged positively by managers/directors, teachers and trainers, as well as learners. There is agreement on the importance of combining formal and theoretical learning activities with on-the-job experiences for the quality and outcomes of tailored learning provision in terms of motivation to learn, skills acquisition and personal and professional empowerment.

## Companies' capacity to offer tailored training

Tailored training is still quite an uncommon practice among companies. Employers generally see limited relevance in workers upskilling and reskilling: in their view, the 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.

The lack of familiarity with the provision of tailored training is accompanied by the 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.

Participatory approaches are rare exceptions: the training offer is mostly predefined in training plans that do not envisage the involvement of the employee in the design of the training contents and learning objectives.

However, when there is an offer of tailored training, properly built on skills assessment, employees report tangible benefits in terms of upskilling and reskilling, with clear improvements in the levels of professional development, self-efficacy, motivation and work-safety. Personalised learning is acknowledged to be more effective than traditional 'one size fits all' training, as much in terms of skills

acquisition as on the motivational level. Nonetheless, employees also expressed concerns regarding the risks of excessive specialisation in training contents and objectives, which raises some perplexities on the effective empowerment of the worker in the labour market, out of the specific company needs.

Some of the companies, SMEs in particular, argue that the design and provision of training tailored to the individual's skills needs require specialised professionals (experts in skills assessment, trainer, careers guidance practitioners) to be found outside of the company, within other socioeconomic actors operating in the territory (VET providers, employment services, social partners). However, cooperation with other actors is not a common practice: only 1 in 4 companies report being engaged in local networks, albeit informal, with other relevant socioeconomic actors, and just few are part of *Reti Territoriali*. Respondents express a lack of trust due to the heterogeneity and low clarity of the purposes of networks comprising subjects with different interests and missions.

In most cases, companies – SMEs in particular – cannot 'make' tailored training in-house due to the lack of specialised personnel able to design and implement it, rigid organisational models and/or limited organisational resources. Companies also cannot 'buy' training from other actors. Financial investments are deemed to be not profitable and external funding is affected by uncertainties in terms of timing and continuity. But many companies are also 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 public actors.

## Implementing *Reti Territoriali* at the local level

Results from fieldwork suggest that *Reti* are still rarely implemented at the local level. Nonetheless, stakeholders involved in SR1 highlight several benefits of working in a *Rete* or other network of integrated services and point to positive experiences and good practices of existing multi-stakeholder cooperation. However, in most cases these experiences are not formalised, are limited to specific projects, and rely on ad hoc funding.

Overall, all stakeholders agree that *Reti* and other networks of integrated services prove particularly effective for reaching out and engaging vulnerable groups. They agree that involving actors who know well the local level and the socioeconomic features and needs of its inhabitants, together with dedicated funding to implement the necessary interventions/policies in a timely manner, is essential for establishing effective *Reti*. Civil society organisations, in particular, 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 manner of delivery of the services to beneficiaries), sharing of information between public and private employment services.

Working in *Reti* is regarded as extremely effective maximising synergies between relevant actors, supporting good practices and allowing for comprehensive and holistic approaches. Cooperation between training providers and companies is considered 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, on this basis, designing and developing relevant training courses. Working in partnerships supports 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. It is also underlined that partnership-based approaches facilitate peer-learning and development of innovative methods and tools.

Beneficiaries highlighted their positive experience when receiving different services in an integrated manner and ad hoc individualised advice and support (e.g. in cases when career guidance was integrated with analysis of skills needs and provision of training opportunities, or support in finding a job). Especially in the case of more vulnerable or disengaged adults with complex past experiences in education and/or in the labour market, this integrated approach can contribute to improving self-esteem, motivation and further engagement in learning, training and/or the labour market.

Despite the shared understanding of the benefits of *Reti*, stakeholders reported that efforts to strengthen coordination and cooperation struggle to become systematic. This is clearly linked to the issue of fragmented and unclear governance: the current governance setting of the lifelong learning system in Italy is reported to be too complex and responsibilities fall under the remit of several institutional actors, hindering policy coherence and effectiveness. All the actors agree that 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 success of a *Rete*.

This is linked to the issue of sustainability over time: outside of *Reti*, partnership-based approaches often tend to be project-based and to rely on ad hoc funding, which inherently hinders *Reti*/network sustainability and effectiveness. The level of formalisation has a substantial impact on the potential and effectiveness of a *Rete* or a network of integrated services more generally, as it is linked to the achievement of specific objectives rather than a stable, comprehensive and holistic provision of integrated services.

## Summary of main messages

The micro phase highlights large territorial differences in the provision of outreach and guidance services, both in terms of availability and results achieved. Both services appear to suffer from lack of a clear system logic and are often provided with a narrow scope. While guidance is mostly targeted at labour market (re)integration and less towards a lifelong approach, outreach suffers from particularly weak governance. This implies that outreach is not developed in a systematic and integrated way, but is rather carried out within ad hoc projects or specific initiatives limited in space and time.

The provision of tailored learning/training is also suffering a lack of coordination mechanisms and cooperation practices among the different actors involved. Even though tailored learning is judged positively from different perspectives and dimensions, grounding its design and provision on skills assessment practices and processes is not always the rule.

Multi-actor networks are regarded as particularly effective in reaching and engaging vulnerable targets and accompanying them towards integrated services that entail initial and continuous guidance and counselling, skills assessment, and tailored education/training offers. Their effectiveness is reported to be tightly interconnected with the level of development of local actors and networks (the *Reti Territoriali* and other kinds of less formalised or non-institutional networks). While positive experiences of such networks and partnership-based approaches exist throughout the country, the level of formalisation of these relationships is often very limited, and they often run as ad hoc projects rather than sustainable initiatives. Stakeholders formulated several suggestions to progress *Reti* from theory to practice, which include:

- (a) promoting a culture of lifelong learning and developing a strategic and integrated approach for *Reti* underpinned by a clear and shared vision;
- (b) clear roles and responsibilities underpinned by accountability mechanisms and establishment of an agency for lifelong learning in the leadership role;
- (c) moving from ad hoc funding to dedicated and stable funding;
- (d) involving and enabling local level stakeholders, particularly non-institutional actors;
- (e) investing in the continuous professional development of stakeholders, especially practitioners, teachers and trainers;
- (f) developing operational guidelines supporting the implementation of *Reti* based on already successful experiences and good practices which could be scaled up in other areas.

The second phase of the study will build on these findings to discuss the challenges identified with meso level stakeholders.

## CHAPTER 1.

# Thematic country reviews on upskilling pathways

### 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’. Developing adults’ skills not only refers to training but also to information, career choices and guidance to give individuals the means for being actors of their own professional pathways.

In designing and implementing UP for low-skilled adults, Member States would consider national circumstances, the resources available and existing national strategies and they would identify 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 in the optic of 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 through 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:

Decision-making:

- (a) an integrated approach to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults;
- (b) a planning strategy for identification of target groups;
- (c) governance (multilevel/multi-stakeholder);
- (d) monitoring and evaluation.

Support:

- (a) financial and non-financial support;
- (b) outreach;
- (c) lifelong guidance.

Implementation:

- (a) a skills assessment;
- (b) a tailored learning offer:
  - (i) leading to a qualification;
  - (ii) with work-based learning (WBL);
- (c) validation and recognition of skills and competences.

In the TCR on UP, [Cedefop's analytical framework](#) is used as a frame of reference for the data collection instruments and processes, analysis and reporting. It is also the basis for identifying the TCR scope: the TCR object (Section 1.3.1) and specific objectives and key areas to be reviewed during the review (Section 1.3.3).

## 1.2. Aims and steps of the TCR on UP

Cedefop launched the first round of thematic country reviews (TCRs) in 2021<sup>(1)</sup> 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 at stake. The first round of TCR involved France and Italy, while a second TCR round was launched in 2023.

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, and it results in 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.

### 1.2.1. 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 (Section 1.3.1); 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 (Section 1.3.3).

### 1.2.2. Field work

The field work 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, 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

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<sup>(1)</sup> Expected to conclude at the end of 2023.

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.

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

### 1.3. The TCR on UP in Italy

This publication is the first in the TCR series on the TCR on UP in Italy. It summarises the outcomes of the first phase of the TCR on UP in Italy and accompanies the publication of the findings from the [TCR on UP for France](#).

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).

#### 1.3.1. 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: it 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 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 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.

### **1.3.2. Other pillars of an 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 the regional/local level. 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) <sup>(2)</sup> 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 has a budget of EUR 4.4 billion (with an additional EUR 500 million from REACT-EU) for the period 2021-25.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Particularly, over the 5-year period 2021-25, the PNNC envisages at least 800 000 workers – out of the three million to benefit of GOL – to be involved in training activities; of these, 300 000 for strengthening digital skills.

