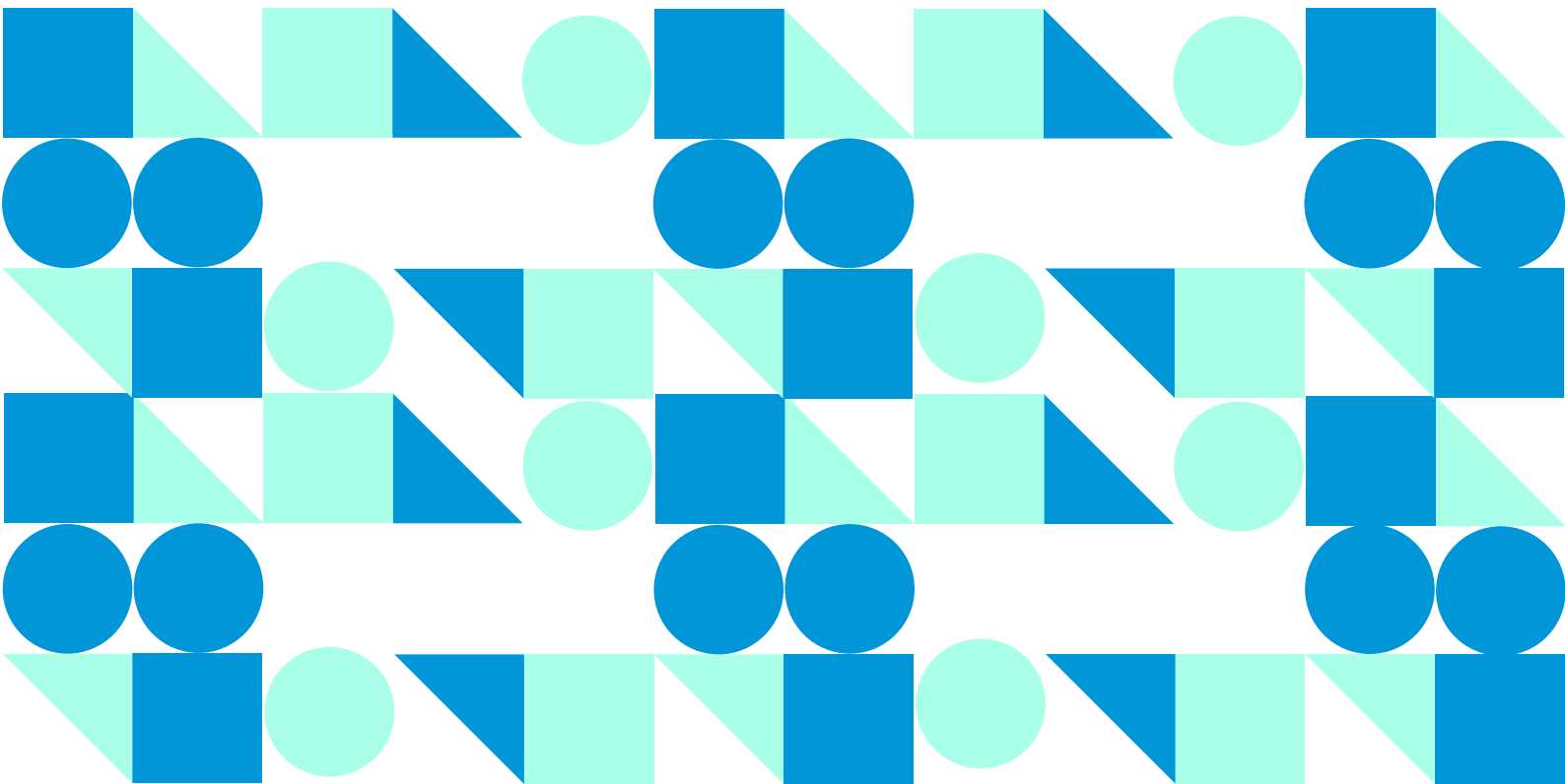




Research paper

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

Key findings of the second and third research
phases and suggestions for future action





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 This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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Foreword

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

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

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

This final report on the TCR on UP conducted in France from 2021 to 2023 serves as a valuable resource for policy-makers, social partners, and all stakeholders involved in the upskilling process. The TCR highlights the importance of encouraging outreach approaches, maintaining the skills of upskilling support professionals, rethinking funding and designing flexible instruments, engaging companies in upskilling pathways, ensuring effective multi-stakeholder governance, and designing policies that address less qualified groups while keeping in mind a broad definition of successful upskilling pathways. The lessons learned provide valuable insights for the development and implementation of effective upskilling strategies across the EU.

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

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Cedefop Executive Director

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Head of Department for VET and skills

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Executive summary

Overview

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

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

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 areas for action. The French steering group is composed of the Ministry of Labour, the CARIF/OREF ⁽¹⁾ network, France Compétences ⁽²⁾ and Pôle Emploi ⁽³⁾.

This is the final report of the TCR on UP in France and summarises the outcomes of the second ('meso') and third ('macro') phases of the review which

⁽¹⁾ The Centres of organisation, resources and information on training: regional observatories on employment and training are backed by the State and the Regions and involve the social partners. They have three main missions: to inform; to observe and analyse; to encourage the development of competence, contributing to job insertion and the fight against unemployment.

⁽²⁾ France Compétences has been the core institution of the French vocational training system since 2018.

⁽³⁾ Pôle Emploi is part of the French Public Employment Service.

were conducted from September 2022 until November 2023. The second phase (September 2022 to July 2023) consisted of surveys carried out on a 'meso' scale and aimed to put the 'micro' findings (below) into perspective from a wider regional strategy point of view and within the regional ecosystems of stakeholders, discussing the challenges identified (Chapter 2). The third phase, the 'macro' phase (September to November 2023) consisted of a workshop in which relevant national stakeholders discussed the main issues arising from the previous investigation stages (Chapter 3). The report concludes by putting forward six areas for future policy action with relevance for France and with potential for policy learning beyond its boundaries.

This report complements a previous one, *Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in France: Key findings of the first research phase* (Cedefop, 2023); this summarised the outcomes of the first phase of the TCR on UP in France, the 'micro' phase, and was published in April 2023. The first phase (October 2021 to July 2022) consisted of surveys carried out on a 'micro' scale to gather information as close to the ground as possible in three selected regions and on selected PIC/PRIC funded schemes and the CEP service (Section 1.4 and Cedefop, 2023).

The TCR on UP for France focuses on outreach and guidance for low-skilled adults and on the crosscutting dimensions of governance and financial and non-financial support for these two areas. The research investigates the extent to which the actors who offer financial and non-financial support coordinate with each other, articulate their services and develop innovative, concerted and adapted strategies and methods. Their aim is to reach out and provide learning guidance⁽⁴⁾ to low-skilled adults in the logic of building an individualised and seamless or continuous learning and/or employment pathway⁽⁵⁾.

The TCR steering group for France chose to narrow the focus of the research to low-skilled unemployed adults, paying particular attention to outreach and guidance pathways that integrate work-related training activities, and to low-skilled workers in the private sector at risk of skills obsolescence and job loss. Both target groups will focus on the people who are sometimes referred to as the invisibles: those who are furthest away from the upskilling services, who are off the radar of the institutions or other traditional actors (the situation of invisibility may, in some way, have been created by those institutions or traditional actors) and who may

(4) Guidance is a learning process.

(5) A seamless or continuous pathway means that the users benefit from the necessary means, conditions, organisations and partnerships that avoid (non-voluntary) breaks and disruption to individual pathways, and makes the transition from one stage of the pathway to the next (from outreach, to guidance, to training) smoother.

suffer from multiple vulnerability factors. The TCR on UP for France also considers the grey area where many low-skilled adults are to be found, either due to their frequent changes of economic status (mainly between employment and unemployment) or to their precarious, unstable professional pathways.

Box 1. Object and geographic coverage of the TCR on UP in France

Object of the review: Based on information given by the French government, the UP Recommendation in France is implemented through the 2018 vocational training reform (see Law 2018-771, 5 September 2018, Freedom to choose one's own professional future). However, for the first two phases of the review (the 'micro' and the 'meso' phases), it was essential to identify and select relevant measures and services for the review and its targeted population, which included both unemployed and employed low-skilled adults ⁽⁶⁾. The first two phases of the review were thus narrowed down to the PIC/PRIC funding programme operationalising the law and targeting less qualified unemployed adults and selected schemes funded by the programme at the regional level in the three regions selected (see geographic coverage below). In addition, and in the same regions, the first two phases of the review focused on the CEP service for employed adults in the private sector (in particular its use for those with the lowest qualification level), introduced by the Law on vocational training, employment and social democracy of 5 March 2014 and thoroughly revised by the Law of 5 September 2018.

Geographic coverage: The first two phases ('micro' and 'meso') were conducted at the regional level in 3 selected regions (out of the 13 that make up the territory of France, excluding regions overseas): Bourgogne Franche Comté (BFC), Nouvelle Aquitaine (NA) and Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur (PACA). The third phase ('macro') was conducted at the national level and discussed selected main findings of relevance for possible national-level policies and/or interventions.

Source: Cedefop.

Key findings

Approaches to 'reach out' to less qualified unemployed adults

Several stakeholders are adopting practices based on proximity and partnership to reach out to less qualified unemployed adults. These practices involve working in the immediate living environments of the target population, using intermediaries and local stakeholders from various fields (social, medical, sports), and establishing relationships that go beyond one-off interactions. However, these efforts can be hindered by two main factors: over-investment due to financial

⁽⁶⁾ Support policies and measures often apply the unemployed-employed dichotomy, distinguishing between potential beneficiaries based on their economic status. The French system is characterised by strong separation between two ecosystems of players, one dedicated to supporting unemployed adults and the other to employed adults.

opportunities, where stakeholders may focus excessively on outreach practices because of potential funding, possibly at the expense of other important aspects of support; and a plethora of service provision, where the abundance of support services and initiatives can lead to confusion, duplication of efforts, and lack of coordination among stakeholders.

Raising awareness among low-qualified employees

Service providers face difficulties in raising awareness among low-qualified employees due to several factors. Constant reforms in the vocational training ecosystem lead to a loss of reference points for both target populations and professionals. Service providers often lack direct access to less qualified employees, as they primarily communicate with companies, relying on employers and HR managers to relay information to their employees. Additionally, service providers have limited financial and human resources to carry out in-depth information and communication campaigns and apply proactive approaches to reach the target population.

Company engagement in upskilling pathways

Companies are becoming more open to engaging in upskilling pathways for low-qualified unemployed individuals due to recruitment issues and labour market shortages. The favourable economic climate and labour market trends have led companies to shift their attention to less qualified and/or long-term jobseekers, providing opportunities for their integration into the workforce. However, when it comes to their own employees, companies often prioritise immediate HR needs, such as adapting to new technologies or processes and recruiting for short-staffed positions, over long-term upskilling initiatives for their employees, raising concerns over the risk that employees run in 'de-skilling' while in employment. This is particularly evident in sectors experiencing job recruitment shortages, where short-term issues of managing recruitment difficulties and staff turnover become the main focus.

Challenges in achieving 'seamless' upskilling pathways

Achieving 'seamless' upskilling pathways (see definition of the term in Annex1) remains challenging due to several factors. First, there is a lack of alignment between the strategies of various stakeholders involved in supporting less qualified adults. Second, the multitude of stakeholders and the complexity of the ecosystem make it difficult to coordinate efforts and ensure smooth transitions between different stages of the upskilling process, resulting in individuals being required to undergo the same processes with different providers and feeling frustrated with the

system. Third, there is limited permeability between the ecosystems of jobseekers and employees, despite initiatives to bring them together. This lack of permeability can hinder particularly the progress of individuals who frequently alternate between periods of employment and unemployment.

Impact of funding methods on human resources management and professional roles

Funding methods play a crucial role in the management of human resources within organisations involved in upskilling support. The market logic and method of funding prioritising short-term contracts behind the implementation of guidance and training strategies leads to competition between service providers and concerns about the survival once funding comes to an end, which impacts the working and employment conditions of professionals, particularly in terms of contract length, pay, and staff turnover. Additionally, the changing profiles of the target populations, who increasingly face multiple barriers to employment, require professionals to adapt their approaches and acquire new skills. This has led to a degree of porosity between the fields of training, counselling, job integration, and social work, blurring the boundaries of professionals' areas of expertise.

Allocation and use of funds for upskilling pathways

The allocation and use of funds for upskilling pathways vary between unemployed and employed adults. For the unemployed, the Skills investment plan (PIC) and the Regional skills investment pacts (PRIC) provide funding to invest in or strengthen upskilling activities, but they lack coordination, negatively impacting the individuals, particularly those in precarious employment. Funding methods are not always favourable to the stability and development of human resources or the adaptation of upskilling pathways. For employed adults, highly segmented and rigid funding, designed for professional reconversion rather than upskilling, makes it difficult to offer tailored support where it is needed. The division of funding between jobseekers and employees should be questioned, as an overall view of the system would encourage a more comprehensive upskilling strategy in France.

Role of the Career Development Counselling Service (CEP) for private sector employees

The CEP service for private sector employees and the self-employed is seen as an essential lever for securing career paths and developing people's autonomy. The service aims to help individuals progress within their company and job, enhance and develop their skills, and reflect on their professional pathway. However, this comprehensive understanding of the CEP service remains

uncommon among employees and companies. The positioning of the CEP in relation to employer practices, company HR strategies, and occupations with recruitment shortages needs to be clarified.

Need for recognition and stable employment conditions for upskilling professionals

The changing profiles of the target populations and the current policy trends towards comprehensive support and pathways are leading to a degree of porosity between the fields of training, counselling, job integration, and social work. This has led to a certain loss of reference points for professionals regarding the nature of their work. They also face unstable employment conditions and lack of recognition of their work; the latter is essential for professional support to individuals in complex social situations that require long-term assistance.

Impact of top-down approaches and reforms on stakeholders

Top-down approaches and constant reforms have led to disruptions at the implementation level and limit stakeholders' room for manoeuvre in developing upskilling pathways. Stakeholders often look to top-down roadmaps driven by quantitative targets, which do not necessarily align with the logic of upskilling pathways and only marginally address the emerging needs from the field. Constant reorganisation and evaluation burdens professionals. This can lead to a loss of meaning, deterioration of working conditions, and staff motivation issues. Approaches emphasising quick return to employment change the nature of social support provided by local authorities and may contrast with the general principle of the UP Recommendation and its ambition to enable adults not only to 'access and progress in the labour market', but also to 'achieve their full potential', 'engage in further education and training' and 'play an active part in society'.

Complexity, variability, and challenges in stakeholder roles and coordination

The distribution of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders involved in adult skills development policies in France is complex and varies across regions, leading to challenges in coordination and alignment. The 2018 reform and the introduction of the PIC and PRICs have shifted the steering process towards State authorities, while providing additional resources to regions, resulting in a complex sharing of tasks and resources between regional authorities, decentralised State authorities, and public employment service actors. The effectiveness of this coordination varies across regions, with some experiencing competition and juxtaposition of efforts. Regional committees (CREFOP) designed to facilitate joint construction of policies and stakeholder coordination have had limited success, often serving as

mere information-sharing platforms rather than true forums for collaboration. At the local level, the coexistence of multiple initiatives and coordination bodies led by different stakeholders (e.g., SPIE experiments, regional strategies) complicates the understanding of the ecosystem and hinders the development of a clear, joint vision. These challenges in stakeholder coordination and alignment can ultimately impair the efficiency and impact of adult skills development efforts in France.

