



EBSN podcast series on EPALE

**Ensuring the three-step
approach of Upskilling
Pathways - skills assessment,
tailored learning offer and
validation**

Transcript of the podcast



Ensuring the three-step approach of Upskilling Pathways - skills assessment, tailored learning offer and validation

EDITOR: Welcome to EBSN's second podcast session made in collaboration with EPALE. In the current session we are focusing on the European Commission's Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults.

Basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) have become a policy priority in Europe and they are at the heart of the EU Skills Agenda as well as the Upskilling Pathways recommendation which was adopted by the European Council in 2016.

In order to improve access and take up quality learning opportunities, adults with low qualifications and basic skills challenges should have access to Upskilling Pathways in three key steps that are skills assessment, tailored learning offer, and validation & recognition.

The European Basic Skills Network aims to support the implementation of the Recommendation in Member States in a number of ways, by curating and publishing expert materials, open educational resources, organising MOOCs, workshops and conferences that address one or more key aspects of Upskilling Pathways' complex vision.

In 2019 a Commission Staff Working Document on Taking stock of implementation measures the European Commission took a closer look at the results in Member States. This document concluded that (quotation) „The crucial three-step approach set out in the Recommendation (skills assessment, tailor learning offer, validation and recognition of skills) is present in only a small number of initiatives. What is needed now is development of the missing elements. A large number of implementing measures rely on block offers or generic training, which may raise challenges in meeting the objectives set in the Council Recommendation in terms of individualised, tailored offers based on assessment¹.”

Having all three steps well-integrated in a national system is at the heart of making Upskilling Pathways a reality in Member State. However, it is in itself a major challenge that may be connected to the multidimensional nature of adult basic skills provision involving a number of different sectors and stakeholders from the educational, employment and social sector too. This poses several questions, one being crucial to all countries wishing to succeed in building pathways to low-qualified adult citizens, namely: how can states ensure skills assessment, tailored learning offers and validation schemes in a meaningful and integrated way that focuses on the individual learners' and the labour market needs at the same time?

¹ EU COM (2019) Taking stock of implementation measures. Commission Staff Working Document. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/implementation-report-upskilling-pathways_en.pdf (p. 29).



In this podcast we aim to take a closer look at the three steps through the scope of experts from two Member States: Spain and Slovakia. Our first guest is Dr Luis Carro from the Spanish institution OBSERVAL, one of the key institutions when it comes to Upskilling mechanisms in Spain.

DR LUIS CARRO: *Hi everyone, Dr Luis Carro speaking. I am a professor of educational research methodology at the Department of Pedagogy. I am working for 30 years ago as professor and researcher in the initial teacher training and lifelong learning at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, at the University of Valladolid in Spain. In 2008, I was the founder and director of Observal, the Spanish Observatory of Validation of Professional Competences. This Observatory was created because of the European Project Leonardo da Vinci related to the process of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In this Observatory we collect data about the process of accreditation of professional competences acquired by labour experience in Spain. According with the Royal Decree published in 2009 for regulating this process of validation, we make analyses focused on the implementation of these practices in different regions of Spain, observing many different situations depending on each region. During the last 10 years we have collected data about the number of people who has been involved in the accreditation processes and how have been implemented in every time. We are also involved in several European projects related to transversal competences with youth and adult people. In the Observatory we produce research oriented to achieve the academic level of master and doctoral degrees.*

EDITOR: *We asked Dr Carro about the extent to which the three steps of Upskilling Pathways are working together in Spain. We were also interested in what parts function well and what in his view posed challenges so far.*

DR LUIS CARRO: *The first step is related to skills assessment. As we can see in Europe, there are initiatives refer to methods of skills assessment such as skills profiling, or skills screening, as a first step in supporting low skilled/low qualified adults. However, only in few cases do they appear to be used to identify gaps in basic skills such as literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. In the case of Spain, we find a lack of initiatives focused on the implementation of skills assessment beyond the assessment to obtain a formal title equivalent to the secondary school level (as compulsory for everyone to entry in some job places). In this sense the academic skills assessment is used to be developed in the regular Adult education schools funding by public money. The processes of skills assessment as a first step to build up a personal profile to recognise the prior learning acquired by life and labour experience is not enough implemented in Spain. In this point, I'd like to point out the skills audit, to identify existing skills and upskilling needs, as a fitted strategy to provide confidence and feasibility to low skilled adults.*