The New Skills Fund <sup>(3)</sup> (Box 1, Section 1.5.2) instead provides financial support to companies offering services for the identification and validation of skills and the personalisation of the learning pathways in order to cope with the challenges and innovations following the COVID pandemic.

### **1.3.3. Target groups, key areas to be reviewed and objectives**

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

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 a systematic intervention at the interinstitutional level, but only from actions approved by individual administrations at the local level.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Foreseen in the [National recovery and resilience plan](#) (PNR, 2020) but adopted in 2021.

#### 1.4. Current outreach and lifelong guidance system

There is no systematic approach to outreach <sup>(4)</sup> in Italy: it is often provided in the framework of lifelong guidance <sup>(5)</sup> 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 a system logic necessarily hinders its effectiveness. It affects the capability to intercept and raise awareness of 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 mere 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.

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<sup>(4)</sup> Outreach: key area 6 in Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults.

<sup>(5)</sup> Lifelong guidance system: key area 7 in Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design the national guidance strategy for the formal education offer</li> <li>• Cooperate with other institutional/non-institutional stakeholders to design policies related to outreach and guidance</li> <li>• Define operational standards for Guidance services in formal education institutions</li> <li>• Define and finance (through ESF resources) upskilling/reskilling pathways for teachers providing guidance within formal education institutions</li> </ul>
CPIA (Ministry of Education)	Regional, local	Implementation Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate and implement guidance activities of the adult population.</li> <li>• Run information and awareness campaigns at local level to reach out to specific target groups</li> <li>• Guide learners in the development of tailored training pathways</li> </ul>
CRRS&S centres (Ministry of Education)	Regional, local	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and analyse training and skill needs at regional level</li> <li>• Develop innovative teaching tools and methodologies</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

INDIRE (Ministry of Education)	National	Design Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support Ministry of Education with data production, research and monitoring in formal education</li> </ul>
MINISTRY OF LABOUR	National	Design Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define operational standards for Guidance services in PES, with the support of ANPAL</li> <li>Design the national guidance strategy in VET and CVET</li> </ul>
ANPAL (Ministry of Labour)	National	Design Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor activities of PES</li> <li>Manage the job information portal <i>Click Lavoro</i>, which also provides information on learning opportunities</li> </ul>
ANPAL SERVIZI (ANPAL)	National	Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design tools and methodologies to support public and private labour market actors</li> </ul>
INAPP (Ministry of Labour)	National	Design Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage, also in cooperation with the Regions, two information portals relevant for guidance and outreach (<i>Atlante lavoro</i> and <i>Professioni e Competenze</i>)</li> </ul>

UNIVERSITIES (Ministry of University and Research)	Local	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise outreach and guidance activities for students.</li> <li>Manage job placement services for their students</li> </ul>
RUIAP (Non-institutional network)	National	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Network of 30 Universities which produces scientific evidence to support and promote guidance services for their learners</li> </ul>
REGIONS	Regional	Design Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate and manage PES</li> <li>Manage ALMPs measures, including outreach and guidance</li> </ul>
Tecnostruttura (Regions)	Regional	Design Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support Regions in managing ESF resources, also for the implementation of outreach and guidance activities</li> </ul>
PES (Regions)	Regional/Local	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out outreach and guidance activities especially for unemployed adults</li> </ul>
Private training providers (private actor)	National/Regional/Local	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out Outreach and guidance for VET learners</li> </ul>

CIOFS-FP (VET provider)	Regional	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage BILCO centres which carry out outreach and guidance activities targeted to fragile and vulnerable targets</li> </ul>
Municipalities	Local	Design Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate local guidance services (e.g. COL and <i>INFORMAGIOVANI</i>, see below)</li> </ul>
<i>INFORMAGIOVANI</i> (Municipalities)	Local	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer training and career guidance for young adults</li> </ul>
Interinstitutional Working Group on Lifelong Guidance (multiple institutions)	National	Design Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft general guidelines and proposals for the definition of minimum standards for guidance services</li> <li>• 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 as INVALSI, INDIRE and INAPP)</li> </ul>

Source: Cedefop.

When looking at the actors engaged in outreach and guidance, it is worth mentioning that 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, still can 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, the 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.

## 1.5. Current tailored training offer

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 <sup>(6)</sup> 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 the set-up of 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.

### 1.5.1. 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 <sup>(7)</sup>.

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<sup>(6)</sup> Tailored learning offer: key area 9 in Cedefop analytical framework for developing upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults.

<sup>(7)</sup> 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-



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 <sup>(8)</sup>) 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 single 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.

Activities of CPIAs are backed by the P.A.I.DE.I.A plan (Activity plan for adult education innovation) <sup>(9)</sup>, which aims at supporting the continuing vocational training (CVT) of CPIA staff with managerial, organisational and teaching upskilling and reskilling actions.

### **1.5.2. Tailored training offer for workers**

Tailored learning offer 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 offer 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 in the labour market.

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<sup>21</sup> *Anagrafe degli Studenti*), there are about 260 000 adults currently enrolled in CPIAs.

<sup>(8)</sup> Common European framework of reference for language skills.

<sup>(9)</sup> 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.

Interprofessional joint funds support in-company CVT at sectoral level <sup>(10)</sup>. 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 the 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 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 in order to cope with the challenges and innovations following the COVID pandemic.

**Box 1. The New Skills Fund (*Fondo Nuove competenze* – FNC)**

The New Skills Fund <sup>(11)</sup> (*Fondo Nuove Competenze* – FNC) has been conceived to counter the economic effects of the COVID-19 epidemic. It is a tool that 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.

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<sup>(10)</sup> In 2018 and 2019, the interprofessional funds published 172 calls for proposals, for total funding of over 970 million EUR (*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.

<sup>(11)</sup> 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.

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:

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

- (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 the definition of 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.

### **1.5.3. 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<sup>(12)</sup> 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) to 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 called Bil.Co. (Table 1). In the Piedmont Region, CIOFS-FP centres are articulated in 12 training centres, seven Bil.Co. guidance centres and a regional coordinating headquarters; they employ about 250 professionals (83% women) and have 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.

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<sup>(12)</sup> *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.

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 the 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General management and funding of CPIA</li> <li>• Training of CPIA directors and teaching staff</li> <li>• Define the standards for recognition of qualifications and certifications</li> <li>• Define objectives, standards and curricula for upper secondary VET, post-secondary non-tertiary VET</li> </ul>
CPIA (Ministry of Education)	Regional Local	Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide learning and training offers</li> </ul>

Actor	Level of operation	Type of main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for Tailored training offer (by law, political, declared mission)
CRRS&S centres (Ministry of Education)	Regional Local	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and analyse skills and training needs of the region</li> <li>Develop innovative teaching tools and methodologies</li> <li>Design, in cooperation with the PAIDEIA working group, upskilling and reskilling pathways for the CPIA teachers</li> </ul>
INDIRE (Ministry of Education)	National	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support training of CPIA teachers</li> </ul>
INVALSI (Ministry of Education)	National	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the national education system, including CPIA (quality of the training offer)</li> </ul>
MINISTRY OF LABOUR	National	Design Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsible for VET and CVT policies in the framework of active labour policies</li> </ul>
Chambers of commerce	Local Regional	Implementation Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify skills needs: analysis and monitoring of the local economy.</li> <li>Organise short modular training courses for entrepreneurship</li> </ul>

Actor	Level of operation	Type of main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for Tailored training offer (by law, political, declared mission)
REGIONS AND AUTONOMOUS PROVINCES	Regional	Design Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design, organise, and provide VET</li> <li>• Manage PES;</li> <li>• Set the standards and procedures for validation of skills and competences</li> <li>• Design and manage the regional repositories of professional qualifications</li> <li>• Fund private VET providers</li> <li>• Set the standards for VET (provided by private VET providers)</li> </ul>
PES	Local Regional	Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design tailored services for unemployed adults:</li> <li>• Provide skills assessment and profiling of the beneficiaries (upskilling and reskilling needs)</li> <li>• Design tailored training pathways for upskilling and reskilling (which will be provided by CPIAs and/or other training providers)</li> </ul>
Private training providers (including CIOFS-FP)	Local Regional	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer training pathways</li> </ul>

Actor	Level of operation	Type of main contribution (design, support, implementation)	Main task for Tailored training offer (by law, political, declared mission)
Technical group on certification of competences (Ministry of Labour, Regions, INAPP, Tecnostruttura)	National	Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design the national system for the identification, validation and certification of competences (IVC).</li> <li>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</li> </ul>
Trade unions and employers' associations	National	Design Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and analyse skills needs of workers and companies</li> <li>to support the design of in-company CVT</li> </ul>
INTERPROFESSIONAL FUNDS (Social partners)	National	Design Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design CVT offer, especially for low-skilled workers</li> <li>Fund CVT courses</li> <li>Monitor CVT implementation and use of funds</li> </ul>
AUSER (civil society)	National Local	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer adult learning courses for upskilling and reskilling (basic skills, transversal skills, digital skills)</li> </ul>

Source: Cedefop.