Going forward

The conclusions of the TCR on UP for low-skilled adults in France highlight several key points and policy recommendations of broader relevance for supporting the development and implementation of effective upskilling strategies in the EU.

First, the review emphasises the importance of encouraging approaches that ‘reach out’ to less qualified adults, both unemployed and employed, to enable them to express a desire and/or ability to undertake an upskilling pathway. This involves providing accessible, clear, and comprehensive information on available services, using diversified communication channels, and relying on local intermediaries and collaborative dynamics to identify and reference target groups.

Second, the review stresses the need to maintain the skills of professionals involved in upskilling support and encourage the complementary nature of professions that meet the needs of less qualified adults. This can be achieved by relying on ‘generalists’ in charge of monitoring pathways and referring individuals to ‘specialists’ as needed, as well as fostering cooperation and partnership dynamics between different professionals in guidance, job integration, employment, and training.

Third, the review calls for rethinking funding and designing flexible upskilling instruments tailored to the needs of less qualified groups, regardless of their labour market status. This requires a high level of coordination between stakeholders, the creation of bridges between the ecosystems of jobseekers and employees, and the use of simple and accessible funding mechanisms that take into account the specific needs and challenges of the target populations.

Fourth, the review highlights the importance of encouraging companies to take part in upskilling pathways to support less qualified people (both employees and jobseekers), in collaboration with social partners and other ecosystem stakeholders. This involves raising awareness, providing resources for developing coordinated policies of ‘going towards’ companies, and encouraging the adoption of HR policies that are more attentive to the needs of less qualified employees.

Fifth, the review emphasises the need for effective multi-stakeholder governance at the most appropriate territorial level to ensure the coordination of

upskilling pathway policies and initiatives. This requires reaffirming the principle of multi-stakeholder governance, distributing tasks, jointly constructing and guiding the actions of institutions, and allocating adequate decision-making mandates and operating resources to the governing bodies.

Finally, the review recommends designing upskilling public policies that address all less qualified groups, keeping in mind a broad definition of successful upskilling pathways. This involves targeting individuals with low-level or obsolete qualifications, regardless of their labour market status, and reaffirming the general principle of the UP Recommendation, which aims to enable adults not only to access and progress in the labour market but also to achieve their full potential, engage in further education and training and play an active role in society.

CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

1.1. Policy background

In December 2016, the European Council adopted the European Recommendation on upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults (Council of the European Union, 2018), (hereafter referred to as the UP Recommendation). It was the main legislative proposal of the [European skills agenda](#).

The UP Recommendation aims to help the less qualified adults to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy, and digital skills and/or to acquire a broader range of skills by progressing towards an EQF 3-4 qualification, 'in order to achieve (their) full potential, play an active part in society and undertake (their) social and civic responsibilities. Such skills, knowledge and competences are also crucial for accessing, and progressing in, the labour market and for engaging in further education and training.'

The state of implementation of the UP Recommendation and the key challenges are mainly based on two stages:

- (a) the three-step strategy suggested in the UP Recommendation: a skills assessment, tailored and flexible learning provision, and validation and recognition. Delivery of the initiative should be underpinned by coordination and reinforced partnerships; outreach, guidance and support measures; and follow-up and evaluation;
- (b) the adoption of a systemic approach for 'developing a coordinated and coherent approach to upskilling pathways for adults'.

In designing and implementing UP for low-skilled adults, Member States consider national circumstances, the resources available and existing national strategies, identifying priority target groups for the delivery of upskilling pathways nationally. They 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 re-skilling 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 view of the implementation of the UP 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:

- (e) financial and non-financial support;
- (f) outreach;
- (g) lifelong guidance.

Implementation:

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

In the TCR on UP, Cedefop's analytical framework constituted the basis for identifying the TCR's scope and objectives (Section 1.2)

1.2. Scope and objectives

In 2021, Cedefop launched the first two thematic country reviews (TCRs) on the UP Recommendation, for France and Italy (concluded in December 2023). A third one was launched in 2023 in Croatia (expected to conclude in 2025).

As stated in the study terms of reference, ‘the TCR is a country-owned and country-driven review process of their upskilling pathways approach, based on 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 policy recommendations’ (7). The steering group brings strategic direction to the TCR on UP, gives feedback on the documentation produced and validates the intermediate and final outputs, including suggestions for actions.

Through the TCR launch, the relevant ministry (the Ministry of Labour in France and Italy), in cooperation with Cedefop, appointed a steering group in each of the two countries; this group represent important stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of upskilling pathways. The French steering group is composed of the Ministry of Labour, the CARIF/OREF (8) network, France Compétences (9) and Pôle Emploi (10).

At the beginning of the review, the main, crucial role of the steering group was to agree on the target groups of the TCR on UP, identify the TCR’s scope and objective, i.e. the priority area(s) to be reviewed in the TCR from among those indicated in Cedefop’s analytical framework on upskilling pathways (Box 2), and the national strategies that could be considered the national equivalent of the UP Recommendation in France relevant for the selected target groups (Section 1.2.1).

(7) Cedefop tender specification (2020). [Promoting lifelong learning of adults through CVET 1 systems and upskilling pathways](#).

(8) The Centres of organisation, resources and information on training – regional observatories on employment and training – are backed by the State and the Regions and involve the social partners. They have three main missions: to inform; to observe and analyse; to encourage the development of competence, contributing to job insertion and the fight against unemployment.

(9) France Compétences has been the core institution of the French vocational training system since 2018.

(10) Pôle Emploi is part of the French Public Employment Service.

Box 2. Overview of the TCR in France

Main theme: the system's capacity to integrate and support the less qualified adults through didactic guidance approaches.

Main key areas (based on the Cedefop analytical framework): #6 Outreach #7 Lifelong guidance.

Cross-cutting key areas (based on the Cedefop analytical framework): #3 Governance; #5 Financial and non-financial support

Target populations: less qualified adults, with a focus on less qualified unemployed adults who are the most at the periphery of training activities, employment and even institutions, and on less qualified employed adults exposed to the risk of skills obsolescence and job loss.

The objective of the TCR France is to analyse how the stakeholders who provide financial and non-financial support do (or do not) coordinate their services, and whether (or not) they develop innovative, concerted and appropriate strategies for mobilising and providing (didactic) guidance to low-skilled adults, particularly those who have experienced cumulative difficulties of various kinds and who have sometimes developed a certain mistrust of institutional stakeholders.

Source: Cedefop.

1.2.1. National strategies in France equivalent to the EU UP Recommendation

The UP Recommendation encourages Member States to consider their national circumstances, available resources and existing national strategies to offer low-skilled adults upskilling pathway opportunities based on a three-step approach: skills assessment, tailored and flexible learning offer, and validation and recognition, all of which are underpinned by coordination and partnerships, outreach, guidance and support measures, follow-up and evaluation. This approach pervades different national policies and strategies, initiatives and institutional mandates, implying the need for pulling resources together and for better coordination and cooperation.

Based on information given by the French government, the UP Recommendation in France is implemented through the 2018 vocational training reform (see Law 2018-771 ⁽¹⁾). The main objective of Law 2018-771 is to renovate the system of initial and continuous vocational training as well as the unemployment insurance scheme with the aim to invest massively in training and skills and empower everybody to manage their careers successfully and support the most vulnerable. Since 2020, the Recovery plan for the French economy

⁽¹⁾ LOI No 2018-771 du 5 Septembre 2018 pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel [LOI N 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 for the freedom to choose your professional future].

(France Relance) ⁽¹²⁾, through its dedicated training and employment component, also contributes to implementing the UP Recommendation.

These policies and means of funding build on a systematic and coordinated strategy similar to the orientation of the UP Recommendation. They give the impetus for acting at both national and local levels to encourage the various stakeholders at different levels to work together, to promote integrated and personalised pathways enabling individuals to design and implement their own professional project plans and to develop and validate their skills. They introduced a new definition of the training activity: ‘a learning path to reach a professional goal’, which may include work-based training activities, validation of prior learning processes and skills assessment schemes.

To identify the object of analysis within the scope of the Law governing the transposition of the UP Recommendation in France, it was essential to identify and select relevant measures and services for the review and its targeted population, which included both unemployed and employed low-skilled adults. Support policies and measures often apply the unemployed-employed dichotomy, distinguishing between potential beneficiaries based on their economic status. The French system is characterised by strong separation between two ecosystems of players, one dedicated to supporting unemployed adults and the other to employed adults.

1.2.1.1. *Selected measures for the low-skilled unemployed*

To bring about part of the 2018 vocational training reform, in 2018 the French government launched the Skills investment plan (Plan d’Investissement dans les Compétences, PIC), which is a 5-year investment plan (EUR 15 billion) that aims at building a society of competences. The main objectives are: to train one million low-skilled young people who are outside the labour market and one million low-skilled and long-term unemployed adults; to speed up the transformation of the national vocational training system starting by identifying current and future skills needs and innovative teaching/learning methods and tools; to meet the recruitment needs of companies, especially for promising occupations ⁽¹³⁾. PIC is based on three strands: accompanying and securing professional pathways; ensuring core competences; meeting the skills needs of companies and upskilling the workforce. PIC is a government initiative and a large financial lever for reinforcing or launching national measures and bringing in additional resources to regional measures. Part of PIC is implemented through the agreements signed between the State and the

⁽¹²⁾ [Recovery Plan \(France Relance\) of 3.9.2020.](#)

⁽¹³⁾ Promising occupations are either emerging occupations from new fields of activity or occupations that are facing manpower shortages in employment sectors that are struggling to recruit workers with the required skills.

regions (as the local authorities have a mandate to organise and finance the regional vocational training and guidance services, especially for jobseekers). Those agreements are called regional skills investment pacts (*Pactes régionaux d'investissement dans les compétences*, PRIC).

1.2.1.2. *Selected service for the low-skilled employees in the private sector*

For low-skilled workers, the Career Development Counselling Service (*Conseil en Evolution Professionnelle*, CEP) for people working in the private sector is identified as a key service that can provide an overview of outreach and guidance practices and of the opportunities for career and professional development. CEP was introduced in France by the Act on vocational training, employment and social democracy of 5 March 2014 and thoroughly revised in 2018 by the Act on freedom to choose one's own professional future. No such service provided for free existed before these dates.

Even though the CEP service for people working in the private sector is not specifically designed for low-skilled workers, it appeared interesting to look at the extent to which they access this service, benefit from appropriate counselling and use it to build and implement UP.

1.2.2. Steps of the investigation phase/field work

The field work kicked off in October 2021 and was organised in three stages.

- (a) First stage (October 2021 to July 2022) consisted of surveys carried out on a 'micro' scale to gather information as close to the ground as possible in three selected regions and on selected PIC/PRIC-funded schemes and the CEP service (Section 1.4 and Cedefop,2023).
- (b) Second stage (September 2022 to July 2023) consisted of surveys carried out on a 'meso' scale and aiming to put the 'micro' findings into perspective from a wider regional strategy point of view and within the regional ecosystems of stakeholders, and discuss the challenges identified (Chapter 2).
- (c) Third stage, the 'macro' phase (September to November 2023) consisted of a workshop in which relevant national stakeholders discussed the main issues arising from the previous investigation stages (Chapter 3).

The first two stages were conducted at the regional level in 3 selected regions, on selected PRIC schemes for the low-skilled unemployed and CEP service for low-skilled employees in the private sector (Section 1.4). The third stage was conducted at the national level and discussed selected main findings of relevance for possible national-level policies and/or interventions.

This report is based on the findings from the second and third investigation stages ('meso' and 'macro') and leverages on the findings from the first stage

(‘micro’). The findings of the ‘micro’ phase were published in 2023 under the title *Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in France: key findings of the first research phase* (Cedefop, 2023).

1.3. Context in France: an unsteady ecosystem and a wealth of literature and reports

The TCR on UP in France was carried out over a period of 3 years (from December 2020 to December 2023), in a particular context involving major changes for the upskilling and reskilling strategy in France. The challenging objective was to ‘take a picture’ of a system in full effervescence, with changing contours, and adaptation to changes in national political priorities (between two different presidential terms of office) as well as to external circumstances that have had an impact on its operationalisation.

The 2018 law for ‘the freedom to choose one’s professional future’ has led to an overhaul of the guidance and training system, whether in terms of funding, schemes (see definition of the term in Annex 1) or even the players involved. This review also follows on from the Covid 19 pandemic, which disrupted the implementation of the reform and led to the introduction of various short-term measures to promote the recovery of economic activity. The new Law for full employment (n° 2023-1196), approved the 18th of December 2023, will lead to a major reform of support for jobseekers, by transforming the public employment service, Pôle Emploi, into a new larger entity called France Travail (Chapter 2).

The results of the TCR on UP in France is also part of a wealth of literature and recent reports on support for less qualified adults, produced by a range of local and national institutions and bodies.

A series of reports present the results of evaluations carried out on a range of instruments and schemes within the framework of the Skills investment plan (PIC) and the connected State-Region agreements (PRICs), on their implementation and the entry into training of unskilled jobseekers, whether they were initiated by the DARES - Ministry of Labour (2020, 2021, 2022 ⁽¹⁴⁾) – or commissioned by the regions. The High Commissioner on Skills ⁽¹⁵⁾ also produced ‘best practice’ guides

⁽¹⁴⁾ Bucher et al (2020), First report of the scientific committee of the Skills Investment Plan, Dares. Bucher et al (2021), Second report of the Scientific Committee of the Skills Investment Plan, Dares. Ayala et al (2022), Third report of the Scientific Committee of the Skills Investment Plan, Dares.

⁽¹⁵⁾ *Haut-Commissariat aux Compétences*. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour, the French *Haut-Commissariat aux Compétences* oversaw setting out and monitoring the PIC measures, up until 2023.

based on the results of experiments conducted as part of the PIC, concerning, for example, promoting best practices, encouraging the individuals furthest away from the labour market and training, or the construction of ‘seamless pathways’⁽¹⁶⁾. Other studies investigated the implementation of the Career counselling service – *Conseil en évolution professionnelle* (CEP) – open to all employees and independent workers of the private sector (France Compétences, 2022, 2023⁽¹⁷⁾). These various evaluation and capitalisation projects concern schemes aimed at specific target groups: on the one hand, unskilled jobseekers, with a focus on young people, and, on the other, people in employment in the private sector, whatever their level of qualification.

