

## Upskilling Pathways and Adult Learning

### A perspective of the private employment services industry in response to the EU public consultation

18 March 2022

#### Executive Summary

The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the public consultation on adult learning. Adult learning, life-long learning and a combination of work-based on training-based learning are most suited to equip adults with the skills needed to succeed on the labour market. The private employment services industry plays an important role in providing skills assessment, career guidance and career management and transition pathways for millions of workers in Europe.

#### General Assessment

- The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the European Commission public consultation on adult learning and upskilling pathways. The private employment services industry, through its temporary agency work, direct recruitment and career management services plays a vital role in offering upskilling pathways, in offering training and skills assessment and in facilitating adult learning.
- In several European countries, training and adult learning facilitating upskilling pathways are organised in the context by sectoral social partners and in the context of collective labour agreements. The World Employment Confederation-Europe is convinced that EU policy initiatives in the area of training and adult learning must be guided by the common, European challenges such as the digital and green transition, while at the same time reflecting and building on the different, national training and labour market models, respecting diversity and promoting mutual learning.
- As European sectoral employers' organisation of the private employment services industry, the World Employment Confederation-Europe aims to contribute to the consultation on upskilling pathways through this position paper, while focusing exclusively on some comments on the first strand of the consultation.

#### Target groups for upskilling pathways

- While upskilling and training is important for all workers to be able to progress and enjoy secure career transitions, the World Employment Confederation-Europe believes that special attention in national and European training and upskilling pathways should be devoted to training of young people, first-time labour market entrants and low skilled.
- Focus should be laid on labour market relevant skills and training, which needs to be demand driven and tailored to the workers' needs. The private employment services industry and its career management services play an important role in providing such tailored training and upskilling offers to enable labour market transitions.

#### Impact of the upskilling pathways recommendation

- The benefits of the Council Recommendation lay mainly in gaining qualification for the individual, gaining basic literacy and numeracy as well as further education and training. The access to work experience is also an important element of adult learning.

## 1. General comments

- 1.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe welcomes the 2020 European Skills Agenda and the Council Recommendation on Upskilling pathways. Skills and training policies, which are tailored to national and local labour market needs are essential to support people in the changing world of work and in enabling employment opportunities in the context of the digital and green transitions.
- 1.2. Skills and employment policies will become even more essential in many European countries, which are currently facing the impact of the war in Ukraine, which is leading to massive refugee and migration movements since March 2022. The World Employment Confederation-Europe calls upon national governments in the region to take all necessary measures to support refugees during the war in Ukraine. Assistance needs to include humanitarian support by admitting refugees, providing them integration support and allowing them to work in the country in which they are residing. For refugees it is important to gain access to employment as soon as possible, as work contributes to the stability and safety of their lives. Agency work can be particularly beneficial to refugees, also considering the fact that a large share of them are women with caring responsibilities for children. The private employment services industry can play an important role in meeting the needs of refugees in terms of labour market and housing access, skills assessment, training and social protection.
- 1.3. The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways is an important EU policy instrument to foster labour market reforms, improve skills and training policies at national, European and local level and to enable labour market transitions. The private employment services industry plays an important role in enabling skills enhancement through formal and in-formal, work-based learning and by allowing people to acquire skills through work experience. Career Management actively and concretely promotes an integrated way to look at jobs, skills and business performance with a long-term perspective. Career management services support enterprises with a proactive approach to strategic workforce planning and provides businesses the tools needed to secure, retain and build teams with the right skills to remain competitive in a world of increasing skills shortages, where employee skills also need to evolve rapidly. For individuals, knowing which skills to develop will guarantee their long-term relevance in the labour market and ensure their competitive advantage. Using career management services provides organisations and individuals with a unique perspective of the job market and insights into which skills are in the highest demand. It helps aspiring workers set the foundations for a fulfilling working life by understanding their own aspirations, strengths and passions. Careers today are no longer linear but take numerous twists and turns, which makes upskilling pathways even more important.