Table 2 displays a very complex governance model, where roles and responsibilities are shared among different actors and at different levels. While, as discussed in Section 1.5, 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, but also tools and methods) to offer tailored training.

## 1.6. Fieldwork strategy

Based on analysis of the state of play of outreach/guidance (1.4) and tailored learning offer (Section 1.5) presented above, the national steering group and research team have 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, in particular, 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: (i) 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*'s establishment and performance by looking at their composition, cooperation among different actors, and capacity.

## 1.7. The micro phase: methodological approach

Fieldwork for 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.

### 1.7.1. Stakeholders involved in SR 1 and methods

Stakeholders involved in SR1 have been 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).

Among career guidance actors (both managers and counsellors) BIL.CO. Centres, CILO/ Informagiovani and civil society organisations have been selected as these organisations are engaged in outreach, especially toward vulnerable and disengaged individuals. In contrast, 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 to the fieldwork.

Companies have been selected among those involved in the INDACO <sup>(13)</sup> survey. Among these, 13 companies have been selected for in-depth interviews, based on geographic balance, sector (manufacturing and service sector), and size (SMEs and large companies). Companies have identified the employees to be involved in the fieldwork.

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

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<sup>(13)</sup> The [INDACO survey](#) is carried out by INAPP and investigates demand and supply of CVT within Italian companies.

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

In total, 285 stakeholders have been involved in SR1. Table 3 summarises, per each topic investigated, the stakeholders involved and methods used.

Detailed information on the number of stakeholders consulted for each topic as well as the specific methods and tools used for the consultation are reported in Annex 1.

The topic of *Reti* (topic 4), has been 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). More information on the focus groups can be found in Annex 2.

Table 3. **Topics, stakeholders involved and 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PES, Bil.Co., <i>Informagiovani</i>, CILO and NGOs (Managers/Directors);</li> <li>• PES, Bil.Co., <i>Informagiovani</i>, CILO and NGOs (Career counsellors);</li> <li>• PES, Bil.Co., CILO and NGOs (Beneficiaries).</li> </ul>	Individual interviews, group interviews, web survey
	Education and training providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities;</li> <li>• VET providers (Managers);</li> <li>• CPIA (Directors);</li> <li>• VET providers (Trainers);</li> <li>• CPIA (Teachers).</li> </ul>	
	Beneficiaries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Learners;</li> <li>• CPIA Learners;</li> <li>• Unemployed people.</li> </ul>	

Topics	Stakeholders	Methods
Topic 2: Tailored learning building on skills assessment	<p>Education and training providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET providers (Managers);</li> <li>• CPIA (Directors);</li> <li>• VET providers (Trainers);</li> <li>• CPIA (Teachers).</li> </ul> <p>Beneficiaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Learners;</li> <li>• CPIA Learners;</li> <li>• Unemployed people;</li> <li>• Employees.</li> </ul>	Individual interviews, group interviews, web survey
Topic 3: Company, in particular SME, capacity to offer tailored training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Companies (already or potentially) involved in tailored training delivery;</li> <li>• Employees.</li> </ul>	Individual interviews, web survey
TOPIC 4: Implementation of <i>Reti Territoriali</i> (territorial networks) at the local level	<p>Outreach and guidance organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PES, Bil.Co., <i>Informagiovani</i>, CILO and NGOs (Managers/Directors);</li> <li>• PES, Bil.Co., <i>Informagiovani</i>, CILO and NGOs (Career counsellors);</li> <li>• PES, Bil.Co., CILO and NGOs (Beneficiaries).</li> </ul> <p>Education and training providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities;</li> <li>• VET providers (Managers);</li> <li>• CPIA <sup>(14)</sup> (Directors);</li> <li>• VET providers (Trainers);</li> <li>• CPIA (Teachers);</li> <li>• Companies;</li> <li>• Beneficiaries.</li> </ul>	Individual interviews, group interviews, web survey, focus groups

Source: Cedefop.

<sup>(14)</sup> 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.

## CHAPTER 2.

# Main findings from SR1

### 2.1. Strengthen holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable

Outreach activities have broad and heterogeneous targets: low-skilled and low-qualified adults (both employed and unemployed), as well as vulnerable groups like migrants, disabled people, victims of gender violence, and those living in different disadvantaged social and family situations.

The results of the interviews conducted during SR1 emphasise the relevance of multi-actor networks in reaching out to vulnerable targets and conveying them towards integrated services that bring initial and continuous guidance and counselling, education and training offers, employment opportunities, and other kinds of social services. Outreach and guidance activities are carried out mainly at the local level, with differentiations between the various bodies and actors involved, it follows that their effectiveness is reported to be tightly interconnected with the level of development of local actors and networks (the *Reti Territoriali* and other kinds of less formalised or non-institutional networks).

#### 2.1.1. Main findings

The points of views and contributions of institutional and non-institutional actors implementing outreach and guidance as part of their core activities (PES, BIL.CO., *Informagiovani*, COL, CILO and NGOs) were investigated through individual in-depth interviews. Interviewees (managers and practitioners) reported that PES, Bil.Co. and COL carry out outreach activities with the support provided by other civil society organisations, which play a key role in contacting fragile and more vulnerable subjects. With respect to roles and responsibilities, it is a shared opinion that the mandate on outreach is not attributed to a specific actor among the institutional and non-institutional actors interviewed. Guidance is considered to be more central in the set of activities performed by PES, Bil.Co and COL as per their mission or institutional mandate (in the case of Public Employment Services).

In the methods and tools used for implementing outreach and guidance activities, the use of traditional tools (flyers, posters, events) is not widespread, while digital channels (social media, websites and online information, cross-posting) are more common and help reach 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. Face-to-face meetings are also preferred when it comes to guidance: 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). According to the interviewees, the effectiveness of these techniques is demonstrated by greater inclusiveness of vulnerable subjects, personal empowerment, and the ability to plan their professional future <sup>(15)</sup>.

Interviewees emphasised that stable cooperation practices among the various actors in outreach, guidance, training, and work placement (e.g. PES, social services, CPIA) are crucial to the provision of integrated services. It is reported that, in the case of socially disadvantaged persons, the role of intermediate actors and organisations (social services, civil society organisations) – which are in a position to build trust relationships – as well as word of mouth, proved to be functional to the effectiveness of outreach. With other users, such as NEETs, discouraged individuals, and – as a result of the pandemic – even qualified adults, digital channels are considered to be more appropriate tools for the outreach strategy. Nevertheless, clear and well-defined roles and tasks for the different actors are deemed to be fundamental to offering adequate services to users who do not possess ‘basic autonomy’ due to conditions of severe material and social deprivation.

PES practitioners pointed out that outreach strategies require multi-dimensional responses that might not always be reflected in their operational capacity, in terms of size and skills of the staff, financial resources and technological equipment. On the one side, interviewees stated that better technologies and spaces for the provision of services would be desirable; on the other side, they report a shortage of staff and the need to update their skills in order to cope with the novel regulatory framework for the certification of skills and the psychological and emotional dimensions of the users (such as motivational aspects and regulation of emotions during job interviews and when interacting with employers and HR specialists).

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<sup>(15)</sup> Even if the pandemic has strongly stimulated the use of remote meetings, today in some projects financed by the Regions a limit is placed on virtual activities.

Also, according to managers, it must be considered that, if outreach and guidance activities represent an institutional activity for PES, COR and COL, in the case of BIL.CO. and civil society organisations these activities are mainly project-based and sustainability over the medium and long term is not always ensured.

The surveys on the CPIAs teachers and directors showed that outreach activities are carried out in 28% of the cases: lack of adequate financial, professional, and technological resources to implement systematic practices were reported by directors as the most common factors preventing the implementation of systematic outreach actions. In addition, they considered the geographic location as an additional barrier, given that CPIAs are generally located in large cities and may be difficult to reach by adults coming from remote areas.

Where developed, outreach activities are mainly carried out by teachers who have received ad hoc training: only in a few cases are these provided through the support of external consultants and experts. Teachers report that a plurality of tools and channels are used to reach out to potential beneficiaries of CPIA's education offer (migrants and refugees in most cases): leaflets, press articles (also on the web), posters, social media channels as well as institutional websites.

For guidance, 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.

Even though some CPIA directors reported that the teachers have the right skills to carry out outreach activities, more upskilling opportunities for teaching staff are considered by many respondents to be a key enabler to make outreach activities effective and organise them in an efficient way. It is commonly agreed among the directors that financial resources and infrastructure adaptation (both physical and technological) deserve additional investment to improve the provision of outreach services, which often rely only on ad hoc funded projects. Teachers also highlighted that outreach could be strengthened by increasing flexibility in working hours, creating margins to allocate slots dedicated to enabling cooperation with other local stakeholders.