Studies were also conducted concerning support and training for the low-skilled, particularly the young and older people. For example, the various public policies aimed at supporting, training and integrating young people (aged 16-30) were analysed by France Stratégie⁽¹⁸⁾. As part of the evaluation of the national strategy for preventing and combating poverty⁽¹⁹⁾, various support, training and integration measures were analysed for young people furthest away from employment and for the most vulnerable. Recent work by the research institute Céreq focuses more specifically on developing the skills of the less qualified employees over 50s (Lambert et al., 2023). Other studies dealt with cross-cutting issues that do not focus solely on the low-skilled, such as support for professional transitions among the employed, through an analysis of the underlying logic of the French upskilling/reskilling system (Bouvard et al, 2023), or the obstacles to individualisation⁽²⁰⁾ of training pathways (France Compétences, 2023).

Changes in the vocational guidance and training system after the 2018 reform, with a particular focus on funding methods, the use of training funds and their distribution, were analysed by the French Court of Auditors (Cour des Comptes, 2023), and France Compétences (France Compétences, 2023).

⁽¹⁶⁾ Haut-Commissariat aux Compétences (2022), La collection des guides de capitalization. Eight guides for capitalising on and learning from innovative projects funded under the Skills Investment Plan (PIC).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Sauléa. (2022). Evaluation des accords-cadres CEP actifs occupés, France compétences. France Compétences. (2023). Le CEP à l'épreuve des usages, Quels effets pour ses bénéficiaires?

⁽¹⁸⁾ An independent institution reporting to the Prime Minister, ‘France Stratégie contributes to public policy through its analyses and proposals. It stimulates public debate and informs collective choices on social, economic and environmental issues. It also produces public policy assessments at the request of the government’ (www.strategie.gouv.fr).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Comité d'évaluation de la stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté, Rapport 2022, France Stratégie.

⁽²⁰⁾ See Annex I for the definition of the term.

The findings of the TCR on UP in France appear to complement this (non-exhaustive) literature. The aim of the review has not been to evaluate a whole range of schemes, but to take stock of and analyse the support provided to less qualified adults in the light of the UP Recommendation. The entry point for this TCR on UP is, therefore, the target populations: the less qualified adults, whether jobseekers or employees (regardless of age).

This report draws on the results of the meso and macro levels of empirical research and builds on the results of the micro level (Section 1.4). Existing studies and reports have been used to shed light on the results.

1.4. Summary of the surveys at the ‘micro’ level

The surveys at the micro level investigated Cedefop’s key thematic areas (Box 2) by collecting data on the ground, for three schemes (in three different regions) that were launched or strengthened by the Law of 5 September 2018 and the PIC/PRIC funding programme targeting less qualified unemployed adults. In the same regions, the surveys focused on the CEP service for employed adults in the private sector (particularly its use for those with the lowest qualification level), introduced by the Law on vocational training, employment and social democracy of 5 March 2014 and thoroughly revised by the Law of 5 September 2018.

The first phase of the study was based on a series of surveys carried out in three French regions (out of the 13 that make up the territory of France, excluding regions overseas): Bourgogne Franche Comté (BFC), Nouvelle Aquitaine (NA) and Provence Alpes Côte d’Azur (PACA).

Figure 1. **Regions of France**



NB: In yellow, the regions covered by the TCR on UP.

Source: [Régions et départements français - 2024](#).

The three regions were selected considering the political, administrative and geographic configurations as well as the socioeconomic characteristics of the populations. They all must address territorial disparities, especially in challenged urban districts and remote rural areas. They are considered fragile, with poor socioeconomic indicators, and benefitting from specific policies and funding. In the three regions, there is a significant part of the out-of-school population over 15 years old with a low level of qualification (no diploma or with a diploma up to level 2 EQF): 29.4% in BFC region, 26.8% in NA, 27.7% in PACA region. The unemployment rate of the population with no diploma is 23.2% in BFC region, 23.9% in NA region and 24.8% in PACA region ⁽²¹⁾. While the PACA region was not transformed by the Law n°2015-29 of 16 January 2015 on regional divisions, BFC region resulted from the merging of two former regions and NA region resulted from the merging of three former regions (accompanied with significant governance changes). Regarding the vocational training issue, in 2019, the BFC and NA regional authorities signed agreements with the State and ran the PRICs implementation;

⁽²¹⁾ Figures for 2019 (source: *INSEE – dossiers complets Région BFC, Région NA, Région PACA*).

in PACA region, the regional delegation of Pôle emploi oversaw managing the PRIC implementation.

Between February and April 2022, 78 interviews were carried out with career/employment advisers, guidance counsellors, trainers and local managers coordinating a team of counsellors or advisers ⁽²²⁾. They all belong to (public or private) provider organisations that received public funding for implementing locally the selected PRIC schemes or the CEP service. The aim of the interviews was to collect information about their practice on outreach and guidance support for low-skilled adults, plus their opinions on the selected schemes and CEP service (below) in terms of challenges and benefits.

In addition, 225 questionnaires were completed by participants in the selected PRIC schemes. Below is a brief description of the selected PRIC schemes and CEP service.

- (a) DAQ 2.0 takes the form of a service of general economic interest (SGEI) piloted by the BFC regional authority since 2020, building on a scheme launched in 2010. It focuses on securing career paths, personalising, and individualising training for all jobseekers, with a particular focus on people with few or no qualifications, with a view to helping them find employment and/or a higher level of qualification. The scheme is implemented in the region by a consortium of guidance/training providers, who are encouraged to develop local cooperation (in particular to guide people towards the scheme).
- (b) The PIC Axis 2 contract has been piloted by Pôle Emploi regional delegation in PACA region since 2020. It focuses on encouraging the less qualified who are furthest away from employment and training, and on a knowledge of basic core professional skills required for access to training leading to qualifications. The scheme is implemented throughout the region by various stakeholders (local training providers) which are encouraged to develop local cooperation, particularly to reach out to target groups and work on removing employment barriers.
- (c) The Mobilisation towards training call for projects, the first wave of which was launched in 2019, is steered by the NA regional authority. It encourages stakeholders in the social field and those involved in vocational training to set up joint projects to promote (re)mobilisation and access to training for vulnerable groups who are furthest away from employment, training or even

⁽²²⁾ There is no univocal definition to distinguish these job profiles (counsellors, advisers, trainers, etc) in terms of distribution of tasks and competences. Their names varied according to the uses and customs of the different provider organisations. They were all professionals in direct contact with the beneficiaries enrolled in a specific scheme and they had the task to support beneficiaries in their personal development.

institutions. As an experiment, the scheme involves a wide range of actions, unevenly distributed across the region.

- (d) The CEP service offers free and personalised support and is seen as an 'essential lever' for securing career paths, developing people's autonomy and their ability to choose their professional future. Since 2020, the service has been delivered to people employed in the private sector by regional consortia of stakeholders, selected by France Compétences as part of a multi-year public contract. The CEP is a service open to all employees and self-employed. It does not specifically target the less qualified.

Through these various schemes and services, the first phase of the study was able to highlight the levers, challenges and obstacles to reaching out to and supporting less qualified adults in an appropriate way, in order to support their commitment into upskilling pathways.

To identify target populations, communication initiatives and innovative approaches to getting closer to the less qualified unemployed adults are being encouraged and deployed. They rely on local stakeholders, sometimes outside the field of vocational training, on activities (recreational, sporting, cultural) to (re)mobilise or (re)socialise them, on initial contacts rarely relating to training-employment issues, and on listening to day-to-day problems. They remain dependent on specific local conditions and are linked to the nature of relationships between stakeholders. As far as adults in employment are concerned, efforts to reach out to the less qualified and/or those in remote areas are limited or even unimplemented. Mass communication and extensive use of digital channels can make access to information and use of the service more complex for the most remote groups, especially since employers or HR departments are seldom considered reliable sources of information.

In addition, local and *ad hoc* forms of collaboration are developing between 'traditional' and 'new' stakeholders in medical, psychological and social work fields, vocational training, and labour market integration; this is despite a persistent lack of permeability between the two ecosystems (jobseekers and employees). This may raise doubts about the upskilling potential of the less qualified adults in precarious jobs, who oscillate between employment and unemployment.

In terms of guidance support, the first phase of the study highlighted the key role played by the adviser, coordinator or trainer, who acts as a point of contact for individuals on their upskilling pathway and as an interface with the other stakeholders. However, sometimes too many tasks are entrusted to this person and the division of roles is unclear or the referral function is diluted between the professionals involved in the scheme.

Other points of importance for unemployed adults to (re)engage in upskilling pathways have also been highlighted: (re)gaining confidence in oneself, in one's abilities, and even in the institutions; and developing intrinsic motivation, particularly for people who are experiencing numerous difficulties in their professional and/or personal lives. The aim is to take an overall view of each person's situation to be able to propose a comprehensive approach and the most appropriate forms of support and guidance, with the appropriate time, means, resources and partnerships. Finding 'tailor-made' solutions can take time and require continuous attention, which sometimes conflicts with the deadlines and other terms and conditions of schemes or services. Professionals often demonstrate a high level of adaptability and commitment, particularly in terms of devoting more time to the people who need it most, within frameworks that are sometimes highly constrained (by factors such as cumulative quantitative targets and reporting obligations).

Finally, it is important to consider individual degree of autonomy. Autonomy is an essential dimension of empowerment. It can refer to a minimum command of the language, a minimum command of digital tools, the ability to seek out and use information or resources, the ability to take initiative, the ability to make informed choices, etc. It should be noted that less qualified people do not have the same level of autonomy as more qualified people. It should, however, also be noted that less qualified does not automatically mean less autonomous, and vice versa.

The first phase of the study ⁽²³⁾ highlighted a few issues (such as those related to human resources, funding, coordination amongst stakeholders) that the second phase of the review (the 'meso' phase) sought to explore in greater depth.

The [full summary of the key findings of the micro phase of the TCR on UP in France](#) is available online.

⁽²³⁾ See the full report on the first phase of the study: Cedefop (2023). *Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in France: key findings of the first research phase*.

CHAPTER 2.

Key findings of the ‘meso’ level research phase

2.1. Objective and scope

Following on from the 'micro' phase, this second phase focused observations on the same three regions of metropolitan France. While the selected schemes and service in the three regions were still in focus, the observations also took broader and more strategic aspects linked to the areas of investigation. The aim was to extend the field observations to the management bodies of the organisations implementing the schemes and services selected for analysis in the ‘micro’ phase (training organisations, associations, local authorities) and to the stakeholders in charge of political and institutional steering and funding (regional and local public authorities, joint bodies steering upskilling and training strategies). This second phase sought to broaden the range of observations in two directions.

- (a) The first consisted of soliciting stakeholders who, although not formally involved in the implementation of the selected schemes, cooperate in various ways to increase their effectiveness, for example, by providing information and raising awareness among potential beneficiaries or by providing specific assistance services as part of the guidance and support process.
- (b) The second involved gathering information on regional policies and strategies for guidance and skills development. The emphasis was on studying the degree of coherence, inter-knowledge and interconnection between schemes, financial instruments and stakeholders operating in the same area, with the aim of analysing the way in which the organisation of this offer responds to a seamless pathway logic.

Particular attention was paid to changes in public policy since the Law of 5 September 2018 and the PIC/PRIC strategy and their impact on players in the regions.

2.1.1. Methodology and types of stakeholders interviewed

The surveys in the second phase of the review were carried out between January and June 2023, based on a qualitative technique. A total of 70 people were interviewed in 41 semi-structured individual or collective interviews.

Table 1. **List of stakeholders interviewed in the three regions surveyed (meso phase)**

Stakeholder	Type	Number of interviews	Number of persons	Description
Region authority	Local Authority	3	6	Main actor for the design and implementation of local guidance and training policies (especially for jobseekers)
Structures delivering guidance schemes funded by PRICs, observed in phase 1 ⁽²⁴⁾	Service Provider	6	10	Management or steering bodies of public/private training organisations, non-for-profit organisations
Pôle Emploi Regional delegations	Public Employment Service	3	6	Main national public employment service provider for adult jobseekers, Financing the provision of guidance, learning, training and skills development, services through public sources (including PACA region PRIC's Axis 2)
The Regional Directorates for the Economy, Employment, Labour and Solidarity (DREETS)	Decentralised State authority	1	5	Representation of the State at regional level jointly responsible with the region for the training and skills development regional policies
Local Plans for Integration and Employment (PLIE) of the territory	Service Provider	2	2	Local multi-partner platforms (cofunded by ESF) supporting the less qualified individuals' integration and access to employment
Department authority	Local Authority	6	8	Bodies steering local programmes for social action, solidarity, insertion, inclusion. Bodies steering the pluriannual local plans for integration and employment (PLIE) and SPIE ⁽²⁵⁾ experimentations.
Cheops - CAP Emploi	Public Employment Service	3	3	PES Supporting disabled workers, disabled jobseekers and hosting companies to apply for funds

⁽²⁴⁾ DAQ 2.0, PIC Axis 2, 'mobilisation formation' call for projects.

⁽²⁵⁾ The Public Service for Integration and Employment (*Service Public de l'Insertion et de l'Emploi - SPIE*), which has been tested since 2018 in volunteer departments, aims to improve the effectiveness of employment support for people experiencing particular integration difficulties, and is intended to develop consortia of local stakeholders around a joint service base.

Stakeholder	Type	Number of interviews	Number of persons	Description
EVA network members (CEP providers for employees)	Service Provider	5	9	Steering teams of the regional mandated operators and some shared contracting providers that have the task to implement CEP service for employees
OPCO Skills development facilitators	Service Provider	3	8	Joint bodies supporting occupational branches for skills development policies and company training strategies; financing and supporting companies with fewer than 50 employees, helping them define and implement their skills development plans
Association Transition Pro (ATpro)	Service Provider	4	8	Financing and accompanying the implementation of instruments dedicated to career transitions.
Unions and Company Federations	Social Partners	2	2	Responsible for skill/careers development opportunities awareness and information campaigns inside the companies
Other relevant stakeholders	Other	3	3	Cité des métiers (Local Association), Pôle Emploi National headquarter, Consulting Company
Total		41	70	

Source: Cedefop.

The interview guidelines (Annex 2) were organised in a way to articulate the four analytical key areas of the TCR on UP, France, and the lines of questioning emerging from the 'micro' phase. The guide was then modelled for each interview, and the most relevant questions were selected for the type of stakeholder being interviewed.

As indicated above (Sections 1.2.1 and 1.4) the French system is characterised by strong separation between two ecosystems of actors: one dedicated to supporting unemployed adults and the other to employed adults. The 'meso' phase sought, as far as possible, to go beyond this separation based on people's status on the labour market and to examine the links between the two ecosystems, particularly the forms of support dedicated to precarious (low-skilled) workers or to those who often alternate periods of work and periods of unemployment.

The surveys targeted directors and managers (in the broadest sense of the term) with the aim of gathering information on governance, cooperation and

networking practices relating to the implementation of awareness-raising, guidance and support programmes for upskilling.

Although the stakeholders were identified and contacted on a regional basis, for one category (OPCOs, often organised into regional delegations) it proved appropriate to organise collective inter-regional interviews to gain a cross-sectional view of the three regions under consideration. Two such interviews were organised. This configuration proved useful for comparing different approaches or for allowing differences or similarities in practices to emerge.