## 2. Extend to which the main features of the Council Recommendation have been reached in the European Union

- 2.1. Skills and training policies remain essential in the current economic context, as labour markets are emerging from the Covid-19 crisis while at the same time being confronted with new skills, training and upskilling pathway needs linked to the digital and green transitions.
- 2.2. Skills assessments by private employment services and their career management services are essential and the private employment services industry, through its broad portfolio of HR services (including temporary agency work, direct recruitment and career management) can provide an important contribution to skills assessment and design tailored and flexible upskilling pathways. Guidance and mentoring support are important for people who aim for or are in need of managing labour market transitions and move to new jobs. Effective and efficient models of public-private partnerships, such as in France, Belgium the United Kingdom and the Netherlands are an important element in enabling upskilling pathways and transitions.

### 3. How effective have these features been in helping low-skilled adults take part in adult learning measures

- 3.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe is convinced that further reforms of national education and training policies guided by the Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways would be desirable to enhance labour market participation, support people who are confronted with new labour market risks or who have to move to new jobs.
- 3.2. As already indicated in earlier replies to questions of this public consultation, the World Employment Confederation-Europe attaches importance of skills assessment, the provision of tailored and flexible offers to workers and job-seekers. The private employment services industry, through its agency work, direct recruitment and career management services, are an important labour market actor for designing and implementing career and upskilling pathways that benefit jobs seekers, companies in search for talent and contribute to the well-functioning of labour markets in Europe.

### 4. Extent to which specific target groups have been able to better access adult learning measures

- 4.1. The World Employment Confederation attributes high importance to supporting adult learning. Continued education and training are important both for young people and throughout the professional career to enable secure career transitions and progression.
- 4.2. The World Employment Confederation-Europe and its members attribute specific attention and focus to providing training and skills enhancement to medium and low skilled workers. Besides training and qualification for specific jobs and professions, focus should be laid on improving core basic and generic skills to improve labour market readiness and employability.

### 5. Relevance and targeting of skills needs in specific sectors

- 5.1. The private employment services industry provides services to all economic sectors and is able to provide flexible workforce solutions for all job profiles and professions. Despite the multi-sectoral approach of the private employment services industry, the World Employment Confederation-Europe supports skills and training policies that target specific sector and profiles.
- 5.2. The services sector has been one of the main, growing sectors in the European economies and belongs to the core sectors in which agency workers are assigned and working. The World Employment Confederation-Europe thus supports a focus of training policies that target skills needs in specific sectors with a focus on services industries and with a special attention to horizontal and transversal skills, which are required in professions of the services industries.

## 6. To what extent have features of adult learning measures been delivered in cooperation with relevant stakeholders?

- 6.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe have put a strong focus on skills assessment, the tailored offer of upskilling solutions and the validation and recognition of skills acquired. Furthermore, the motivation of adults in need to improve their professional qualification and outreach measures have been important for the private employment services industry.
- 6.2. Career management services have been instrumental for workers who are at risk of or have recently lost their jobs, as they provide career transitions, skills assessment and career guidance to workers. In several countries, career management services are provided in coordination with and with the support of public employment services, enabling secure and safe labour market transitions and allowing workers to remain in employment.

## 7. The benefits of adult learning measures in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways

- 7.1. The benefits of adult learning measures in response to the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways lay mainly in gaining qualification for the individual, gaining basic literacy and numeracy as well as further education and training. The access to work experience is also an important element of adult learning.
- 7.2. For employers, the main advantages of adult learning are to address skills shortages, whereas for society at large, the main benefits are based on lower costs for welfare benefits, the support of skills acquiring for the digital and green transition and the reduction of skills mismatches. Upskilling pathways have an important role for the society at large in responding to skills mismatches in the labour market.