Better cooperation with other socioeconomic and institutional actors active in the territory is deemed by directors to be a factor that would contribute to implementing and developing extensive and systematic outreach activities. Networking is considered important also by CPIA teachers, who underlined how synergies, sharing of information and cooperation with social services of the municipalities, civil society organisations 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 with other institutional stakeholders.

According to VET providers (managers), outreach is not one of their core activities: most of the learners are directed to the VET centre by public employment services (PES), social services managed by the municipalities and civil society organisations. This kind of cooperation is effective in territorial contexts where PESs are well functioning, offering a fundamental synergy. VET providers are instead more involved in continuous career guidance, that is supporting the beneficiary in planning their training pathway. They directly perform outreach activities only in the case of pathways aiming to support entrepreneurship and self-employment. On-field interviews with VET trainers confirmed the low level of involvement of VET providers in outreach practices. In their opinion, 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. Appropriate technical equipment and upskilling opportunities for staff are also deemed to be important elements for supporting outreach strategies and actions.

Interviewees in universities (teachers who are in charge of designing and coordinating outreach and guidance activities) agreed that outreach is not a core business for universities, which are more centred on guidance, even if with low focus on the provision of integrated services tailored to user's needs. As a result, universities only attract users who spontaneously turn to their adult learning offer. As stated by one of the interviewees: 'We don't go looking for these targets and this is a bit our limit. If people come, they will probably find a variety of services and opportunities, but, if they do not, we do not look for them'.

With respect to resources – financial and human – universities underline their dependency on ad hoc funding, which might jeopardise their sustainability, whereas practitioners have the right skills to provide effective guidance services.

The beneficiaries of outreach and guidance actions implemented by PES, BIL.CO., *Informagiovani*, COL, CILO and NGOs stated that they were informed 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 the beneficiaries 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.

The beneficiaries of training courses in CPIAs (basic literacy competences in Italian language, in most cases) 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. guidance centres and employment services).

Most of the beneficiaries interviewed were directed to training activities for upskilling and reskilling, which were only in some cases integrated with guidance services and personal/professional empowerment measures such as support to CV drafting, job placement, strengthening motivation, self-awareness and self-confidence. They reported that contact and cooperation between the outreach and guidance centre and the VET provider were not always maintained. When the integration between guidance and training actions was constant and systematic, beneficiaries showed a high level of satisfaction in terms of training outcomes (new skills acquired) and employability and personal growth and increased wellbeing (resilience, higher motivation, self-esteem, autonomy, renewed interest for learning).

The fundamental role that the counsellor is called to play in terms of bringing out and strengthening the skills of individual users is recognised by the beneficiaries, particularly in the case of vulnerable targets with low self-esteem and self-confidence.

### **2.1.2. Strengths**

Summarising, the following strengths and key-enablers in outreach and guidance can be identified from SR1 field work.

- (a) Outreach is mostly carried out at the local level. The stakeholders interviewed during SR1 agreed on the potential effectiveness of synergies and cooperation among territorial networks (*Reti Territoriali*) actors to reach fragile and vulnerable targets.
- (b) Informal networks, when relying on well-structured and consolidated practices, also proved to be supportive of systematic and integrated outreach and guidance activities.
- (c) Face-to-face contacts can make the difference, particularly when outreach strategies are targeting more vulnerable groups. The role of civil society organisations – which operate directly on the territory and are able to build trust-based relationships with potential beneficiaries – is also considered pivotal to well-functioning outreach.
- (d) Digital channels are more appropriate when reaching out to people living in remote areas, where the presence of services in the territory is very scarce.

- (e) In the case of guidance activities, face-to-face interaction is considered – by both practitioners and beneficiaries – to be more effective.
- (f) Outreach and guidance practitioners have the right skills to carry out their tasks. Nevertheless, investments in continuous vocational training are considered essential to overcome fragmentation (among actors and territories) and bring outreach and guidance to a systemic level.

### **2.1.3. Gaps and challenges**

- (a) There are territorial differences and gaps in the provision and availability of outreach and guidance services and, consequently, results achieved.
- (b) Roles and responsibilities among the different institutional and non-institutional actors are not clearly defined in the case of outreach.
- (c) Outreach is not developed in a systematic and integrated way. It is mainly carried out within ad hoc projects or specific initiatives limited in space and time.
- (d) Financial, technological and human resources are limited and not always adequate to implement constant, extensive, systematic and integrated outreach and guidance activities, particularly in densely populated areas.
- (e) Practitioners need more continuous vocational training opportunities in order to upskill and adapt their work to the latest regulatory and methodological developments in outreach and guidance.

## **2.2. Tailored learning building on skills assessment**

Evidence gathered from the surveys and in-depth interviews paints a multi-faceted picture of the ways tailored learning provision builds upon skills assessment. Even though tailored learning is judged positively from different perspectives and dimensions, grounding its design and provision on skills assessment practices and processes is not always the case. 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.

### **2.2.1. Main findings**

CPIAs show most familiarity with assessing the skills developed during previous learning experiences in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. Based on the assessment they draft an individual training pact (i.e. the document stating the training needs of the beneficiary and guiding the design of the tailored learning pathway).

According to CPIA directors and teachers, both managerial and teaching staff are involved in assessing learners' skills and drafting the individual training pact. In most cases, directors intervene only when finalising and signing the pact, whereas teachers are central to the whole process, from the assessment of the skills to the design of the tailored learning paths, building upon the individual's training needs as detected during the assessment phase.

Despite the lack of a standardised procedure, some methods and tools are reported to be commonly used in skills assessment practices: examination of documentation in the case of formal learning experiences; and interviews, tests and trials when it comes to the skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. Teachers consider these tools as effective and functional in supporting the skills assessment process; most feel confident about 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. It follows that the creation of specialised job profiles, adequately trained on skills assessment methodologies, is considered a priority to harmonise skills assessment processes and practices.

Among the factors frustrating the efforts to achieve a standardised and systematic approach to the integration of skills assessment and tailored learning, the CPIA directors report 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 skills and stay up to date with methodological developments and innovation – are considered as essential to making skills assessment processes a structural component of the pathways for low-skilled adults.

This perception is shared by teachers. Even if most feel they have the right skills to carry out valid skills assessment processes and design well-grounded tailored learning pathways, they also highlight that innovative teaching methodologies are central to the quality and outcomes of the tailored training offer. According to many of the teachers surveyed, experiential learning, hybrid learning, work-based learning, and peer learning are considered to be supportive of tailoring the learning experience. Teachers note 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 the tailored training in terms of skills acquisition and empowerment of the subject are generally judged positively by the teachers. Nevertheless, a number of challenges and concerns with respect to the low level of flexibility of the current training settings are shared. They report the need for

additional spaces and staff in order to go beyond the traditional approach of learning within the rigid borders of the class, which are not supportive of the modularisation of the pathway, and which may not be appropriate for adults. Also, with relation to the assessment of skills acquired in non-formal and informal context, the availability of appropriate equipment to perform practical and laboratory activities should be extended.

VET providers (managers) report 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 for appropriate assessment practices, staff shortages – and, as a consequence, lack of dedicated personnel – are reported to be the main barrier to carrying out skills assessment in a standardised way and on a regular basis. A participatory approach in the design phase, where learners are also involved in devising 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.

Even if the link between skills assessment and tailored learning is not always understood or, for reasons related to limited resources, rests ‘on paper’, VET trainers say that the provision of tailored learning has a number of positive impacts on the overall quality of the learning outcomes: besides shortening the time needed to get a qualification and targeting the specific skills needs of the learners, tailored learning also increases their commitment and motivation to learn, while being functional to reconciling their work, learning and family/personal responsibilities. VET managers, on their side, stress the importance of combining formal learning activities with on-the-job experiences for positive outcomes from tailored learning provision. Among the challenges, they report that the processes for the certification of the skills acquired during tailored learning pathways are still facing bottlenecks and criticalities on the regulatory/bureaucratic side, which are limiting the potential value of tailored training.

The perspectives of the learners (CPIAs and VET centres) partly confirm the views expressed by managers and teachers, while shedding light on additional strengths and challenges of tailored learning building on skills assessment. As reported by the 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 the VET providers (managers), limitations in the development of skills assessment practices also affect the final phase of the training pathway, that is the certification of the learning outcomes (in terms of skills acquired), which rarely takes place.

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 be based on the identification of the skills already possessed by the individual. An interpretative aspect 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. Skills assessment processes and methods are generally confirmed to be little standardised and harmonised.

Most of the learners declare they 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 the individuals and their abilities, aspirations, expectations and socio-cultural backgrounds. Consistency of the training contents with the learning objectives, adequacy of the teaching methodologies, materials and equipment, and flexibility of lesson 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).