2.2. Background information

The Law of 5 September 2018 reformed the system of apprenticeship and continuing vocational training. It aimed to reinforce career paths, to avoid and fight unemployment. As the first section of the Law states, the aim is to move towards a 'new skilled society'. According to the Minister for Employment in office in 2018, 'skills can and must be a means for everyone, especially amongst those of us who are less privileged, to shape their personality, to integrate, to become free and to be proud'.

The economist Jean Pisani-Ferry wrote in his report to the Prime Minister in 2017 that equipping the less qualified unemployed (and workers) with new skills, will help to increase the level of employment in France. This would be done using modular training that is tailored to the individual and is continuously adapted to the needs of the sectors with the greatest skills shortages. Coming before the reform and the Skills investment plan (PIC), vocational training is confirmed as being a component of the active employment policy. In combining the logic of qualification with that of skills, the aim is to help build a 'skilled society', 'the key to employment and the society of tomorrow'. The development of skills should also enable people to adapt to the major changes (economic, ecological, digital, demographic), and foster the ability to remain employed and transitions to 'growing' occupations and sectors.

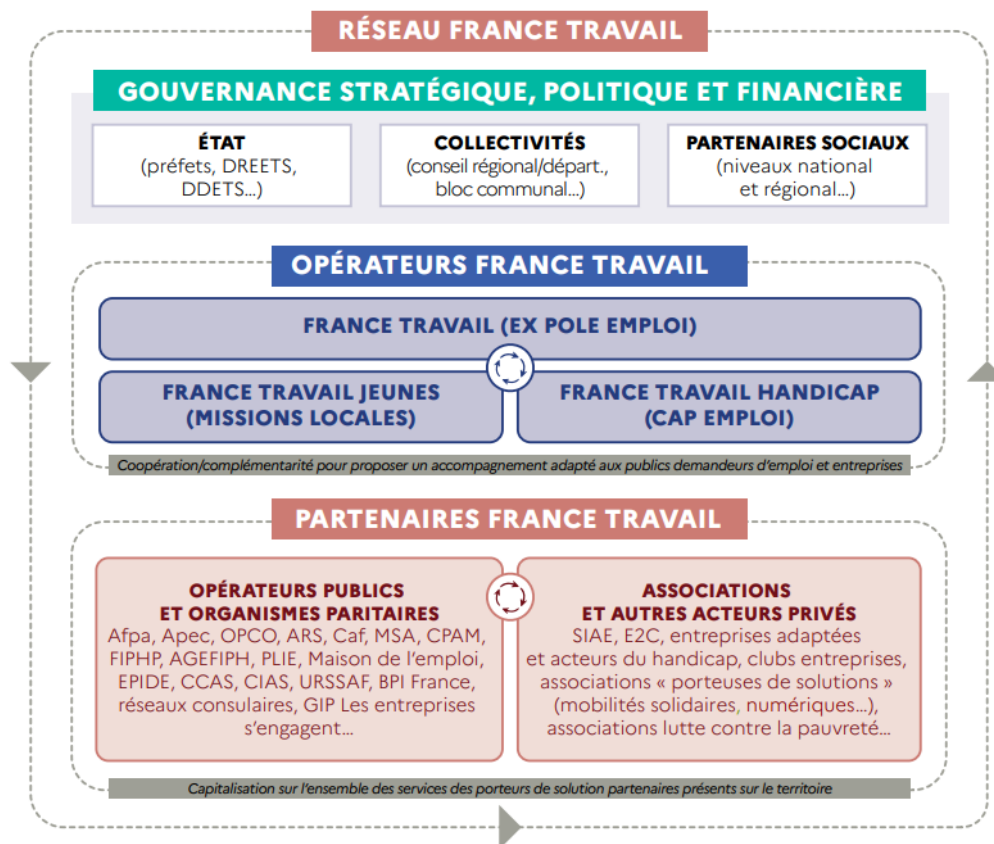
While the name of the Law of 5 September 2018 suggests that all individuals would have 'the freedom to choose' their 'professional future', the surveys of the TCR on UP attest, as do numerous other surveys, the importance of the barriers that can hinder access to pathways leading to skill development for the less qualified employed or unemployed adults.

This is the backdrop to the vast continuing project of PES reform (that should transform Pôle emploi into France Travail and set up a network for employment), which is intended to give new impetus to public action in the field of employment, i.e. to remedy the pitfalls of previous instruments. The title of [the summary report](#)

on the expected role of France Travail (issued by the High Commissioner for Employment and Business Commitment), underlines this ambition: ‘a deep change in our collective action to achieve full employment and thus enable everyone access to autonomy and dignity through work’ (April 2023). The report summarises the national and regional consultations carried out in September 2022. The proposals that are set out have been deployed over the course of 2023. They include experiments such as enhanced support for recipients of the minimum solidarity income (*Revenu de solidarité active, RSA*) managed by the Department authorities. The aim of the PES reform is to improve cooperation and provide common tools for the stakeholders involved, to simplify, streamline, maintain and optimise the pathways individuals take towards employment, as well as rendering the services for individuals and companies clearer and more effective.

The diagram below (taken from the report) illustrates a prospective representation of what the Network for employment and France Travail could look like.

Figure 2. **Prospective representation of the Network for employment to be reproduced at national and territorial levels**



Source: Adapted from « Rapport de synthèse de la concertation de la mission de préfiguration de France Travail » (April 2023).

It should be noted that at the time of the 'meso' phase interviews (January to June 2023), little information about the Network for employment and France Travail was available. Most of the stakeholders who were interviewed were uncertain about it and expressed a great deal of uncertainty, some of them even worrying, about its impact on their respective organisations and roles.

At the same time, the current situation of 'almost full employment', as characterised by most of the stakeholders, echoes, at different levels, the reasserted political choices. As far as the Region and Department authorities ⁽²⁶⁾ are concerned, this situation of 'almost full employment' has led to a focus on the less qualified and those furthest from employment, while those within employment are said to have benefited from the economic recovery. For example, the Government wishes to strengthen RSA recipient support in accessing or returning to employment by adding a requirement of 15 to 20 hours a week filled with specific activities ⁽²⁷⁾. It builds on the Public Service for Integration and Employment (SPIE) experiment, which was itself based 'on the conviction that only access to employment can provide a lasting route out of poverty', with the underlying assumption that 'everyone is employable' ⁽²⁸⁾.

At the time of the 'meso' surveys, the stakeholders in the labour market integration-training-employment ecosystem were operating in a particular economic climate and in a shifting political and institutional context; this was characterised by the upturn in the labour market and the sharp increase in training provision in the light of increased funding brought about by the PIC, the monetisation of the Personal training account (*Compte personnel de formation* - CPF) and the measures in the Recovery plan for the French economy. This was coupled with the uncertainties about how this funding would evolve over time, as well as the prospect of setting up of France Travail and the Network for employment, and how the next Regional contract plans for the development of vocational training and guidance (CPRDFOP) ⁽²⁹⁾ for the period 2023-27 would be defined. This has led to a questioning of how to support less qualified people and respond to the recruitment shortages of certain economic sectors.

⁽²⁶⁾ French sub-regional territorial entities (NUTS level 3).

⁽²⁷⁾ The testing of 'reinforced support' for RSA recipients is part of the PES reform. It began in 2023, with 18 volunteer Departments, for a period of 2 years. Depending on the results of the monitoring and evaluation of the test, the idea is to extend it as part of the implementation of PES reform.

⁽²⁸⁾ Jean Bassères, General Director of Pôle emploi.

⁽²⁹⁾ The CPRDFOP (*Contrat de plan régional de développement des formations et de l'orientation professionnelles*) is a multi-year strategy that defines the implementation of the regional vocational guidance and training policies.

This political, economic and social context is apparent at various levels for those involved in supporting the less qualified individuals or those who are furthest from employment, and is illustrated in each section in this chapter.

- (a) The first part deals with the issues of identifying and 'reaching out' to the less qualified adults and shows how financial and regional considerations influence the way in which organisations deal with these issues. This is in parallel with the context of economic recovery, which is structurally changing the type of target population supported, and the consequences of successive crises that have weakened the situation of those furthest from employment (Section 2.3).
- (b) The second part deals with companies, revealing the issues linked to their involvement in upskilling pathways and the impact of so-called 'shortage' sectors on support for career plans and professional development of less skilled adult employees or those furthest from employment (Section 2.4).
- (c) The third part looks at the question of career pathways, how they can be seamless ⁽³⁰⁾ and how they can be maintained. This concept, which is very much in the public eye, is linked to the notions of individualisation and tailoring to the individual ⁽³¹⁾ (see Annex 1 for the definition of the main terms). It is also viewed through the prism of a paradigm shift: training courses aimed at acquiring a level of qualification giving way to a pathway based on smaller modules and progressive stages. This is done according to the skills needs of individuals, with, in addition, a growing call to meet the labour needs of sectors and occupations experiencing recruitment shortages ⁽³²⁾ (Section 2.5).
- (d) The fourth part deals with the human resources (HR) issues, illustrating on the one hand the market logics that impact HR management in services and schemes providers; and, on the other, the professionalising of the HR providing UP support, which are undergoing radical change because of changes in the target population but also of reforms and public policies (Section 2.6).
- (e) The fifth part is devoted to the question of funding, and how the policies developed in favour of employment and how the institutional changes create

⁽³⁰⁾ A seamless pathway is one in which the sequence of stages and components is fluid, interlinked and progressive in nature, and avoids interruptions and gaps in the process.

⁽³¹⁾ Individualisation refers to the idea that the individual is placed at the heart of the organisational arrangements, as the starting point and reference point for the stages and components of the pathway. Tailoring to the individual refers to a more qualitative approach that considers their characteristics and uniqueness, their situation and pathway, to adapt the help, support, etc. that is specific to each pathway.

⁽³²⁾ 'Most sectors are currently experiencing recruitment difficulties: jobs with a high or very high level of recruitment shortages account for two-thirds of employees'.

- differences in funding methods that have an impact on the stakeholders involved (Section 2.7).
- (f) The final part looks more specifically at public policies, illustrating the challenges in terms of coordination and networking among the various stakeholders involved in supporting adults with fewer qualifications or who are furthest from employment, as well as governance issues affected by top-down reforms and policy guidelines (Section 2.8).

Specific clarifications (in the form of boxes) relating to issues raised during the first phase of the survey ('micro' level) are used to illustrate the analysis of these themes.

2.3. Identifying and reaching out to the less qualified adults

The findings from the field phase show that the issues in identifying and the practices of 'reaching out' are very different depending on the target populations (unemployed or in employment) and are presented in turn.

2.3.1. Reaching out to the less qualified unemployed adults: positives and negatives

The 'outreach' approach originated in the field of social work. While there is no established definition of the term, it encompasses the idea of reaching out to people and their needs, without waiting for a request to be expressed. In this mode of functioning, the personnel involved in UP activities may go out to meet people in their own environment to provide support and help. Contacts can also be made by telephone, email or social networks, or through intermediaries.

Under the impetus of the Skill investment plan (PIC) and the economic recovery, social welfare practices increasingly penetrate training and employment areas of public action, as those furthest from employment and the less qualified are also among the poorest⁽³³⁾. An analysis of the interviews confirms this dynamic which also emerges from different approaches in terms of action. However, this shift towards actively approaching the target population is not generalised and systematically integrated into the methods of intervention of all stakeholders.

⁽³³⁾ '82% of poor individuals have no more than a baccalaureat diploma and almost a third have no qualifications at all. The poverty rate for people with no qualifications is twice as high as for those with a 3-year higher education diploma' (Observatoire des inégalités, Data, April 2023).

Practices based on proximity and partnership on the rise

Going toward the target population engenders a twofold proximity: physical and also relational. It means working 'elsewhere' and 'differently' (Ott, 2018). The change takes place in the development of empowerment: from working 'on' the target population to working 'with' the target population. The paradigm for this type of action is based, among other elements, on the acceptance of a risk of 'mismatch between professional workers' perceptions of the intervention priorities and those of the individuals they support' (Boehm, Staples, 2002), as well as 'the existence of a significant gap between the concrete reality individuals experience and the support structure available to them' (Côté *et al.*, 2002). The current priority group for support does not always align with the primary target of stakeholders in the ecosystem. The necessary conditions were not consistently in place to facilitate the specified target population's access to qualifications, even though obtaining such qualifications may have appeared to be a desirable solution to their problems. Individuals generally prioritise other concerns such as financial insecurity, health, housing, and various constraints like mobility and childcare, which are identified as social obstacles hindering their access to training. Funding from the PIC and the economic upturn have helped to ensure that this group is considered more widely. As a result, there has been a shift in the public policy approach to access to training. Some of the stakeholders interviewed see their practices as more proactive.

The emphasis on proximity revolves around providing interventions in the immediate living environments, specifically targeting individuals who are off the radar of public initiatives: the so-called 'invisible' population. A few examples of such initiatives are: the transformation of a former industrial complex into a training centre (observed in PACA region); information on what is on offer at the charity organisation *Restos du cœur* ⁽³⁴⁾ in BFC region and sport at the foot of apartment blocks in NA region.

Some practices are based on improving finding those who have 'disappeared'. For example, one Department introduced a new statistical tool to identify individuals who were no longer registered at PES and were also no longer monitored by the social services. This involved recruiting staff specifically for this task, as well in-depth use of RSA recipient lists or lists of long-term jobseekers ⁽³⁵⁾

⁽³⁴⁾ Les Restos du cœur is a non-profit organisation recognised as being of public utility. Its aim is to provide help (particularly food aid) to the most disadvantaged individuals.

⁽³⁵⁾ A practice known as 'scrape the bottom of the barrel' for individuals who have been registered as job seekers for many years.

that advisers no longer see. It also involved using social networks, or word-of-mouth (particularly in rural areas), or even peer-to-peer sponsoring ⁽³⁶⁾.

People empowerment can also be a lever. Some departments are testing the practice of appointments voluntarily taken by the individuals themselves to replace notification by offices and move away from the directive approach. One region is testing self-registration in upskilling/reskilling activities, without any PES intermediation.

For most of the regions, local partnership is a lever. One example is to ensure the permanence of a PLIE ⁽³⁷⁾ contact person in social centre premises. One other example is to build synergies between *Pôle emploi* and the Department to offer at the same venue (usually a *Pôle Emploi* local agency) employment and social integration counselling. A third example is the organisation of local job fairs or events under the joint support of the regional authority and *Pôle Emploi*. One partnership has been set up by one regional authority with temporary employment agencies, with the institutions dedicated to the disabled individuals (Agefiph ⁽³⁸⁾ and *Cap Emploi*), and with other stakeholders in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. All these initiatives illustrate a partnership approach. However, a form of competition may also arise.

Scheme providers competing for beneficiaries

The departments are struggling to reach out to discouraged RSA recipients, as are PES ⁽³⁹⁾ stakeholders to guide jobseekers through an extensive and ever-changing range of upskilling and training activities. Providers implementing public funded schemes operate below their capacity in terms of number of supported beneficiaries, thus risking losing public funding. In the light of this situation, the providers involved may tend to protect and promote their own internal initiatives and schemes, before considering linking up with others.