## 8. Implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling pathways has incurred the following costs?

- 8.1. Based on the assessment of the World Employment Confederation-Europe, the costs for the Council Recommendation as a non-legally binding EU instrument have been limited.
- 8.2. At the same time, the Recommendation contributed to reducing societal costs linked to inactivity and social welfare benefits. In the medium to long term, the Council Recommendation has the potential of fostering social innovation, thus new way of learning, working and social protection, which is strongly welcomed and supported by the World Employment Confederation-Europe.
- 8.3. In the current labour market environment, it is essential to manage and mitigate labour market risks, especially linked to mismatches and the under-utilisation of the labour force. The private employment services industry plays an important role in this context and the Council Recommendation provides welcomed guidance for national skills and labour market policies.

## 9. Are you familiar with any of the following EU funding programmes?

- 9.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe is aware of the European Social Fund, the EU Employment and Social Innovation Programme, Erasmus+ and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. As EU Sectoral Social Partner for temporary agency work, the World Employment Confederation-Europe has only used EU funding lines to support the Social Dialogue based on EU calls for proposals.
- 9.2. As the World Employment Confederation-Europe has not been directly in the EU funding programmes, except for the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue budget line, it is difficult to assess how these programmes contributed to the objectives of the Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways. At the same time, the European Social Fund, the Employment and Social Innovation Programme and Erasmus+ have a high potential to contribute to the objectives of the upskilling pathways recommendation. Similar, the Recovery and Resilience Facility holds that potential.

## 10. To what extent is it still relevant today to promote learning opportunities and further guidance support to low-skilled adults in the EU?

- 10.1. Upskilling pathways, career guidance and learning opportunities for low-skilled adults are important to improve labour market efficiency and the allocation of human capital, also against the background of rising skills and labour shortages in Europe. The private employment services industry plays a key role in supporting specific target groups such as first-time labour market entrants, medium to low skilled, long-term unemployed adults, nationals with a migrant background and persons with disability.

## 11. To what extent have there been overlaps between the Council Recommendation on Upskilling pathways and the EU policies on skills?

- 11.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe considers that there is an important need for consistent and coherent skills and training policies of the EU, which also respect the principle of subsidiarity.
- 11.2. When designing skills and training policies and upskilling pathways, it is important to include an approach of public-private partnerships, thus involving the private employment services industry, as well as the social partners at national level in accordance with national law and practice.
- 11.3. Consistency and coherence and the avoidance of overlaps is particular important with regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe, the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong learning.

## 12. Overall assessment of the Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways

- 12.1. The World Employment Confederation-Europe considers that the adult learning measures related to the Council Recommendation have been broadly in line with the employment and social priorities of the EU.
- 12.2. The Recommendation on upskilling pathways is overall welcomed and contributed to a fairly large extend to the progress on skills assessment, the provision of a tailored and flexible offer and the validation and recognition of skills acquired.

### 13. To what extent is EU policy guidance still required to provide opportunities for low-skilled adults to develop their skills

- 13.1. Adult learning for low-skilled adults remains relevant and EU guidance is required to a fairly large extent to promote the exchange of good practices and promote mutual learning and bench-learning.
- 13.2. National and European policies to promote adult learning for low-skilled adults should be guided by the principle of social innovation, thus fostering new ways of working, learning and social protection. Social dialogue and social partners driven initiatives, such as the bipartite funds fostering adult learning in the agency work industry in several European countries can provide an important contribution to support low-skilled adults to develop their skills and qualifications.

#### *About the World Employment Confederation-Europe*

The World Employment Confederation-Europe is the voice of the employment industry at European level, representing labour market enablers.

The World Employment Confederation-Europe includes in its membership national federations from all across Europe, as well as several of the largest international workforce solutions companies. It is therefore fully representative of the industry, both in size and diversity. The World Employment Confederation-Europe brings a unique access to and engagement with European policymakers (EU Commission, European Parliament, and Council) and stakeholders (trade unions, academic world, think tanks).



The World Employment Confederation-Europe strives for a recognition of the economic and social role played by the industry in enabling work, adaptation, security and prosperity in our societies. Its members provide access to the labour market and meaningful work to almost 11 million of people in Europe.