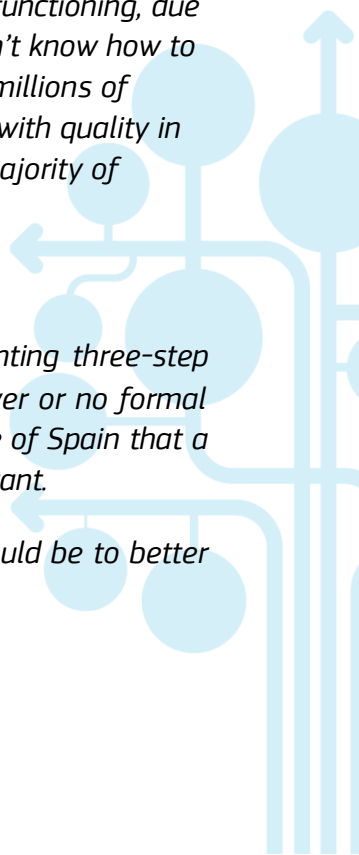


The second step is focused on a tailored and flexible learning offer. As the European recommendation provides, low skilled adults should be provided with an offer of education and training meeting the needs identified by the skills assessment. The learning offer should also consider, as far as possible, local, regional and national labour market needs. In Spain, the adult education system is uniform and well implemented in the whole country. If we have a look how is developed in each region, we can appreciate that all regional authorities have similar procedures to entry at adult education schools or to start adult courses for achieving the formal diploma of secondary level. In some settings we find extracurricular activities to complement the basic skills with a non-formal education training. But these non-formal initiatives are not enough considered as alternative to formal curriculum. These initiatives are not financed and many times they are depending on voluntarism of educators. If we found an NGO with an interesting offer of non-formal courses, it can be observed that these programs are only as complementary to another formal courses and not as a real alternative for low skilled people. The basic skills courses for everybody would be offered as open educational resources and should be more considered by the society. Because of the unknown concept of the new basic skills, it should be necessary to implement a good strategy to provide more visibility of it, in alliance with business, organisations and social entities. In brief, there is not an offer of training courses defined and adjusted to low skilled adults, based on their skills assessment.

The third step is related to validation and recognition of skills. This is the main point more implemented in Spain. As I said before, with the Royal Decree approved in 2009, in Spain it was implemented an important process of recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. This development in validation is driven by the need to upskill workers, many of whom have no vocational qualifications but lots of work experience. According to this, the process of validation is developed in terms of professional competences needed to obtain a diploma or certificate by whom has not enough level of qualification as professional workers. Following the steps of accreditation of professional competences, the beneficiaries will obtain a recognition of their level of qualification according with the National Qualification Framework. In this case, the third step is easy to recognise in the Spanish context. Many people know how it's functioning, due to their interest to obtain a diploma. But the majority of low qualified workers didn't know how to start. According to the national statistics of employment, there are more than 11 millions of inhabitants who has not enough education or they are underqualified to operates with quality in their jobs. For this reason, it's so important to invest more funds to reach to the majority of population who need improve their basic skills.

EDITOR: *As pointed out by Dr Carro, one of the major challenges in implementing three-step approach is to make sure that the existing provisions account for those with lower or no formal qualifications and people with basic skills needs. It is also apparent from the case of Spain that a strong collaboration with labour market stakeholders and social partners is important.*

In the next section Luis Carro talks about what the most important measures would be to better address the needs of low-skilled citizens in Spain.





DR LUIS CARRO: *I'd like to say that in Spain we have to do a big effort and put resources for professional in-service training and initial training for new adult educators and counsellors. The big effort and energy must be put in social campaigns of awareness to elevate the consideration of the concept of basic skills and how is the meaning for underqualified people. But we must start by the Ministries of Agriculture, Industry, Economy and Education. If the consideration of upskilling is integrated in the general economy probably the level of the country will increase easier and faster. A good example is always the better theory. The politicians should be facilitating the strategies of good practices and quality and inclusive education for all.*

EDITOR: *As pointed out by the Taking stock report of the European Commission, some countries approached the implementation of Upskilling Pathways by launching projects with national and international partners to pave the way for upskilling measures.*

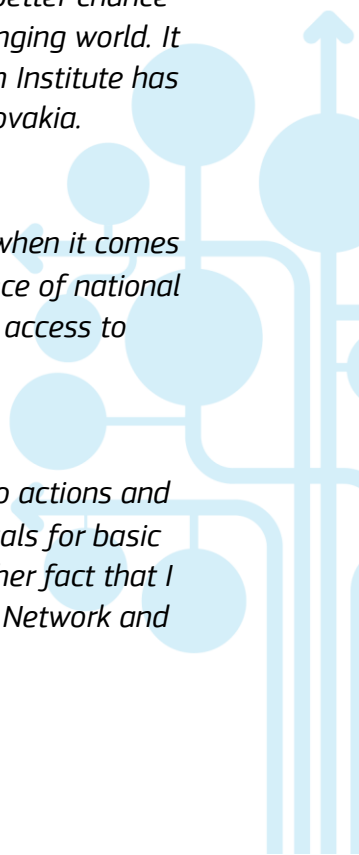
In Slovakia the BLUESS project aims at creating a dialogue and establishing the basics of partnerships that could address the skills challenges of low-qualified adults in the country.

We asked our next guest, Lubica Gallová from the State Vocational Education Institute in Slovakia on behalf of the BLUESS project to introduce this initiative.