In this way, 'outreach' can be a strategy of scheme providers to safeguard their portfolio of activities (guidance and other non-financial support, training) and their human resources. Competition between provider organisations may take

⁽³⁶⁾ Trainee accompanying a family member or close friend to an information meeting.

⁽³⁷⁾ Pluriannual local programmes for social integration and employment (PLIE), co-financed by the European Social Fund (see Table 1).

⁽³⁸⁾ Association for the Management of Funds for work Integration of Disabled Individuals (*Association de Gestion du Fonds pour l'Insertion Professionnelle des Personnes Handicapées*).

⁽³⁹⁾ PES have the power to issue a formal act of 'referral' which validates a jobseeker's skill development plan, offers the proposition of enrolment in a specific upskilling scheme, and triggers the resources and financial aid made available to the jobseeker to carry out the plan.

precedence over the principles of cooperation. This means that one organisation's target group could also be a target for another organisation. The proliferation of scheme providers in a particular geographic area is attributed to the availability of public funds through PIC/PRICs programmes (Section 2.7). Simultaneously, a contextual decline in individuals seeking assistance from the Public Employment Service (PES) and a heightened emphasis on expeditious return to work, achieved by minimising the time spent on training, contribute to this competitive landscape.

The surveys reveal that, in some circumstances, scheme providers are withdrawn into themselves despite opening up to partnership (see above). In this context, some stakeholders expect that PES reform and the discussions around the next Regional contract plans for the development of vocational training and guidance (Section 2.2) will perhaps lead to greater complementarity.

Competition between schemes and subregional territories characteristics

In the BFC region, competition between Pôle emploi and DAQ 2.0 schemes is notably more pronounced in rural areas, where there are more available places in support schemes than potential beneficiaries to cover them. In these contexts, Pôle Emploi could be less eager to refer individuals to DAQ 2.0. This dynamic has led to challenges hindering DAQ 2.0 providers from meeting quantitative targets set by the regional authority. In response, DAQ 2.0 advisers in rural areas have adopted alternative strategies, including reaching out and independently recruiting target populations, such as by directly contacting unemployed individuals at their homes or outside supermarkets. Conversely, in towns and urban areas within the same region, no competition between the schemes has been documented. DAQ 2.0 beneficiaries in urban settings enjoy ample opportunities, and the portfolio of individuals benefiting from DAQ 2.0 is substantial. In this configuration, DAQ 2.0 outreach action is less mobilised, and referral, particularly from the PES, is sufficiently effective. Thus, it appears that people in rural and urban areas experience different settings for access upskilling pathways, which are influenced by stakeholders' interactions on the ground.

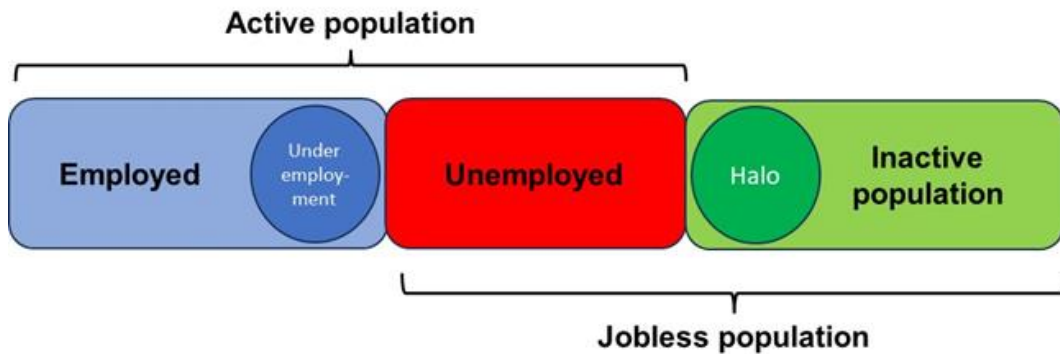
This observation, based on surveys in the BFC region, needs to be nuanced for the other regions. In urban areas, 'outreach' may need to be reinforced, particularly for those target populations living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Practices may differ because of the density of service provision (high or low) regardless of the rural or urban nature of the locality.

Highs and lows of reaching out to the 'invisibles'

The stakeholders interviewed noted that the increase in the number of individuals available within the target population reduces competition between schemes. However, a saturated provision can reduce the search for the 'invisible' population.

The population in need is larger than that of those identified as 'unemployed': the 'invisible' population also lies within what is called unemployment halo. The diagram below illustrates this aspect ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Figure 3. **Underemployed and halo: two situations close to unemployment**



Source: www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3613533.

The inactive population, as defined by the International Labour Office, is made up of individuals without a job: either, who have looked for a job, but are not available for work (450 000 people in 2021 in France); or, who have not looked for a job, but are available for work and would like to work (841 000 people); or, who have not looked for a job and are not available for work, but would like to work (660 000 people). This means that 2 million people in France were in the unemployment halo in 2021 ⁽⁴¹⁾. Given the scale of this phenomenon, the PIC made it one of its major issues.

Approaches to 'reaching out' to the less qualified and unemployed adults that are furthest from employment are being adopted by several stakeholders. This has contributed to the opening of the training-employment ecosystem. The practices differ in terms of their diversity and local adaptation, but they are based on common principles (geographic and relational proximity, cooperation between stakeholders, empowerment of individuals). However, the efforts to 'reach out' to less qualified and unemployed adults who are furthest from employment are sometimes hindered by two main factors.

- (a) Over-investment due to financial opportunities: some stakeholders may be excessively focused on these outreach practices because of the potential financial benefits or funding available for such initiatives. The emphasis on financial opportunities may lead to a disproportionate allocation of resources

⁽⁴⁰⁾ The underemployed population holding short-term or part-time job contracts (by choice or not) is another category that has received little attention (see below).

⁽⁴¹⁾ INSEE Références (2022). [Halo autour du chômage et sousemploi](#).

- to these practices, possibly at the expense of other important aspects of support for the target population.
- (b) Impeded by a plethora of service provision: the existence of numerous support services and initiatives targeting the less qualified and unemployed adults may hinder the effectiveness of these outreach practices. The abundance of service providers may lead to confusion, duplication of efforts, and a lack of coordination among stakeholders. This plethora of services may make it difficult for the target population to navigate and access the most appropriate support for their specific needs, ultimately impeding the success of the outreach efforts.

2.3.2. Awareness-raising among the low-qualified employed is difficult

For unemployed adults, the issues of information, mobilisation, identification of the less qualified groups, including the so-called 'invisible', are explicitly included in policy guidelines and benefit from dedicated financial resources. The same does not apply for the employed adults.

Constant reforms lead to a loss of reference points

The interviewees all agree that there is a lack of clarity and visibility in the vocational training ecosystem for employees. A succession of reforms and upheavals caused by the most recent one (2018) have left their mark. These changes have contributed to instability and confusion for both the target populations and professionals. The 2018 reform introduced many changes: new providers, revisions in scopes of activities, creation of schemes or changes in them, changes to the funding system. There were also the short-term measures taken to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The resulting 'increase in providers', 'scattering of services' and occasional 'overlap' have led to a loss of reference points, a scattering of information, and even overexposure to service supply from a variety of providers. What is more, time was needed for certain actors to adapt (and sometimes even 'turn the page' on former roles) before they could initiate and adjust their information and communication activities.

These changes appear to service providers as fully top-down guidelines. They have become 'executors *stricto sensu*' who apply 'top-down roadmaps' and are dependent on the budgets allocated to them (Section 2.6). Each budget corresponds to a scheme, and the actors receiving the specific funds develop their information and communication activities in line with these predetermined frameworks. It is, therefore, more a question of promoting and deploying schemes (within the limits of their budgets). This seems to run contrary to the idea of

reaching out to the target population and working with them to identify skills and qualification needs to offer tailored pathways.

Little direct access to the less qualified employees in the private sector

The interviews also revealed a general lack of financial and human resources to carry out in-depth information and communication campaigns and apply proactive approaches to target populations. These target populations are not necessarily employees (and consequently the less qualified among them), but companies. In this case, reaching out to employees appears to be indirect and/or intermediated (Section 2.4).

When providers' 'generic contacts' are companies, it is employers, human resources managers and even middle managers who are approached. It is up to them to relay the information to their employees (or not), to take advantage of the tools and services on offer (or not), and to convert the HR support they are eligible to receive into upskilling initiatives for their employees (or not). It is also through meetings (with occupational branches or within the Regional Committees for employment, vocational training and guidance framework, for example) that the service providers pass on information to representatives of employer organisations and employee unions. However, it is pointed out that this information is not systematically disseminated, and employees are not always approached. 'So, we have to deal with relay organisations, intermediaries and representatives, to whom we pass on information and explain things. We always find that, in the end, the final potential beneficiaries don't get the information, or that it's too complicated to encourage them, and so on. After all, I think that since I've been working in this field, I've always heard the same thing' (DREETS). Communication at employee level must pass through the screen of HR departments; they have to 'be in a positive frame of mind about employees' professional development' (CEP adviser).

Other issues arise concerning company awareness. It takes a significant amount of time and effort in the field to convince companies, especially smaller ones, to seek support beyond basic assistance (which often relates to financial or recruitment issues). The challenge lies in persuading these companies to benefit from guidance 'through the HR process, while also making them responsive to employment law regulations and training rights.' (OPCO 1). 'It's more a matter of the adviser making individual contact with the company and providing information on the added value of the existing offer in terms of social, economic and financial impact, and that's the only way we can reach people with low skill levels. And that takes time' (OPCO 2). It also requires human resources. 'In other words, we continue to make individual appointments in companies, but when you have 26,000 companies to visit in a region, with a team of 23 people, i.e. the marketing force to

reach the companies, you understand that it's not possible'. (OPCO 2). These issues are greater for SMEs: 'everyone is hitting a brick wall on how to do it; we can't go and see all the existing SMEs' (CEP adviser).

In recent years, a network of career transitions support advisers (DARP), run by the DREETS, was set up. Its aim is to contact and support companies, with priority given to very small businesses (VSEs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The network seems, however, to have only a limited reach given the scale of the challenge. It should find its place in relationship to the other stakeholders and should demonstrate its complementarity rather than its overlap, as well as dealing with limited resources (only one officer per each Department authority) and an uncertain timeframe (it is not sure to function beyond 2023).

Finding the right contact person within the company (particularly in smaller companies), establishing a relationship of trust, raising awareness, as well as arguing the case for and supporting companies on HR and training issues, are essential to get companies 'on board'. This leads companies to look beyond their short-term problems (recruitment shortage, staff turnover) and getting their employees 'on board' with upskilling programmes. These efforts to reach out to companies and their needs, as well as to encourage them (and indirectly to encourage employees, especially the less qualified) require time, means and human resources. However, these conditions seem not to be met at the time of the review.

Most interviewees felt that their organisations lack the necessary human resources and financial means to deploy effective strategies aimed at improving the visibility of their services and raising awareness of their upskilling schemes. This limitation in resources hinders their ability to address the issue of non-use by certain groups, which often stems from a lack of knowledge about the existence of these schemes or the conditions for accessing them. For example, employees on fixed-term contracts may not take advantage of the Professional transition project (PTP) even if they are eligible.

Developing and maintaining close relationships with companies, which ultimately enables reaching out to employees as well, also leads to a potential increase in the number of requests for support. Consequently, the dissemination of information and approaches to target populations are calibrated according to the limits of funding and the resources available to respond to these requests.

In an attempt to counterbalance the lack of resources, the service providers rely increasingly on digital means of communications for the general public, and on the joint organisation of events (e.g. webinars, forums). These collaborative initiatives, as well as pooling resources, also help to build bridges between the different instruments offered by the different actors and illustrate possible

complementarities among them. While these initiatives appear to be interesting and appreciated by participants, they remain small in scale and attract mainly the most aware public. Other initiatives illustrate a desire to widen networks and forge links with stakeholders who can play a relay role for employees' (work) lives (for example, occupational medicine, social workers).

Some stakeholders admit to being 'inexperienced' in actively engaging with employers. Their scope having changed after the reform, they are no longer clearly identified and reached out to by their target populations. Today, they strive to find the right way to inform and communicate, with limited resources and a feeling of uncertainty about their future. They fluctuate between focusing on the present, on their redesigned scope of action, or capitalising on their experience/past.

CEP service relevance for private sector employees widely acknowledged

The new version of the CEP service for private sector employees exists within an ecosystem in constant flux. The analysis from the 'micro' phase, confirmed by stakeholders interviewed during the 'meso' phase, reveals a general lack of knowledge about the service, a lack of visibility of the new providers of the service (especially when the links between the CEP service and the primary activity of the providers delivering it are not apparent), and a lack of comprehensive understanding of the service among both employees and companies. However, all the interviewees praised the efforts made by the CEP service providers in terms of geographic coverage, as well as communication initiatives and partnership approaches. This progress has led to an increase in the use of the service.

Not all interviewees agree with the new shaping of the CEP service introduced by the reform, but they are unanimous in recognising the importance of the existence of CEP. They also agree on the need to expand the dissemination of information, which is currently deemed too restricted. They recognise the importance of ensuring that the information reaches a more extensive audience or is made available in a more widespread manner and of improving access to CEP (which is still too limited and mainly linked to job transition projects outside the company). The stakeholders are calling for support from the State to achieve this, including:

- (a) a large national communication campaign, like the one carried out for the Individual training account. This would lend support to provider initiatives at the regional level, 'it's such a fundamental right that the State should also put some money into communication at national level ';
- (b) an increase in the budget allocated to the CEP for private sector employees. This would be in line with the expansion of use of this service.

Box 3. 'Micro' phase issues on the scope and perception of the CEP scheme

The 'micro' phase of the survey analysed the scope of the CEP service, particularly the extent to which potential beneficiaries acknowledge its guidance and support-advice components. The service aims to help individuals progress within their company and job, improve and develop their skills, and reflect on their professional pathway. However, this comprehensive understanding of the CEP service remains uncommon among employees and companies.

The 'meso' phase of the survey highlighted the strong involvement of CEP providers in developing the visibility of the service by emphasising all its facets.

Stakeholders agree on the importance of increasing the involvement of companies, along with occupational branches and OPCOs, in promoting the service. Companies have a crucial role in guiding and assisting their employees, particularly those who are less qualified. These employees often find it more challenging to plan their career paths and benefit from initiatives such as the CEP service. There is also a need to strengthen the links between the CEP service and companies' HR strategies, highlighting the positive effects that the CEP service can have in supporting and developing human resources activities.

Source: Cedefop.

Determining the terms and conditions of the cooperation with companies raises new questions. How can the principles of the CEP service (neutrality, confidentiality) be preserved if companies are involved more closely in the provision of services to employees? How should the CEP service fit in relation to company HR and recruitment prerogatives? Within CEP provider organisations, at what levels should relationships with companies be developed (CEP regional consortia level, management level, advisor level)?