Certain challenges may jeopardise the effectiveness of tailored training provision. It is agreed among learners that approaches with too great a focus on the theoretical dimensions (i.e. formal training in learning classes) may have a very limited impact on learning outcomes: participatory methodologies, laboratories, and dual learning experiences are instead reported to have a positive impact on the motivation of the learner and personal and professional empowerment. Additional challenges are related to the excessive use of distance learning – which is perceived as an obstacle to the practical dimension of learning and is perceived in general terms as demotivating – are more related to the contingencies of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2.2.2. Strengths**

The following strengths were identified from the field survey.

- (a) Considerable level of diffusion of tailored learning offer.

- (b) Good level of integration between skills assessment and tailored learning design in the case of CPIAs.
- (c) Learners are generally motivated and satisfied with the quality of training staff, methodologies and equipment.
- (d) Tailored learning impacts positively on learning outcomes, personal empowerment and employability, especially when dual learning approaches are adopted.

### **2.2.3. Gaps and challenges**

- (a) Skills assessment is not always considered by practitioners to be functional to tailored learning.
- (b) Lack of understanding by the beneficiaries of the rationale and purposes of skills assessment and its connection with the design of tailored learning.
- (c) Low level of standardisation and harmonisation of skills assessment processes, methods and tools.
- (d) Tailored learning pathways are not always followed by a certification of the competences.
- (e) Participatory approach in the design of the learning offer is rarely adopted, particularly with fragile targets.

## **2.3. Companies' capacity to offer tailored training**

### **2.3.1. Main findings**

Based on the results of the employer survey, personalised training is still quite uncommon: the advantages and real nature of personalised pathways are still unclear to employers, especially for low-skilled employees. Another main point highlighted by the survey is that the organisational and financial efforts required to implement tailored training are not negligible, especially in the case of small and medium enterprises.

The survey revealed that almost half of the companies in the sample had experience of implementing personalised and flexible forms of training, while one third of the companies only rely on standardised training practices. The remaining companies declared they have no interest in training for upskilling and reskilling their staff. Also, about 1 in 5 employers declare that they have no knowledge of tailored training.

Companies offering tailored training are 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 of the companies (less than

one third). Training takes place within the company, where courses are usually held by external trainers. The use of traditional, face-to-face approaches still represents the norm; in some cases e-learning tools are reported to support the provision of tailored training.

The field survey highlighted that the involvement of low-skilled employees in training is still low: upskilling needs for this target group mostly concern technical or specialised content related to tasks, with transversal skills not greatly taken into consideration. The analysis of personal skill needs is mostly carried out through individual interviews, which may also take place during induction of recently recruited staff; this rarely leads to validation or certification of prior learning experiences.

In their cooperation with other actors (VET providers, employment services, social partners), at local level, in the design and implementation of tailored learning, companies mostly adopt an 'individualistic' approach: only 1 in 4 reports to be engaged in local networks, often informal, with other relevant socioeconomic actors, and just a few are part of *Reti Territoriali*.

The evidence gathered in the survey was complemented by in-depth considerations discussed during individual interviews with employers. These involved 13 companies (six operating in manufacturing sectors, seven in the tertiary sectors), most of whom were SMEs (11), evenly balanced across the country (five in the north, four in the centre, and four in the south/islands).

The interviews suggested limited relevance attributed to the centrality of upskilling and reskilling of employees: employers do not see the advantages related to up/reskilling the workforce as compensating for the required financial investment and organisational effort. When implemented, tailored learning approaches are extemporary, not systematic, structured or embedded within the company's training policy. Despite that, in-depth interviews highlighted that tailored training offers are becoming increasingly common, especially following the technological transformations required to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lack of familiarity with the provision of tailored training is accompanied by the low level of development of skills assessment practices; these do not follow a standardised approach, meaning that they are often unstructured, and rely on informal methodologies. As stated by one of the employers: 'We verify [the skills] on the job'. Also, validation and certification processes are not implemented.

This is mainly due to the limited pedagogical resources that companies (particular SMEs in) have in-house, associated to their low propensity to network with other actors in the territory (as observed in the survey), and overreliance on ad hoc external funding for the implementation of training activities.

The interviews also revealed an absence of employer awareness of which enabling actions could be triggered to enhance their capability in the provision of tailored training for worker upskilling and reskilling. Some of the companies, particularly SMEs, acknowledge that the design and provision of training tailored to individual skills needs require specialised professionals (experts in skills assessment, trainer, careers guidance practitioners) found outside of the company, within other socioeconomic actors operating in the territory (VET providers, employment services, social partners). Yet finding the resources outside of the company is not reported to be a priority for employers, who state that they are thinking about joining multi-stakeholder (formal or informal) networks but have more pressing issues.

Some respondents express a lack of trust due to the heterogeneity and low clarity of purpose of networks of actors with different interests and missions. Additional barriers to cooperation with other actors include finding and agreeing coordination mechanisms and, when it comes to institutional/public actors, bureaucracy.

Employees report that the offer of tailored training always is at the initiative of the employer; this is mostly well accepted by workers. Approaches and practices envisaging the worker-employer joint design of the training pathway are not reported to be common. It is more usual that the training offer is formulated by the employer following assessment of worker objectives and activities.

The degree of flexibility in courses varies greatly from company to company: there are cases where the definition of methods, tools, contents and schedules is profiled to the training needs of the employees and companies; and situations where most aspects of the training offer are formulated in a pre-defined format. Employees report that the assessment of previous learning experiences and current training needs is often carried out by the employer, mostly using unstandardised tools and methodologies (especially in the case of SMEs).

Half of employees report that a final evaluation of the learning outcomes follows the conclusion of the training experience. They do not attribute particular relevance to the evaluation phase, which does not affect their perception of the quality of the course.

However, with respect to the training contents and outcomes, the interviewees reported tangible benefits in terms of upskilling and reskilling, with clear improvements in the levels of professional development, self-efficacy, motivation and work safety. The common opinion was 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 approach.



Most of the employees were satisfied with the flexibility (in terms of time, tools, and methodologies) of the tailored training pathways. Hybrid forms (on site and remotely) especially allowed them to reconcile the training schedule with their work and personal/family needs. Only one interviewee reported that the timing of the training conflicted with work commitments.

Some challenges, and areas for improvement, were also discussed during the interviews with employees. The perception of an excessive specialisation of the training contents and objectives raised some perplexities with respect to the effective empowerment of the worker in the labour market. Also, some concerns regarding the composition of the learning groups were discussed. Interviewees reported that groups of people with different background, levels of experience and skill needs can be detrimental to effective learning.

In contrast, employees report that when personalisation implies individual lessons, the relationship dimension of learning – central to triggering collective learning mechanisms through exchanges, discussions and peer learning – is absent.

VET providers (managers) also offered a contribution, during the individual interviews, to tailored training within companies. In their view, for large groups of workers personalisation integrates with ‘inter-company’ interventions, that is training offers addressed to staff working for different companies. In those cases, the added value of the training offer consists in the analysis of different companies’ skills and training needs, which are then blended in a single training offer by the VET provider. This kind of approach is reported to be particularly beneficial to SMEs, whose capabilities for employee upskilling and reskilling are limited.

### **2.3.2. Strengths**

Some of points of strength and enablers can be identified following the survey and in-depth interviews.

- (a) Employers are aware of the need for worker upskilling and reskilling to cope with the challenges introduced by the product and process innovations that characterised the most recent developments in the production of goods and services and work organisation.
- (b) The design of the tailored training provision is also informed by the analysis of the company’s skills needs.
- (c) Employees who benefitted from tailored training are satisfied with the training methods and arrangements and the learning outcomes (although the risks of over-specialisation are highlighted).

### 2.3.3. Gaps and challenges

There are also weaknesses and challenges to be faced, as well as gaps to be filled, in order to pave the way to an efficient and effective provision of tailored training.

- (a) The rationale informing tailored learning practices and competitive advantages of personalising the upskilling and reskilling processes are still unclear to employers.
- (b) Companies cannot provide tailored training in-house. Lack of specialised personnel able to design and implement tailored training (from the skills assessment phase to the evaluation of outcomes) and rigid organisational models or limited organisational resources constitute a barrier, particularly for SMEs.
- (c) Companies cannot buy training from other actors. Financial investments are deemed to be not profitable and external funding is affected by uncertainties in terms of timing and continuity.
- (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 public actors.

## 2.4. Implementation of *Reti Territoriali* at local level

Although the Law which established *Reti* was adopted over 10 years ago (Section 1.3.2) results from fieldwork suggest that *Reti* are still rarely implemented at the local level. Nonetheless stakeholders involved in SR1 highlight several benefits of working in a *Rete* or other network of integrated services and point to positive experiences and good practices of existing multi-stakeholder cooperation. However, in most cases these experiences are not formalised, are limited to specific projects, and rely on ad hoc funding.