LUBICA GALLOVÁ: *I would like to thank for this opportunity to share how Slovakia has been fulfilling the Upskilling Pathways recommendation during the last two years. This is not for the first time when I have a possibility to present the project BLUESS which we shall complete within the coming month here in Slovakia together with our national and international partners and with the financial support of the European Commission. BLUESS is an acronym for Blueprints for Basic Skills Development in Slovakia and the project aims to support low-qualified persons in the development of literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills in order to give them a better chance for employment, better integration in the society and easier adaptation to the changing world. It is important to mention that my institution which is the State Vocational Education Institute has been partnering with the Central Labour Office and the Ministry of Education in Slovakia.*

EDITOR: *Partnerships and intersectoral collaborations can be of vital importance when it comes to ensuring effective adult basic skills provision. Ms Gallová presents the importance of national and international cooperation while putting policies into practice and widening the access to training opportunities.*

LUBICA GALLOVÁ: *We understand this partnership as a way for turning plans into actions and reaching the goal which is enabling and opening up learning pathways for individuals for basic skills acquisition, towards second chance education or smaller qualifications. Another fact that I would like to mention is that the project was inspired by the European Basic Skills Network and*





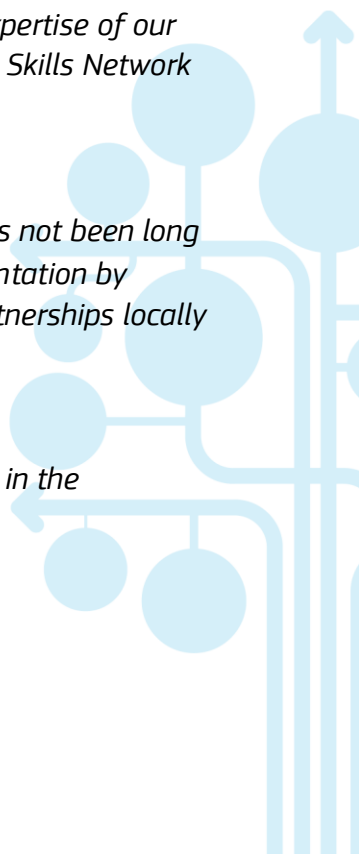
the expertise and experiences in this area shared by its members in various joint events, conferences, meetings, seminars and so on.

EDITOR: *We asked Ms Gallová to tell us about the main challenges, the focus and the aims of implementation measures in BLUESS project for Slovakia.*

LUBICA GALLOVÁ: *Slovakia is the country with the highest rate of long-term unemployed in the European Union and a large share of long-term unemployed adults is with less than secondary education level. It means those who have not completed the second cycle of elementary school which equals to EQF level 2. Low-skilled have the poorest prospects in the labour market in Slovakia. Also, the share of low-skilled remain relatively low, there is a negative trend of increasing the rate of early school leavers which produces new low-skilled generations. In spite of this fact, basic skills was a neglected theme with the exceptions of some project-based initiatives and NGO activities in the areas with high concentration of low-skilled people, mainly the most specific group represented by marginalised Roma communities. Several research papers have reported that basic skills represent a missing area of adult learning provision in Slovakia and there is no specific policy framework for adult literacy and basic skills. The very first goal of the project was to bring this topic on the table and stir up discussion about basic skills and I think that this goal was reached almost immediately once we started the project in 2019. The project implemented two sets of activities. One focused on the development of a set of tools for educators which include a framework of basic skills for adults as a supplement to the Slovak Qualifications Framework and a methodology for education of adults' skills in the area of basic skills. The second line of activities, an assessment tool for labour offices' counsellors was developed by the Slovak Central Labour Office which has been recently training their employees in the network of forty-seven labour offices all over Slovakia. The assessment tool is composed on the individualised assessment and a learning plan which have been integrated into the work of the labour offices. All project activities were accomplished with the support and expertise of our colleagues from the European Association for Education of Adults, European Basic Skills Network and the Irish partner organisation AONTAS.*

EDITOR: *In Member States where basic skills provision for low-qualified adults has not been long in the focus of policy development, it is important to start the process of implementation by raising awareness of the issue at hand, defining the target group and building partnerships locally and globally too.*

In the next section, we wondered what MS Gallová sees as an important next step in the implementation of Upskilling Pathways in Slovakia.





LUBICA GALLOVÁ: *From our perspectives it will be important to make crucial decision on the policy level in Slovakia. The most important ones we see acknowledging basic skills as important part of adult learning which needs specific approach in terms of its implementation and organisation, which calls for strong role of self-governance and municipalities, NGOs, educational providers specialised in basic skills provision as well as career counsellors aware of specific needs of low-skilled people.*

EDITOR: *Our guests presented two different contexts and approaches in implementing Upskilling Pathways and its three-step approach. One of the challenges in making skills assessment, tailored learning offers and validation measures coherent and integrated in a national system is that it calls for a highly collaborative approach from different stakeholders in a national context. This can require new ways of working together that may need different measures in different countries.*

We can conclude from the narratives of our guests that there is no one way of ensuring the three steps. Check the Open Educational Resources of [EBSN's Capacity Building Series on EPAL](#) for different case studies, implementation focuses and policy measures to learn more about these challenges and to see how different Member States are addressing Upskilling Pathways!

Let us know your view on the challenges and opportunities of ensuring the three steps in your country or in general through EPAL in the comment section of the podcast's page.

Thank you for listening our second podcast session!