CEP provider efforts to sensitise companies (phone campaigns, brochures explaining all the situations for which the CEP service can be used) and social partners, complement a whole range of activities undertaken since the service inception to raise public awareness. Such activities aim to get closer to the target populations: increase easy access ('less than 30 km or less than 30 minutes from their place of work or home') and availability (including extended opening hours) to employees; foster the development of 'institutional partnerships' (for example, with the ATPro, OPCOs, Pôle Emploi, Cap Emploi), 'national level partnerships' (for example, with the French Ministry of Employment) and 'local level partnerships' (for example, with 'training and skills assessment organisations, organisations delivering support for self-entrepreneurship, social-occupational health structures'; with regional local information centres (ERIP) in the NA region, and Cités des métiers (job information centres) in the PACA region. There are also 'media campaigns', i.e. TV, radio, information on food bags, [...] Lots of internet, lots of flyers, in short, a large variety of promotional activities' (CEP provider).

Box 4. **'Micro' phase issues on access to information by less qualified employees**

There is no 'specific targeting of less qualified employees' since the CEP service is open to all employees and self-employed individuals. According to one interviewee, there is no need to define specific strategies for this group. Moreover, there is a lack of precise information about less qualified employees within the overall employee population, making it difficult to set up dedicated initiatives: 'In other words, not only do we lack specific actions aimed at these groups, but I think we also lack an analysis of the reasons why we should undertake specific measures. Personally, I don't know why communication for the public does not sufficiently reach the less qualified.'

However, another representative suggests that lower access to less qualified employees needs to be put into perspective. Various sections of the population have been reached through multi-faceted communication efforts and partnerships at the local level. 'We haven't set up any specific initiatives for the less skilled. However, this group is represented in our annual statistics.'

Source: Cedefop.

The CEP providers insist on the need for the CEP service to be continued over a long period of time. This is so that the 'phenomenal work' undertaken since 2020 is not wiped out when the contract for the provision of the CEP service comes up for renewal. Indeed, this work is gradually producing its effects. 'It takes a very, very long time to build up, to become established, to become known and recognised. Now we're slowly starting to reap the rewards of what we were able to sow 3 or 4 years ago, and if we change everything tomorrow, we'll have to learn all over again. We're in a sector of activity that changes on a regular basis, so it's complicated to keep up with things, and if we could have continuity at least in this service, we could avoid adding to the difficulties that already exist'.

CEP service role in 'growing' occupations transitions remains undefined

CEP's contribution to career transitions towards 'growing' occupations raises questions in terms of where to put the cursor of this CEP involvement. For some stakeholders, the CEP can be a link in the guidance chain for these career transitions. This is already the case within the Transco scheme ⁽⁴²⁾ for example. The CEP could collaborate in this way, as mentioned by an OPCO representative: 'We had a meeting with the CEP and AT Pro network. And we're trying to experiment - not very successfully now –by providing information to workers who

⁽⁴²⁾ Transitions collectives or Transco is a scheme launched in 2021 and revised in 2022 by the government, with the active support of the social partners, to find collective ways of securing jobs in the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on joint action by companies, support structures and training bodies at regional level. The scheme, which is used by companies, can provide financial support for the conversion of 'vulnerable' jobs to 'growing' ones.

have resigned from their jobs and workers who are thinking about reskilling. We present them the occupations that are in short supply, the potential in terms of recruitment, and the associated training pathways’.

The attitudes of the CEP advisers are not all the same. Some mention initiating closer ties with the occupational branches on this topic: ‘There are many branches that are encountering problems with sourcing and recruitment, so they are starting to look at us differently in terms of the number of workers we can supply, and as a result they are also taking an increasing interest in us. [...] And so the deal is quite simple, it's to train us and our advisers concerning the jobs, the economic needs of the occupation branch. Because it allows us to provide a more appropriate response if necessary to the target population’. Other stakeholders insist that the CEP is not intended to influence employees to choose particular occupations or sectors, keeping with the inherent principles in the service: ‘Our principles are neutrality and impartiality. In other words, we're not going to favour one training organisation over another, and it's more or less the same principle when it comes to occupations, we're not... we're not a recruitment ground for candidates’.

Stakeholders agree on the need to make the CEP service better known to companies and to involve the latter more in its dissemination. Nevertheless, positioning of the CEP service in relation to employer practices, company HR strategies and occupations and sectors with recruitment shortages needs to be clarified (Section 2.4.2).

Temporary employment agency support for intermittent workers

Links are being increasingly forged between temporary employment agencies and PES, training providers, OPCOs, and regional authorities. These links make it possible to reach out to individuals who fluctuate between work periods and unemployment. Links with temporary employment agencies can occur on various occasions and in various ways: temporary employment agencies could liaise with support-training schemes for sourcing purposes; temporary assignments could feed into individual career paths within support and training schemes; support-training schemes could intervene between two temporary employment assignments. ‘Temporary employees, once they have finished one assignment, sometimes can't find immediately a second one and find themselves out of work for a while. Sometimes they lack the qualifications to access other assignments’, etc. ‘And the role of guidance-training schemes is to take stock of the work situation of the temporary worker who is between two assignments, to make sure that they are getting the right type of training to enable him/her to enrol on the following assignment offered by the temporary employment agency, and to monitor this over

time' (OPCO). In BFC region, closer links between the regional authority and temporary employment agencies are designed to meet better the region's employment needs. Temporary employment agencies reach out to individuals via regional integration schemes (e.g. DAQ 2.0), while at the same time people can pursue their qualification pathway by obtaining partial skills recognition (temporary employment agencies encourage qualification in blocks of skills). It is also possible for them to obtain a vocational qualification or certificate, which can ultimately help them to obtain a permanent contract.

2.4. Company issues in upskilling less qualified adults

Engaging companies in initiatives aimed at improving the skills of less qualified adults, whether jobseekers or employees, remains a significant challenge despite the efforts of scheme providers to increase their participation. The outcomes of these initiatives exhibit considerable variability, influenced by factors such as the socio-economic context of local territories and the availability and utilisation of financial incentives.

The level of a company's involvement is not solely determined by its size; another critical factor is the degree to which companies actively cultivate or neglect a culture of engagement and responsiveness to concerns related to employability and the preservation of careers for less qualified adults.

The extent of corporate involvement in these initiatives is intrinsically linked to the HR strategies adopted by companies and their explicit or implicit embrace of corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles. The active encouragement and promotion of CSR can play a pivotal role in shaping a company's commitment to these initiatives, while the neglect of CSR can hinder their engagement and impact in addressing the skill development needs of less qualified individuals.

2.4.1. Labour market recruitment shortages and implications

Recruitment issues make companies more open to engage in upskilling

The interviews indirectly touched upon the question of company motivations and needs in relation to low-skilled jobseekers, including guiding and training them through internships, on-the-job experiences, or apprenticeship programmes, and potentially recruiting them once the upskilling process is completed.

All the interviewees raised the issue of recruitment difficulties and shortages in various occupations. One of the major current trends is to attract (less qualified) jobseekers to the 'growing' occupations and to the companies which lack workforce. This is reflected in the framework to reduce recruitment shortages

launched by the Government in October 2021. Part of this framework is being implemented with the different regions and Pôle emploi via amendments to the PRICs. The framework has three main strands:

- (a) 'reinforcing upskilling, upgrading and career change for employees';
- (b) 'increasing the effort to train jobseekers to meet the needs of companies';
- (c) 'setting up a specific, large framework for long-term jobseekers' ⁽⁴³⁾.

For some of the interviewees, this policy orientation is sometimes perceived as a 'pressure' exerted by regional authorities and occupational branches. Some training / guidance organisations feel that focusing on occupations with recruitment shortages can contradict the individualised nature of career paths, so diverging from jobseeker aspirations. 'Yes, because it runs counter to what we do daily, what we advocate. We're all about individualisation'. Some CEP advisers simply state that 'we're not here to crush dreams'.

However, other stakeholders state that this policy orientation can also be an opportunity for low-skilled adults in the work integration process. The favourable economic climate and labour market trends (registered in the first half of 2023) towards full employment have led companies to shift their attention to the less qualified and/or longer-term jobseekers: 'For the first time, with recruitment shortage, there is growing interest in the individuals who are on the periphery of the labour market: young people, older people, disabled. This situation provides opportunities; it has led us to work together to open up to new partnerships' (Pôle Emploi). 'Now things have changed. Now they [employers] see that it's a way of recruiting because they're having problems recruiting, so they take us much more seriously. And we have much easier access to companies than before, because of that' (training provider).

Guidance scheme providers intensify efforts to engage companies

Scheme providers devote a lot of time in engaging and collaborating with companies. 'Something we've also introduced as a mandatory rule is work placement in company, on-the-job experiences. That's... essential! Because contact with the real world is also important. It comes at the right time, not immediately, but it must be part of the training path' (training provider). Establishing partnerships with companies is a distinct responsibility for scheme providers. At times, this task is outsourced to external partners, while in other instances a dedicated position within the organisation is created to fulfil this role. Incentives are also being set up to encourage these closer relationships with companies. This is the case, for example, with Department authorities that provide financial support

⁽⁴³⁾ [Dossier de presse - Plan de réduction des tensions de recrutement.](#)

to companies that agree to take RSA recipients in return for the time they devote to mentoring them and guiding them in the job.

According to some interviewees, the connection with companies is essential to ensure a good level of guidance for both jobseekers and companies: 'In terms of looking after groups of people, I really should change my job if I don't know the expectations of a company with over 50 employees, be it private or public, or a very small SME, if I don't have a minimum knowledge of the way they communicate, their language' (Cheops, Cap Emploi).

Some of the interviewees expect companies to be able to adapt to the less qualified jobseekers and those on the periphery of employment. However, there does not seem to be a consensus on this point. According to some interviewees, responsibility for job integration and training should be equally divided between companies and the public service, who should 'both do 50% of the work' (Department). This also prompts inquiries about the role of training organisations in facilitating the evolution of companies into 'learning-centred organisations.' As expressed by a training provider, 'We, the training organisations, have a significant stake in this matter, ensuring that training is not solely entrusted to companies.' Questions also emerge regarding the connections with companies for the purpose of accommodating trainees from the most disadvantaged groups as part of training qualification pathways.

Other stakeholders interviewed called for more consideration to be given to company constraints. 'Of course companies have a social role, but I think we're making them carry too many burdens, we're asking too many things of them, we're suffocating them' 'Their first job for the country is to produce wealth' (employers' organisation). The problem is more apparent for small organisations who rarely have an HR department. Companies should also be guided for other stakeholders. 'We need some real guidance work for companies too, for employers. Especially now. We need to put as much energy into supporting SMEs as we do in supporting jobseekers, which is not the case' (PLIE).

2.4.2. Complexity of engaging companies in upskilling

Companies often prioritise immediate HR needs over long-term upskilling initiatives

Several of the stakeholders interviewed highlighted the fact that companies appear to give less or even no thought to the question of upskilling/reskilling issues (particularly for employees with lower levels of qualification). This against a backdrop of shortages in job recruitment and changes in the funding mechanisms for vocational training (see below). Short-term issues of managing recruitment difficulties and staff turnover are becoming the main focus of companies. '... I don't

think they have perspective to... think about long-term strategy, in fact. It's the present that counts. It's the pressing issues of... the here and now'. This problem seems to be more acute in sectors experiencing job recruitment shortages. 'Because if they lose a hospital worker ⁽⁴⁴⁾ in the field, even if they gain an auxiliary nurse [through an upskilling programme], they still lose the hospital worker. So I think the shortage is such that they can't have the perspective they need. (CEP provider).

Priority given to training for a new position, or adaptation to the job

This is instead of training to acquire a higher qualification. According to several stakeholders, upskilling issues often take second place. Companies develop fewer strategies for maintaining and developing skills; one of the stakeholders interviewed even mentioned his fear that 'downskilling' and 'job loss' could increase in the long term if the trend continues. 'Companies are focused on their economic activity, productivity and profitability, and are therefore not overly worried about human resources issues, skills management and skills upgrading' (OPCO).

Institutional and financial context is less conducive to company-based upskilling for employees

Some of the stakeholders consider that the changes that have occurred since the 2018 reform work against the UP and the involvement of companies in these pathways. These changes are in the realm of management and allocation of joint vocational training funds (Section 2.7). Companies mainly focused on youth apprenticeship development strategies rather than skills development plans (SDPs) ⁽⁴⁵⁾ for employees. The reform drives companies to use more of their own resources (and above their legal obligations) to train their employees. Companies are not always able or willing to do this. The restrictions imposed by the 2018 reform to the new OPCOs in terms of collecting funds directly from companies weaken joint inter-professional action and it is regretted and pointed out as an element that does not help companies to develop tailored 'upskilling' strategies. Some OPCOs also feel that they are not able to meet the demands of companies because they act as 'technical agencies of the occupational fields'. Since each branch has its own policy guidelines and financial rules, this can complicate or

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Which is a less qualified job profile than an auxiliary nurse.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ The skills development plan is a reference document that companies develop to define training strategy, listing all the training initiatives (including compulsory ones) that they are planning for their employees. The 2018 reform entrusts the OPCOs with the task of supporting companies with less than 50 employees in defining and financing their SDP.

even block the work of the OPCOs (especially those that represent numerous occupational branches).

Companies rarely leverage CEP services to support employee upskilling and internal development

Some misunderstandings of the aims of the CEP service available to employees in the private sector curb companies' commitment to UP. In the eyes of companies this service is solely associated with possible departure of employees. 'Companies are a little cautious about the CEP, because they think it will lead to the breaking of work contracts' (OPCO 3). 'In my opinion, companies have not yet properly identified the CEP. The EVA network is not clearly identified, or at least misinterpreted. In other words, there is confusion in the minds of employers, who say to themselves: AT Pro and the CEP network are for employees, I'm going to lose my staff' (OPCO 2). 'I think they don't refer people to CEP because there's a fear that the employee will resign, or go on a training programme, I don't know. But there must be a reason that so little is happening, so little of the service in fact is used by the company' (CEP provider). Thus, the CEP rarely seems to be considered by companies as a resource enabling internal development'. There are very few companies that use CEP to upskill their employees and move them up the company ladder. That possibility is also not understood' (OPCO 2).

Effort to counter the poor perception of CEP by companies is perceived as an important issue. Such actions would help the UP for employees run more smoothly. The CEP providers would like to promote further the 'other' functions of the CEP for companies (beyond external job mobility), i.e. considering 'CEP as a consultancy role supporting the HR policies', which 'can contribute to social dialogue', or which can 'help anticipate change, identify possible internal levers'. The CEP can be an instrument to reduce work-related employer-employee conflicts, as well as a tool to raise awareness on career or upskilling opportunities. It could also facilitate the setting up and development of multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at in-company job mobility pathways for employees, including the less qualified.

Another challenge lies in overcoming the 'differences in language' and 'differences in mindsets' between HR managers and CEP advisers. The former are primarily concerned with satisfying mandatory training requirements (mostly health and safety training) and seeking better returns on investment on the residual part of training resources; the latter are focused on supporting companies to develop medium-term upskilling strategies for all employees. The fact that chambers of commerce (which represent and support private companies) are also members of

the EVA network does not seem to make this task any easier. This is because the CEP service is often deployed independently of other chamber activities ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Changes in company perceptions of the CEP could be encouraged by pooling resources among all stakeholders involved in workers upskilling development. This would contribute to all-size companies and occupational branch awareness.