### 2.4.1. Main findings

Most stakeholders consulted in SR1 do not belong to a *Rete*: many are not even aware of their existence or what *Reti* are.

Only directors of CPIA and managers of VET providers reported that in some cases their organisation belongs to a *Rete*; only 2 out of 32 companies are involved, though two other companies report being in the process of joining a *Rete*. Almost all consulted CPIA Directors (94%) are aware of *Reti*, and 36% report that their CPIA either belongs to a *Rete* or to another network of integrated services. Among those not yet belonging to a *Rete* (or another network of integrated services), joining is a concrete possibility in the future (20%) while fewer than 9%

of CPIA directors are against the idea of joining a *Rete* in the future. CPIAs cooperate with PES, regional research centres and at the local level with municipalities and social services: they often take advantage of infrastructures belonging to municipalities, while social services, which directly depend on municipalities, tend to identify and direct potential learners to CPIAs. Little cooperation is reported with companies and chambers of commerce, or with civil society organisations, VET providers and Guidance centres.

When they are in *Reti*, VET provider participation is highly formalised, for example, in consortiums. In these cases, *Reti* are established to meet a specific objective such as initiatives aimed at developing lifelong and continuous training, initiatives targeted to specific groups or initiatives, or developed in cooperation with social partners and PES, aimed at mitigating the effects of industrial crisis. In addition to *Reti*, VET providers also establish local level partnerships in the context of pathways activated within active labour policy programmes such as, for example, the GOL programme (Section 1.3.2). In some areas, such as the Lombardy region, partnership-based approaches are promoted by local institutions such as municipalities and the PES.

Despite not belonging to a *Rete*, most stakeholders engaged in the fieldwork reported that they cooperate with other actors for 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 bringing together actors in training services. However, no cooperation between these two types of network is implemented nor foreseen. Also, managers of other outreach and guidance stakeholders such as COR, COL and Bil.Co., report similar experiences to managers of PES and declare 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 civil society organisations active at the local level, help in reaching and engaging vulnerable groups. Civil society organisations/NGOs 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*, CILO and NGOs also 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 several stakeholders including relevant public services (e.g. health service, social and housing services etc.) as well as VET providers, CPIAs, public and/or private employment services. Career/LLG organisations also work, on a voluntary basis, with other civil society organisations at the local/ community level that work with specific vulnerable/fragile individuals, such as low-income families, minors and migrants.

Stakeholders 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, and the socioeconomic features and needs of its inhabitants, is essential for establishing effective *Reti*, as is dedicated funding to implement the necessary interventions/policies in a timely manner. Civil society organisations 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 manner of 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 civil society organisations 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.

Working in *Reti* (and partnership-based approaches more generally) are 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 and 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 a 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 highlighted their positive experience when receiving different services in an integrated manner and ad hoc individualised advice and support, such as 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. It is a network (under a formal agreement signed by all interested parties) that 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.

Despite the shared understanding of the benefits of *Reti*, stakeholders reported how efforts to strengthen coordination and cooperation of all stakeholders and 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 the two focus groups for this first 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.

Stakeholders stressed a general lack of a strategic approach to *Reti*, with some attributing this to limited awareness of *Reti's* 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. CPIA directors, managers of VET providers and civil society organisations stressed that 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*.

CPIA directors also 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) among the most important challenges to establishing and sustaining a *Rete*.

This is linked to the issue of sustainability over time: as representatives from PES mentioned, outside of *Reti*, partnership-based approaches often tend to be project-based and to rely on ad hoc funding. This hinders *Reti*/network sustainability and effectiveness. Lack of formalisation may seem less relevant for civil society organisations, VET providers, companies, and especially beneficiaries. However, the level of formalisation has a substantial impact on the potential and effectiveness of a *Rete* or a network of integrated services more generally, as it is linked to the achievement of specific objectives rather than a stable, comprehensive and holistic provision of integrated services. As highlighted by several career guidance counsellors, lack of formalisation often affects governance and results in unclear roles and responsibilities, lack of accountability, lack of shared goals and vision, and ultimately lack of mutual trust.

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.

#### **2.4.2. Strengths**

Stakeholders involved in SR1 are positive towards working in *Reti* and/or other networks. They recognise the benefits of multi-stakeholder cooperation, and – at different levels of engagement – are already providing their services in partnership with other stakeholders. Several important strengths of *Reti* are identified.

- (a) Exploit synergies among different policy areas and actors, and strengthen comprehensive and holistic approaches.
- (b) Facilitate the development of good practices and innovation in tools and methods, and pooling of right skills and resources.
- (c) Facilitate better understanding of the learning/training needs of potential learners, resulting in provision accordingly tailored. 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.

- (d) Potential to reach and engage the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach: local level actors have a strategic role to play in *Reti* and/or networks of integrated services, for their potential to reach out and engage potential beneficiaries, especially the most vulnerable among them.

#### **2.4.3. Gaps and challenges**

Specific challenges and gaps were mentioned.

- (a) Governance: unclear distribution of roles and responsibilities, lack of accountability, lack of shared goals and vision, and ultimate lack of mutual trust. This is also reflected in lack of strategic leadership or coordinating body and limited visibility and awareness among stakeholders.
- (b) Sustainability: lack of strategic allocated and dedicated funding at all appropriate levels (including for capacity building), ensuring sustainability and efficiency over time. Many networks are created quickly, and maintaining continuity without stable and secure funding is difficult. Lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation, exploitation and dissemination of results.
- (c) Capacity: limited number of actors involved in *Reti* and limited opportunities for their professional development against a large pool of potential beneficiaries of services to be offered. Inadequate infrastructures, tools and methodologies to work in a *Rete*.

## CHAPTER 3.

# Concluding remarks and next steps

The first phase of the study engaged 285 stakeholders to investigate the key themes of outreach, guidance, and tailored learning/training building on skill assessment processes. It also investigated the implementation of local level networks i.e. *Reti Territoriali*, which bring together stakeholders for the provision of tailored, flexible, accessible learning/training pathways, grounded on the individual beneficiaries' needs, and aimed at their full empowerment in the labour market and in society.

The micro phase highlights large territorial differences in the provision of outreach and guidance services, both in terms of availability and results achieved. Both services appear to suffer from lack of a clear system logic and are often provided within a narrow scope. While guidance is mostly targeted at the unemployed (or those at risk of unemployment) and their labour market (re)integration, and less towards lifelong career guidance aimed at supporting all individuals throughout their careers, outreach suffers from particularly weak governance. It is not the responsibility of a specific actor, and roles and responsibilities among the different institutional and non-institutional actors are not clearly defined. This implies that outreach is not developed in a systematic and integrated way, but it is 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), substantially hindering its potential reach and effectiveness.

Further, financial, technological and human resources are limited and not always adequate to implement extensive, continuous, systematic and integrated outreach and guidance activities, especially in densely populated areas. Investments in continuous vocational training are considered to be strategic to overcome fragmentation (among actors and territories) and bring outreach and guidance to a systemic level.

Multi-actor networks are regarded as particularly effective in reaching and engaging vulnerable targets and accompanying them towards integrated services that bring initial and continuous guidance and counselling, education and training offers, employment opportunities, and other kinds of social services. As outreach and guidance activities are carried out mainly at the local level, with differentiations between the various bodies and actors involved, it follows that their effectiveness is reported to be tightly interconnected with the level of development of local actors



and networks (the *Reti Territoriali* and other kinds of less formalised or non-institutional networks).

While positive experiences of such networks and partnership-based approaches, which bring together several actors providing a wide range of services (outreach, guidance, provision of training/learning opportunities, social support, health services) exist throughout the country, the level of formalisation of these relationships is often very limited, and they often run as ad hoc projects rather than stable initiatives. Results from the micro phase pinpoint several benefits of working in *Reti*, including increased synergies among different policy areas and actors, facilitating the development of comprehensive and holistic approaches, the development of good practices and innovation in tools and methods, pooling of right skills and resources, as well as the potential to reach and engage the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach. *Reti* are considered as a 'multiplier of opportunities' for beneficiaries, who are central to the process and whose needs should be met holistically in a multidisciplinary way.

Nonetheless, *Reti* are still infrequently implemented at the local level, and stakeholders formulated several suggestions to progress them from theory to practice. These include:

- (a) promoting a culture of lifelong learning and the development of a strategic and integrated approach for *Reti* grounded on a clear and shared vision;
- (b) clear roles and responsibilities underpinned by accountability mechanisms and establishment of an agency for lifelong learning in the leadership role;
- (c) moving from ad hoc funding to dedicated and stable funding;
- (d) involving and enabling local level stakeholders, particularly non-institutional actors;
- (e) investing in the continuous professional development of stakeholders, especially practitioners, teachers and trainers;
- (f) developing operational guidelines supporting the implementation of *Reti* based on existing successful experiences and good practices which could be scaled up in other areas.