For example, 'brunch events' are organised by an OPCO with Eva network members and Transitions Pro Association. Their aim is to present and remind HR managers and employers of the available career transition and upskilling instruments. This type of awareness promotion and information dissemination activities, 'works rather well' because 'these workshops are always full and there is good feedback from employers'. Nevertheless, the activities undertaken by companies to inform employees (particularly the less qualified) remains unproven. The forms of cooperation established along the companies-occupational branches-OPCO-CEP connections are still perceived as being 'too weak in relation to the existing challenges' (CEP provider).

2.5. Seamless upskilling pathway notion and practice

The concept of vocational training has changed as public policy on the subject has evolved. It was initially connected to training courses that referred to 'segments of theoretical or practical study aimed at continuing vocational training and organised within a specified learning progression' ⁽⁴⁷⁾. Since then, the concept has evolved and broadened to encompass any 'learning path to reach a professional goal' ⁽⁴⁸⁾. The inclusive nature of this definition not only covers possible teaching methods and skills development, it leads to reconsidering the nature and links between training and lifelong guidance, giving greater weight to the latter. The focus is on skills (which vary from one individual to another) rather than trades (which have identical content for all). The new approach to vocational training modifies its organisational design. It is based on providing training content in modular form, enabling progression over time, it also introduced room for new forms of content delivery (distance learning, e-platforms) and pedagogical methods (work-based

⁽⁴⁶⁾ For additional details about EVA network membership see Cedefop (2023), Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in France: key findings of the first research phase.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Law no 71-575 of 16 July 1971 on the organisation of continuing vocational training in the framework of lifelong education.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Law no 2018-771 of 5 September 2018 on the freedom to choose one's professional future.

learning, practical work, problem solving, teamwork on projects, self-reflective looks and assessment on the work done).

The pathway is thus conceived as an iterative and jointly constructed process. It involves mediation or active remediation activities, but also a more pedagogical (learning) approach to support (Beauvois, 2018, Delay & Duclos, 2017). Guidance along a personal pathway therefore includes a formative dimension. The notion of a pathway refers to a new articulation of the functions of support, career choices, guidance, and training in a flow that is intended to be seamless. It also refers to forms of empowerment, or even responsibility for individuals. This is both in the process and in the way the individuals improve their own skills. This general understanding of the pathway can be examined in terms of upskilling pathways.

The stakeholders interviewed defined 'pathways' as a series of sequences, within the same structure, or coordinated activities offered by different stakeholders. This raises a major difficulty: how to maintain these sequences. In this sense, the concept of a seamless pathway, is very much apparent. However, it does not have a common understanding. The interviewees all agree that ensuring the follow-up to each sequence is still a delicate stage; this is true for both employed and unemployed adults. The seamless nature of the pathways raises several issues. The following sections deal with issues common to both types of the target groups covered by the review.

2.5.1. Upskilling pathways: a long term, gradual process

All the stakeholders involved are calling for long-term support to help people gain qualifications and find employment. This includes (re)building confidence and removing obstacles that can hinder the progress of less qualified adults in upskilling. 'Because it's a long-term process, you cannot just say: you're a low-skilled person, tomorrow you won't be a low-skilled person. We know very well that we're going to be in this for the long haul, we're going to be guiding the person for all this time' (OPCO 1). In the same vein, the Transitions Pro stakeholders insist on the need to guide the less qualified workers so that they grasp the idea or the desire to take part in upskilling schemes. This is so that these workers overcome excluding themselves and the belief that training is not for them. In guiding the workers, guidance counsellors should also inform them, to point them in the right direction and to ensure that they can take advantage of the existing schemes.

The aim is to be able to set out the sequence of stages and define the length of guidance required, without establishing it in advance. The tailoring of pathways is one of the success factors identified by PLIE stakeholders and Cap Emploi. They, for example, provide sequenced, long-term guidance for individuals whose ability to remain in employment is threatened by health issues or inability. This is

done by reorganising their workstations or planning a retraining programme if the former is not possible.

Thinking about one's career path, building a career plan or following a training course is not something that can be taken for granted. This is particularly the case for the less qualified members of the population, i.e. those who are a long way from training and/or employment and whose career paths are sometimes not smooth. 'Training is about motivating people. And to inspire someone who is 48 years old, who, in any case for our target group, is coming out of a painful experience, either an accident or illness - and often there is a rupture in a chosen career path - you need time, and sometimes you don't have the time'. Access to training can be a real process that involves forsaking and accepting. It requires time, which those involved do not always have, or no longer have. 'And what we used to do over periods of a year, a year and a half, we are now asked to do in 6 months' (Cheops - Cap emploi).

The progressive nature of the pathway often takes time and varies from one individual to another. The progression also depends on the counsellor who is responsible for monitoring and adapting the guidance, which does not proceed in a linear manner, and can be composed by support actions situated upstream or downstream training periods.

Similarly, the bringing in of 'preparatory schemes' echoes the need for progression by setting up early stages that mark out the pathway to training and/or employment (in a seamless approach). These include 'pre-work integration bridging schemes', 'job access bridging schemes', and schemes to get RSA recipients back on board. For example, the DAQ 2.0 scheme in the BFC region and the PIC Axis 2 scheme in the PACA region, are designed as a gateway to training leading to qualifications or employment. However, the level of learning involved in some of these schemes is sometimes still too high for individuals in serious difficulty. They sometimes have no, or no longer master, social or work rules. In these cases, steppingstones seem to be required. Some stakeholders raise the issue of the excessive 'filtering' of target populations. 'Work Integration in itself is supposed to be a bridge, but here we're creating bridges to access bridges!' Moreover, the transition from one level to the next is not always smooth.

Financial considerations are sometimes the cause of less effective and less progressive pathways and lack of seamlessness. This is because organisations have a vested interest in 'filling their boxes' since the financing model is more and more based on the number of beneficiaries entering the scheme. Therefore, within the provider organisations, to ensure receiving funds individuals could be moved from one scheme to another (without real progression in the pathway). This causes 'fatigue' among the beneficiaries 'There's no point in finding a job to beneficiaries',

said one of the stakeholders interviewed. Sometimes things could go faster, and individuals could make career choices, be trained and access a job more quickly. However, this would be detrimental to the structures' financial stability.

2.5.2. Obstacles to achieving 'seamless' pathways

All interviewees expressed a vision of their guidance practices in the form of a 'pathway.' However, none mentioned a clear and shared definition.

Consequently, the coordination of schemes designed for unemployed adults remains an area requiring improvement. There is a genuine risk of individuals exiting a scheme without being able to apply promptly what they have learned, whether transitioning directly into employment or progressing to another scheme within a pathway. Some stakeholders (e.g. training organisations, PES and regional authorities) underscore the persistent challenge of providing timely training and subsequent qualifications at the conclusion of a support or bridging scheme. Delays in progressing to the next stage, sometimes as long as six months, adversely affect individual motivation. Another reason cited is the lack of communication between funders and upskilling (UP) providers regarding the objectives and potential outcomes of the schemes (incomplete information on available offers). Some Public Employment Service (PES) advisers prioritise attracting many participants to the schemes rather than focusing on the output.

According to the management of a major training organisation, achieving 'seamless' pathways is an 'illusion.' The complexity arises from random scheduling, the absence of structured links between schemes, and the emphasis on individual pathways for people with extremely diverse profiles. While some stakeholders view this complexity as an opportunity for individuals to feel comfortable at each stage before progressing, others highlight the risk of individuals becoming lost between two schemes, leading to increased distrust of institutions if the transition between stages is not adequately ensured.

Institutional stakeholders, such as regional authorities and Pôle Emploi, are exploring enhanced guidance forms to facilitate smoother transitions between stages. This may involve schemes sponsored by companies to encourage trainee recruitment. These stakeholders also focus on funding arrangements for schemes with follow-up dimensions. They aim to encourage coordination among stakeholders through regular meetings for information dissemination and improvement in the transition process based on beneficiary needs. However, some stakeholders acknowledge the difficulty of providing such guidance and coordination (Section 2.8). 'Making the right connections at the right times is like being an artist' (Cheops - Cap emploi).

For employees, the goal is to move away from the ‘fragmentation of systems’ and recreate links through cooperation and partnership among stakeholders. A manager in employment and training emphasises the need for centralised information, exemplified by the organisation in the BFC region known as ‘employment trains.’ These accessible platforms bring together training organisations, Operational Competence Operators (OPCOs), and other stakeholders in the training sector, allowing for quicker problem-solving through collaboration.

With the CEP service for private sector employees, there are mixed perceptions among stakeholders about the separation between guidance and career project funding⁽⁴⁹⁾. On the one hand it is seen as a loss in terms of seamlessness between advice giving and project funding; it is also a loss in terms of the legibility of the system and the simplicity of dealing with a single contact. On the other hand, it is seen as a gain in terms of the wide range of situations that the CEP can address, and therefore the forms of support that it can provide to employees. In such a process the CEP can take on a steering role and be the right interface, with a plurality of funding opportunities available.

In addition to adults in and out of work, there are groups with frequent switches between periods of employment and unemployment, such as seasonal and temporary workers. Pôle Emploi has addressed this issue through specific schemes⁽⁵⁰⁾, handed over to private service providers across the country. The increasing guidance for these target groups could help them access more permanent jobs (at least 6-month full-time contracts). These services aim to guide individuals in precarious situations, with the less qualified being over-represented. Initiated in July 2020 and scheduled until mid-2023, their continuation is subject to assessment at the time of the review.

A critical point raised in the ‘micro’ phase of surveys seems to be confirmed in the ‘meso’ phase. This concerns lack of permeability between the stakeholders in the ecosystem of adults in employment and the stakeholders in the ecosystem of unemployed adults; this is so despite several initiatives being launched locally to help bring them together. An example of this is an experiment in the care sector in BFC region: ‘the advantage of the scheme is that we have all sat down together,

⁽⁴⁹⁾ ATPro oversees funding professional evolution projects.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ They are set up in two different ways: either with very precise specifications and flat-rate funding, or with more room for manoeuvre left to the providers (with funding based on actual job access into employment with long-term contracts). The programmes provide intensive guidance for 3 months (plus 2 optional months), switching between individual meetings and group workshops. Flexible timetables and guidance methods aim to make it possible to adapt the programmes to people who are likely to be in work or returning to work.

jobseeker funders and employee funders, we have built a modular offer and we have helped to implement it in the local areas covered by specific learning platforms. These are interesting forms of cooperation [...] it's a bit like the idea of seamlessness, so at one point I go to the platform as a jobseeker, maybe I do the core curriculum and then I go to a company, I continue on a work contract and then I can come back as an employee for an additional module, that's it in a nutshell'. (OPCO) The issues linked with sectors having recruitment difficulties and job shortages is also a factor for possible connections between the two ecosystems.

2.5.3. Attempts to achieve seamlessness: bring stakeholders closer together and shared access to data systems

Processes and experiments are underway to bring together or even pool human resources between stakeholders. One of the challenges that goes hand-in-hand with these moves is that of being able to share information on jobseekers, particularly those experiencing social and professional difficulties. Data on different forms of support and guidance/training provision will be shared among different stakeholders (local authorities, PES, social services). Understanding the diversity of the public would make the pathways smoother for both professionals and individuals. This is one of the underlying assumptions of the ongoing PES reform ⁽⁵¹⁾.

The processes and experiments aimed at bringing together different stakeholders are mainly based on the model and experience of the partnership between Pôle Emploi and Cap Emploi (which began in 2020). This has taken concrete form in the Lieux Uniques d'Accompagnement (Single guidance places) set up within Pôle Emploi agencies. This brings together a Team TH ⁽⁵²⁾ comprising Pôle Emploi and Cap Emploi advisers. The aim is to encourage mutual working practices and complementary expertise. In operational terms, however, the partnership has come up with difficulties relating to the management of information by Pôle emploi's data system, which is not adapted to disabled individuals' situations so valuable information is lost. Improvements are required to include and track all useful information relating to disabilities and specific guidance.

The issue of data systems shared between stakeholders is also at the heart of the Public Service for Integration and Employment (SPIE) experiments. The experiments make it possible to have 'shared diagnoses' between stakeholders. This means that the individuals who are being guided do not have to repeat their

⁽⁵¹⁾ Haut-commissariat à l'emploi et à l'engagement des entreprises (2023). *Mission de préfiguration de France travail*. Rapport de la concertation.

⁽⁵²⁾ TH for *Travailleurs handicapés*, disabled workers.

story to each new person they talk to. Extranets accessible to all referrers (social/training/employment) are being created. The shared data systems contribute to building seamless pathways and the opening up the fields of intervention across the different stakeholders. However, this process also raises the question of the degree to which information can be shared amongst stakeholders: for example, some occupations, such as social workers, are subject to professional confidentiality. Social workers also need to be given access to Pôle emploi's Ouiform platform. The platform allocates jobseekers into training programmes. Access to such platforms will reinforce the role that social workers can play in guiding jobseekers into training. It will make the training process more fluid by reducing the number of intermediary stages prior to training. Some of the stakeholders who are not currently providing specific activities to promote seamless pathways say they are waiting for the PES reform to become a reality. It would lead to matching the data systems of the different stakeholders involved in the future network. It would also create country wide networks with one-stop shops for access to services.

2.6. Issues for HR management and professionals

The meso phase led to the identification of the impact of contextual changes, (e.g. social, economic or political) on human resources management within the organisations and on the relevant professionals involved in the skills development and career development of low-skilled adults: coordinators, job integration advisers, career development advisers, social workers and trainers.

First, funding methods (Section 2.7) play a crucial role, which explains the issues of competition among scheme providers and the varying degrees of pressure on organisations, as well as staff turnover *in a* context where the number of job opportunities for counselling work has been broadened, particularly through the PIC/PRIC funded schemes.

Second, there are the changes in the types of target populations, who are increasingly distant from the labour market and have more and more barriers to overcome. The employment barriers were partly related to the pandemic and economic crises, and the changes in the target population are related to the current recovery (as those who are more employable have already been integrated).

Third, there is the significant (and unanticipated) proportion of employees who are unwell at work, who present high psycho-social risks, and who are seeking services such as the CEP. There is a consensus among the various stakeholders interviewed about this development, which means for the training and career

guidance professions to be equipped with additional competences in psychology or backed by professional expertise on work-related suffering.

At the same time, we note the effects of recent laws, reforms and political guidelines (Section 2.6.2), which tend both to weaken the core tasks and expertise of the teams, but also to blur the boundaries of the fields of competence of the various actors, with a view to pooling or even homogenising practices towards comprehensive support around a single objective: full employment (ongoing PES reform).

2.6.1. Funding impact on the management of human resources

PIC/PRIC funding has significantly broadened the range of upskilling pathways available to low-skilled jobseekers, increasing competition between organisations delivering guidance and training services. Alongside the traditional training organisations operating in an area, new actors have emerged who have obtained national or regional funding (Section 2.7).