*Reti* would clearly benefit the provision of tailored learning/training. Evidence gathered from the surveys and in-depth interviews paints a multi-faceted picture of the ways learning/training provision is tailored to individual (skill) needs. Even though tailored learning is judged positively from different perspectives and dimensions, grounding its design and provision on skills assessment practices and processes is not always the case. Lack of standardised and agreed procedures, and limited human and financial resources, are the most common barrier to the creation of a systematic and integrated approach involving skills assessment and tailored learning. However, if skills already owned by individuals are not taken into

account to adapt the duration and content of the training/learning, and if skills and competences acquired during the learning/training are not systematically validated and certified, the attractiveness of these learning/training pathways is negatively affected. Making sure that all learning/training is visible and valued (through processes of validation) is essential to ensure take-up of opportunities. These issues are particularly critical for low-skilled adults, who generally benefit less from training/learning opportunities and may be particularly discouraged from taking advantage of them.

Tailored training is still quite uncommon among Italian companies, especially when it comes to low-skilled employees. Organisational and financial efforts required to implement tailored training are not negligible, especially in the case of small and medium-size enterprises. Lack of specialised personnel able to design and implement tailored training (from the skills assessment phase to the evaluation of outcomes) and rigid organisational models or limited organisational resources are barriers, particularly for SMEs. While *Reti*, by pooling together several stakeholders, expertise and resources, could provide companies, especially SMEs, with the needed support, companies seem reluctant to 'ally' with other actors and engage in *Reti* or other informal networks. Lack of definition of shared objectives generates mistrust among the players and red tape hinders cooperation with public actors.

Lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of approaches related to upskilling pathways prevents clear understanding of their achievements and challenges, which are essential to improving them and to promotion and awareness-raising of their benefits.

The next phase of the study will build on these findings to discuss the challenges identified in this first round of fieldwork with meso level stakeholders.

## Acronyms

ANCI	National Association of Italian Municipalities ( <i>Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani</i> )
ANPAL	National Agency for Active Labour Policies ( <i>Associazione Nazionale Politiche Attive Lavoro</i> )
AUSER	Active Aging Association ( <i>Associazione per l'invecchiamento attivo</i> )
Bil.Co.	Centres for skills assessment ( <i>Centri per Bilancio delle Competence</i> )
CIOFS- FP	Italian Centre for Vocational Training ( <i>Centro Italiano Opere Femminili Salesiane – Formazione Professionale</i> )
COL	Centres for labour market guidance ( <i>Centri di Orientamento al Lavoro</i> )
COR	Regional guidance Centres ( <i>Centri di Orientamento Regionali</i> )
CRRS&S	Regional centres for research, experimentation and development ( <i>Centro Regionale di Ricerca, Sperimentazione &amp; Sviluppo</i> )
CU	Unified Conference State-Region and Autonomous Provinces ( <i>Conferenza Unificata Stato Regioni e province Autonome</i> )
CPIA	Provincial centres for adult education ( <i>Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti</i> )
FNC	New competences fund ( <i>Fondo Nuove Competenze</i> )
GOL	Garanzia di occupabilità dei lavoratori ( <i>Employability Guarantee for Workers</i> )
INDIRE	National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research ( <i>Istituto nazionale, innovazione, ricerca educativa</i> )
INAPP	National Institute Analysis of Public Policies ( <i>Istituto nazionale per l'analisi delle politiche pubbliche</i> )
P.A.I.DE.I.A	Activity plan for adult education innovation ( <i>Piano di Attività per l'Innovazione dell'Istruzione degli Adulti</i> )
PNNC	National new skills plan ( <i>Piano Nazionale Nuove Competenze</i> )
PES	Public Employment Services ( <i>Centri Per l'Impiego, CPI</i> )
PNRR	Piano nazionale di ripresa e resilienza ( <i>National recovery and resilience plan</i> )
RIDAP	Network for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning ( <i>Rete Istruzione degli Adulti per l'Apprendimento Permanente</i> )
RUIAP	Network of Italian Universities for Lifelong Learning ( <i>Rete università italiane per l'apprendimento permanente</i> )
SC	steering committee
SR	survey round
TCR	Thematic country review

VET	vocational education and training
UP	upskilling pathway
UPI	Union of Italian Provinces ( <i>Unione delle Province d'Italia</i> )

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# Annex

## Annex 1. Overview of the methodological approach applied to SR1

Stakeholder	No	Topic	Tool
PES Directors	3	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview A
Bil.Co. centres managers	2	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview A
CILO/ <i>Informagiovani</i> Managers	3	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview A
Managers of civil society organisations	6	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview A
Universities	3	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview A
Career counsellors from PES	1	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview B
Career counsellors from Bil.Co. centres	3	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic4)	Individual interview B
Career counsellors from CILO/ <i>Informagiovani</i>	3	Topic 4 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview B
Career counsellors from civil society organisations	6	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview B
Beneficiaries of services provided by Bil.Co., CILO and civil society organisations	11	Topic 1 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview C
Managers of VET agencies	7	Topic 2 + Transversal items (Topic 4) + Topic 1 ( <i>some items</i> )	Individual interview D
VET learners	4	Topic 2 + Topic 1 ( <i>some items</i> )	Group interviews G

Stakeholder	No	Topic	Tool
CPIA learners	19	Topic 2 + Topic 1 ( <i>some items</i> )	Group interviews G
Unemployed people	5	Topic 2 + Topic 1 ( <i>some items</i> )	Individual interview H
Employees	9	Topic 2 + Topic 3 ( <i>some items</i> )	Individual interview I
Companies (already or potentially) involved in the provision of personalised training pathways	13	Topic 3 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	Individual interview L
Directors of adult learning centres (CPIA)	52	Topic 2 + Transversal items (Topic 4) + Topic 1 ( <i>some items</i> )	LimeSurvey 1 – Questionnaire E
VET trainers	21	Topic 2 + Transversal items (Topic 4) + Topic 1 ( <i>some items</i> )	LimeSurvey 2 – Questionnaire F1
CPIA teachers	39	Topic 2 + Transversal items (Topic 4) + Topic 1 ( <i>some items</i> )	LimeSurvey 2 – Questionnaire F2
Companies (already or potentially) involved in the provision of personalised training pathways	32	Topic 3 + Transversal items (Topic 4)	LimeSurvey 2 – Questionnaire F3 + Interviews

## Annex 2. Focus groups on *Reti Territoriali* (Topic 4)

Focus group	Number of participants	Dimensions discussed
1. Members of existing <i>Reti</i>	8	Enablers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competences;</li> <li>• Resources;</li> <li>• Infrastructures;</li> <li>• External topics.</li> </ul>

2. Actors with no experience with <i>Reti</i>	8	Challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main obstacles (internal and external);</li> <li>• Potential solutions.</li> </ul>
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### Annex 3. Questionnaires and interview guides used during the field research

Questionnaires and interview guides used during the field research have been developed on the basis of the [Cedefop analytical framework](#). For each topic investigated in SR1, the relevant dimension and corresponding key area and key feature from the Cedefop analytical framework are presented below.

Table 4. **Strengthen holistic outreach and guidance services able to reach out and engage the most vulnerable**

Dimension	Cedefop analytical framework: key area, key features
Principles and logic	<p><b>(KA6.f)</b> Outreach is based on user centrality and geared to development of individual autonomy and readiness to engage in learning and work</p> <p><b>(KA7.f)</b> Guidance activities are organised around the principle of user centrality and adult learners are provided the opportunity for personalised, individual guidance. Services aim at long-term individual autonomy in career management, by encouraging the development of career management skills.</p> <p><b>(KA6.p)</b> Holistic processes, with diagnosis and support of physical and mental health, given the vulnerable state of many individuals. Teams should be interdisciplinary and, whenever necessary, provide support with financial, housing and integration issues.</p> <p><b>(KA7.a)</b> Career guidance services move decisively towards a lifelong and life-wide process support. There is greater integration across support services addressing different life stages and contexts (school counselling, employment services, social services, municipal services)</p> <p><b>(KA7.j)</b> Career guidance is available prior, during and after learning engagement, to support choice, learning and transition to employment/further learning.</p> <p><b>(KA6.g)</b> Services observe ethical standards, with personal information ultimately owned and controlled by users.</p>



Dimension	Cedefop analytical framework: key area, key features
	<p><b>(KA6.i)</b> Public calls and online information are generally used to signpost available services but they are not sufficient and require complementary measures.</p> <p><b>(KA7.h)</b> Integrated information and guidance services involving multi-channel delivery (web, telephone, face-to-face) are available for adult learners and are adapted to beneficiaries' needs; individuals are provided with an adequate blend of digital, phone and face-to-face services, as well as peer support.</p> <p><b>(KA7.i)</b> There is sensitivity and adaptation of methods and tools to the needs of diverse adult groups and individuals (such as NEETs, long-term unemployed (LTU), refugees, those with learning disabilities and difficulties).</p> <p><b>(KA6.l)</b> Use of role models in motivating young people to reengage in learning through awareness-raising and mentoring.</p> <p><b>(KA6.m)</b> Field visits to raise awareness of workers in illegal situations or who are unaware of available opportunities are developed with the help of civic associations and social partners.</p>
Organisation/ Cooperation	<p><b>(KA7.d)</b> There is local and regional cooperation (and coordination); municipalities can play a central role</p> <p><b>(KA6.b)</b> Key decision-makers raise awareness of the role of outreach and their importance for individuals and society.</p> <p><b>(KA7.f)</b> Key decision-makers raise their awareness of the role of career guidance and outreach and their importance, for individuals and policy.</p> <p><b>(KA6.h)</b> Sharing of beneficiaries' registrations across services such as schools, social security, PES and NGOs exists to identify, track and contact individuals in need of support. This requires ethical handling of personal data issues, updating registries and case management.</p> <p><b>(KA6.d)</b> Central administration financing, technical support and monitoring is well coordinated with local/regional operational management and implementation. Municipalities, local employment offices or regional one-stop shops may manage processes and coordinate the efforts of local stakeholders.</p>

Dimension	Cedefop analytical framework: key area, key features
	<p><b>(KA7.n)</b> There is cooperation between guidance services, enterprises and employer associations (e.g. production of local labour market information and intelligence, tasters, shadowing, work-based, learning, internships).</p> <p><b>(KA7.o)</b> Service is provided in a holistic and networked way, coordinated with outreach strategies, local administration, social partners, social services, health services, civil organisations, facilitating access and success of vulnerable adults in learning; individual needs are addressed by services in their specific area of expertise, in a coordinated way.</p> <p><b>(KA6.e)</b> Outreach activities are monitored and evaluated, identifying success factors and adaptation strategies, to allow for national level generalisation.</p> <p><b>(KA7.k)</b> Impartial information and support in accessing flexible learning solutions are available, including work-based learning and open educational resources.</p> <p><b>(KA6.c)</b> Guidance and outreach services are well coordinated and a stable feature of skills development and adult learning policies, ideally framed by national agreements across political forces (national strategies, budgets).</p>
Capacity building	<p><b>(KA7.b)</b> Career guidance support is professionalised in all relevant areas, follows clear standards of service and has an outcome-oriented approach based on improving individual/social welfare, labour market outcomes and learning results.</p> <p><b>(KA7.c)</b> Foundation and continuing training of staff exists in line with high standards of service, providing access to professional qualifications.</p> <p><b>(KA6.a)</b> Trained and dedicated staff, specialised in outreach activities, who can address the complex needs of vulnerable and frequently marginalised groups.</p> <p><b>(KA6.j)</b> Developing street work is fundamental, reaching into peer groups, communities and families. This requires trained staff and is better developed in cooperation with local authorities and NGOs</p> <p><b>(KA6.k)</b> Supported by peer work and community/social economy initiatives.</p>

Table 5. Tailored learning building on skills assessment

Dimension	Topic
Skills assessment/ guidance before the training/ learning offer	<p><b>(KA8.d)</b> Individual plans for next steps in training/learning and support are based on the skills assessment. Individual portfolios can be initiated in the early stages providing the basis for cumulative documentation of referrals, assessments, personal plans and certificates.</p> <p><b>(KA9A.a)</b> There is more than one path in IVET/CVET for an adult to acquire a formal qualification; all paths can make use of skills assessment, validation and/or recognition of prior knowledge.</p>
Flexibility of the training/learning offers	<p><b>(KA9A.c)</b> Although there is an emphasis on diversification of paths and individualisation, based on single learner's needs, a tailored offer does not affect the learning objectives of a given qualification; these remain the same and guarantee comparability and quality of the learning results irrespective of the path taken.</p> <p><b>(KA9A.h)</b> Adults of different learning profiles benefit from a range of pedagogies and methods (such as phone learning), flexible course formats (non-linear offer, combination, own pace) and forms of final assessment available (fear of failure, often linked to the high expectations associated with learning and high investment, may be mitigated with this approach).</p> <p><b>(KA9A.i)</b> Adults' specific constraints (such as family obligations, financial, time, work, distance) and/or needs (such as disability) are addressed individually</p> <p><b>(KA9A.b)</b> There is a clear link between the offers, paths and qualifications, enabling support services to provide clear and consistent information which allows an individual to make informed choices based on his/her needs, ambitions and goals, among other factors.</p>
Capacity building	<p><b>(KA9A.d)</b> Education and training providers and other types of operator have the capacity (pedagogic, financial and human resources) to work with adults, for example through relevant networks and in cooperation with support services.</p>

Table 6 **Companies', in particular SMEs', capacity to offer tailored training**

Dimension	Topic
Companies' current experience/practices in tailored learning provision to their employees	<p><b>KA9B(a)</b> Providers are aware of, prepared for, and supported to use diverse forms of WBL (not only workplace learning) to tailor their learning offer to adults' needs; innovative approaches are encouraged and shared.</p> <p><b>KA9B(b)</b> Employers need to buy into employee training and also to assume responsibility</p>
Companies' capacity (financial, pedagogical etc.) to offer tailored learning to adults	<p><b>KA9B(e)</b> Companies – particularly SMEs – have the pedagogical capacity to work with adults; in-company trainers and staff are informed of adult learner needs and expectations; (key area 5: financial and non-financial support).</p> <p><b>KA9B(f)</b> Company staff attitudes need to be positive towards adult learners as individuals, and potentially as individuals belonging to a particular group (such as refugees).</p> <p><b>KA9B(i)</b> Apprenticeship training provision is tailored to adults' needs/profiles (taking account of aspects such as prior learning and work experiences, individual constraints)</p>
Available support for companies, especially SMEs, to improve their capacity in providing tailored learning to their employees.	<p><b>KA9B(c)</b> There are national, regional and local partnerships involving companies – particularly SMEs – in workplace learning for their own employees or other potential beneficiaries.</p> <p><b>KA9B(h)</b> Apprenticeship training is open to adults, with companies – particularly SMEs – incentivised (financially and non-financially) to offer placements to adults; (key area 5: financial and non-financial support).</p>

Table 7. **Implementation of *Reti Territoriali* at local level**

Dimension	Topic
Composition of the <i>Reti</i>	<p><b>(KA3.d)</b> Key stakeholders (including beneficiary representatives – in this case NGOs) are specifically involved proactively in <i>Reti</i> and in all processes, including programming, innovation, measures, assessments, feedback</p> <p><b>(KA3.g)</b> Stakeholders, traditional and non-traditional, are made aware of the importance of upskilling pathways for adults.</p>

Dimension	Topic
	<p><b>(KA3.h)</b> Governance in the context of upskilling pathways emphasises the strategic role of the local/community level and efforts should be made to ensure that the agreed strategy can be transferred at the local/community level.</p>
<p>Cooperation among the different actors</p>	<p><b>(KA3.c)</b> Roles and responsibilities of key actors (individuals, groups/entities, networks, public and private) at different levels are defined and distributed across decision-making, implementation, supervision, advisory, follow-up and monitoring; strategic leadership is established and one or more coordinating bodies.</p> <p><b>(KA3.e)</b> Effective communication practices with a shared language among those involved in governance aid dissemination of information, support, and feedback. Strategic leadership is essential, with the possibility of one or several coordinating bodies.</p> <p><b>(KA3.i)</b> Key tools/resources (such as agreements, guidelines, frameworks, evaluation tools, databases, web portals to widen access, prior learning assessments are developed collaboratively and officially (laws/regulations) approved, where possible.</p>
<p>Capacity building</p>	<p><b>(KA3.f)</b> Strengthened stakeholder and institutional capacity, and accountability (such as in terms of decision-making, spending, technical capacity) facilitating mutual understanding and common approaches to maximise policy coherence and foster effective partnerships.</p>

# Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in Italy

Key findings of the first research phase

This report summarises the outcomes of the first (micro) phase of the thematic country review (TCR) on upskilling pathways in Italy. It reflects the perspectives of both the beneficiaries of the approaches considered and the actors involved in their implementation. The TCR focuses on outreach, guidance, tailored learning and on the crosscutting dimension of governance in relation to these three areas.

Cedefop's work on the *Thematic country reviews (TCRs) on upskilling pathways* aims at supporting Member States in the development of systematic, coordinated and coherent approaches to upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults. The aim is to undertake in-depth reviews of countries' national approaches to the implementation of the Upskilling pathways Recommendation, with the support of key national stakeholders. In 2021, Italy and France were the first two countries to undertake this TCR exercise; implementation is expected to last until the end of 2023.



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