There have also been changes in managing guidance schemes for the employed. The institutional changes brought about by the 2018 reform had the effect of redefining and redistributing the tasks (guidance, funding, awareness actions, training) among old and new stakeholders, resulting in departures, losses and transfers of staff from one actor to another. The effect of the 5-year life cycle of the contract for the provision of the CEP service managed by France Compétences and the reform of the vocational professional transitions and reskilling schemes will no doubt continue to have an impact on the organisation of these structures, delivering upskilling services for workers and their teams.

Providers struggle with high turnover

For both employees and jobseekers, there seems to be a recurring turnover of counsellors, advisers and trainers. The phenomenon can be explained by the coexistence of different actors, but also by the precarious nature of staff contracts, which run for the duration of the funding agreement signed between the service provider organisation and the public funder and do not allow for a permanent position, forcing professionals to change organisations or institutions quite frequently. 'So the turnover is imposed on us by the precariousness of the schemes and agreements with funders. But as soon as we have a permanent agreement, there's no turnover' (Upskilling provider).

For the organisations specialised in helping people who are farthest away from employment, the difficulties in providing adapted support and the level of competence required are not always commensurate with the remuneration. For example, for the Local plans for integration and employment (PLIE), this seems to be a recent problem, due in part to the post-Covid era. 'A counsellor isn't paid very

well, but he's got a bachelor's degree or higher, so he has a choice. They do the job for one year and then they find something better. And these are difficult jobs. The CIP (vocational integration counsellor) teaches them a few things, but certainly not [enough]. In other words, being in contact with a jobseeker, having the right distance, the right posture, not letting yourself be fooled, it's complicated. There are people who suffer because of this and they suffer very quickly. So, we really need to invest [...] in terms of training, and ideally in terms of pay, but that's just wishful thinking at the moment'.

With the enlargement of the guidance and training market and the arrival of a plurality of service providers, trainers/advisers have had more choice in their recruitment opportunities. HR from certain public bodies, such as Cap Emploi, with expertise in working with people with disabilities, and thus recognised as such on the market, can be recruited by other bodies based on their recognised qualifications and the skills they have acquired through experience, particularly their knowledge of all the assistance and schemes available to employees and jobseekers. The same applies to PES counsellors, which are witnessing this flight of advisers to the more lucrative private sector. '(...) Some of them have been there for 20 years, so there is a certain loyalty. Except that the job market is in shortage for advisers too, so we're losing quite a few advisers, so it's becoming complicated, but I think it's really due to the job market' (Cheops - Cap emploi).

As far as the CEP service for those employed in the private sector is concerned, the lack of reference frameworks for the CEP advisor profession (Section 2.6.2) combined with the difficulty of anticipating workload makes HR management complex for the structures, some of whom say they are having 'difficulty in recruiting, and difficulty in maintaining staff'. Finding candidates with a profile that can match with CEP and professionalising them represents an investment that not all structures can afford, given the uncertainty surrounding the renovation of the 5-year fixed term agreement with France Competences to deliver CEP service. When recruitment does take place, it is often on temporary or fixed-term contracts, which does not necessarily help to stabilise human resources.

Organisations cooperate to optimise use of human resources

There may also be new forms of 'pooling' of the counselling function between several organisations that previously operated independently. This is the case, for example, with the sort of merger of CAP emploi and Pôle emploi, which has led to a restructuring of support for disabled jobseekers. Depending on their situation, jobseekers will be able to be referred within Pôle emploi towards an appropriate support programme, without this being outsourced exclusively to CAP emploi. This has also enabled skills sharing between Pôle emploi advisers (specialising in job

integration) and Cap emploi advisers (specialising in disability). This configuration is also present in certain training organisations where trainers are pooled on the same site for the same upskilling scheme. Actors such as the Cités des métiers, which benefit from the secondment of advisers from the Pôle emploi, Mission Locale, and Eva network agencies, also rely on the pooling of HR resources from several structures. On the one hand, it allows them to receive all types of beneficiary groups and to refer them in the best possible way; on the other hand, it encourages mutual professionalisation at the level of the advisers and then indirectly at the level of their respective organisations.

For other stakeholders, particularly on the employee side, optimising HR and seeking closer ties with other actors are necessary to counterbalance the fragmentation of interventions brought about by the 2018 reform, and the reduction in staff specific to each stakeholder. 'We try to compensate for this lack of time [...] by working in partnership, [...] the rest we outsource, we entrust to other organisations that will be able to complement our work and help us to make projects a success' (OPCO 2). But, 'once it's external, it's immediately more complicated, despite the will on both sides, we're not going to spend our time seeing each other' (OPCO 1).

2.6.2. Changing roles of professionals

The role and tasks of professionals providing advice and guidance to low-qualified adults are being reshaped by two significant macro factors. Firstly, there is a policy-driven shift towards delivering personalised and comprehensive support following the pathway approach. This transformation recognises the unique needs and circumstances of everyone, necessitating a tailored and holistic approach to guidance. Second, the changing profiles of potential beneficiaries are influencing the evolution of the advisory profession. As the diverse backgrounds and experiences of low-qualified adults become more apparent, advisors must adapt their strategies and techniques to cater to a wide range of needs. The convergence of these two factors is leading to a profound transformation in the profession of advisors. Consequently, advisors now exhibit various profiles and come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. This shift raises important questions about the boundaries of the profession and the skills and competences required to navigate this new landscape effectively.

2.6.2.1. Policy-driven changes in professions

There is a shift from a traditional, top-down approach, with the same content given to everyone (among professionals who come from training backgrounds) to an approach using a more horizontal pedagogical relationship based on individualised

guidance, depending on each person's skills. 'So the trainer is more a relationship manager, a facilitator, a mediator, than a know-it-all. Knowledge is accessible now; you can get everything you want on your phone. So, you need someone to guide you in how to find the information and where to find it, rather than giving it to you. So, we're working on this so that we can then put people enrolled into this scheme, in this vision of things. I'm all the more aware of this because we can see that the content of [traditional] training for trainers is out of step with what is now expected of a trainer. The profession is changing fast. In other words, when you develop a scheme, it has an impact on the trainers' (Upskilling provider).

There is tension between the generalisation and specialisation of support between professionals with the posture of 'old-style' trainers, specialists in their field, and 'new generation' professionals with the posture of trainers-counsellors, who must be adaptable to each case and each situation and who are sometimes regarded as 'trainers of nothing' by their specialist counterparts. This can lead to a lack of recognition for some, especially in the case of specialist trainers who have been asked to become more adaptable. For the latter, the whole meaning of their profession has been turned upside down.

CEP advisors have various profiles and very different backgrounds

With the 2018 law, the professional development advice function was taken out of the former FONGECIFs (which became Transition Pro) ⁽⁵³⁾. The CEP service is now mandated to be delivered by private actors selected by France Compétences ⁽⁵⁴⁾ In the three regions studied, the Interinstitutional centres for skills assessments – *Centres interinstitutionnels de Bilans de compétences* (CIBC) ⁽⁵⁵⁾ are the mandated organisations which, along with their fellow contractors, deliver the CEP service and form the Eva networks ⁽⁵⁶⁾. The CEP, as a new remit for the EVA networks members, has required adaptations to their

⁽⁵³⁾ The FONGECIF, inter-professional joint bodies, were created in 1983 to help employees access training and progress in their professional environment. They were replaced in 2020 (following the 2018 reform) by the Transition pro associations.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ For more details, see the Cedefop report on the 'micro' phase available at: [Thematic country review on upskilling pathways for low-skilled adults in France](#).

⁽⁵⁵⁾ CIBC were created in 1986 on a Ministry of Labour initiative to accompany public policies in employment and vocational training. As the name suggests, the CIBC have historically developed an expertise related to the competence assessment scheme. However, they have progressively extended their mission and methods towards career choice, guidance and lifelong vocational training. Today, not only do they deliver the competence assessment scheme and CEP services, but also services linked to validation of prior learning or the Cléa certification.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ As a reminder, the Eva networks are made up of a wide range of players: CIBCs, consular chambers, professional integration organisations.

structures, organisation and staffing. While some of them have chosen to hire advisers entirely dedicated to the CEP, this is not the case for most of them for financial reasons, as the CEP is not yet profitable enough. As a result, CEP services are delivered by personnel with various profiles of advisers from very different backgrounds⁽⁵⁷⁾, which has raised questions from the outset about the training and skills development of the advisers. 'We don't have a [common] reference framework, we don't have the RNCP [a standard from the National registry for vocational certifications] on this. We need to set up training. [...] But it takes 3 months for a CEP advisor to become truly operational. And the time needed for professionalisation is extremely important' (CEP provider).

As there are no job standards for the CEP advisor, the specifications of France Compétences call for tenders currently provide the framework for its function⁽⁵⁸⁾. As a result, most organisations have opted to hire advisers who already have experience in guidance and support under other schemes and for other target groups. In BFC region, the Eva network published a 'reference guide' for career development counselling, detailing the best practices of CEP counsellors (in parallel with France Compétences specifications). The guide contains several hints on the role of the adviser, who must be 'a facilitator who takes different postures', such as that of 'teacher/educator', 'adviser/mediator', 'support' for the individual, 'regulator', reference point, or 'information assembler'. 'The role of the adviser is to put people on their own path, by helping them to make informed decisions, by mobilising their power to act, by offering them a support framework enabling them to find answers about their place, here and now, and their development, within a complex and changing environment' (CEP Counsellor guide BFC EVA network). However, the right service delivery for the CEP counsellor, as recommended in the available documents, is sometimes hampered by practical obstacles, in particular the fulfilment of administrative tasks that encroach on the time dedicated to counselling, and a too short timeframe for the service offer, which gives counsellors the feeling of 'not deepening' on the issues raised by the people⁽⁵⁹⁾ and sometimes acting as an 'information counter'.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ The CIBCs, for example, are responsible for carrying out skills assessments, long-term career development support, based on a battery of tests and diagnoses, and a joint exploration of the person's qualities and limitations and their career prospects. The consular chambers mainly offer support services for businesses and business start-ups. The missions of the CIDFFs are to 'inform, welcome and support anyone, especially women, on issues of access to rights, combating gender-based violence, employment, training, parenthood and equality'.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ France Compétences. (2019). *Cahier des clauses techniques particulières (CCTP), Service de conseil en évolution professionnelle*.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ These aspects were dealt with more extensively in the 'micro' phase of the study.

The stakeholders interviewed during the 'meso' phase took different positions on what should constitute the core business of the CEP counsellor. Some stressed 'pedagogical engineering expertise' or 'financial engineering expertise', others emphasised the need for 'qualitative support' rather than 'assembly-line advice', for 'being up to date on a whole range of schemes, keeping abreast of the latest developments', and for 'providing clear, professional and rapid information'. Some stress the importance of 'knowing the business world, the world of work'. Moreover, some stakeholders point to a lack of deep knowledge of specific economic sectors. They advocate for advisers specialised by sector of activity, rather than generalist advisers. 'We should put the CEP advisers together, but looking for CEPs advisers from different backgrounds and different sectors. And we should go back to sector specialisation. A CEP counsellor can't know [all] the trades and sectors, it's just not possible...' (employers' organisation).

2.6.2.2. *Changes triggered by complex needs of potential beneficiaries*

In jobseeker guidance, another reason for the transformation of the profession is linked to the context and the change in the target group. In a way, this is a sudden and rapid change. Everyone agrees that the individuals who benefit from support are in more precarious situations than before; trainers and advisers are increasingly facing people in serious difficulty. This means that they must change their professional approach. They must deal increasingly with socially isolated individuals, some of whom have lost their basic social codes (such as arriving on time, staying focused), and the professionals say that they are forced to apply a great deal of discipline, sometimes even 'policing'. This is a role that most of them do not wish to take on, as they consider that the heart of their job is to pass on content or provide guidance, and not to enforce order.

For CEP advisers, it is the growing presence of people who are 'suffering' at work, who present psycho-social risks and occupational health issues, and who require psycho-medico-social support in addition to professional support in the strict sense of the term, which is helping to bring into question the boundaries of their action. As a result, several advisers, faced with a loss of reference points in relation to the nature of their profession, resign or move to another organisation, which plays a major role in the shortage of staff in the different schemes observed.

These new profiles of accompanied people mean that the advisers and trainers must deal with a gradual overlap of different functions, from training to social and from social to medical issues. This results in a lack of clarity about their area of expertise and what does and does not fall within their remit. For some organisations, the role of the pathway adviser is to help remove employment barriers linked to individual circumstances (taking a more social approach); for

others the role of the pathway adviser is simply to identify obstacles but not to help remove them. 'Our role will be less to treat than to diagnose and guide' (Upskilling provider). This calls for clearer boundaries between the different professions. The structures want financial resources to enable them to work with in-house psychologists or social workers, so that 'everyone stays in their place'. 'But it's still difficult. For example, we'd like a social worker to come to our premises once every fortnight to deal with requests. Well, that's not possible, the social workers in the town tell us 'we don't have the time, we're not going to come to you for that'. And yet it would be very good because it would shift the discussion, it would also allow the trainee to say 'Well, I'm talking to the trainer about training, I'm talking to the social worker about my social problem, we're not mixing everything up' (Upskilling provider). At management level of the of the various organisations, this also generates a concern to 'protect' the teams. This involves, for example, training teams on conflict management or mental health first aid, which, for some organisations, is done at the expense of developing other core business skills.

2.7. Funding issues

2.7.1. Contrasts in massive investment and new funding arrangements

New sources of funding and substantial financial resources influence upskilling in contrasting ways. 'We have never seen so many resources set out for training and guidance as in the last 5 years'. The stakeholders interviewed in the 'meso' phase shared the view of the wealth of funding. The Skill investment plan (*Plan d'investissement dans les compétences*, PIC), is the major financial instrument within the 2018 vocational training reform (EUR 15 billion over 5 years.). The 'employment/training' measures of the Recovery plan for the French economy (2020-22) also provided an exceptional EUR 15 billion package, to deal with the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic. There was also another financial effect of the 2018 reform that substantially changed the way companies contribute to the funding of the vocational training system. It particularly changed how resources are distributed.

The amounts and the types of financial levers available for guidance and vocational training activities vary between unemployed and employed adults and have distinct targets and objectives for each target group. The PIC is explicitly aimed at developing the skills of the less qualified and those on the periphery of employment (with a strong focus on the young, who are not included in the scope of the UP Recommendation). The financial instrument was designed to 'raise the

level of employment by building a skilled society' ⁽⁶⁰⁾. A direct causal relationship was *a priori* established between developing skills and integrating into the labour market. On the employee side, the funding appears to be less focused on an overall objective and on a priority target population. The funding is divided to cover various objectives (including promoting apprenticeship, job transitions). None of these objectives specifically cover the less qualified employees. Nevertheless, there are schemes which may prioritise the less qualified, such as favourable assessment criteria for job transition funding applications ⁽⁶¹⁾. The main aim is to support measures that can respond to companies' recruitment needs and enable human resources to evolve to meet major changes (economic, ecological, digital).

Box 5. Company contributions to the funding of vocational training

The 2018 Reform radically changed the way companies contribute to the funding of the vocational training system. A Single contribution to vocational training and apprenticeship (CUFPA) was set up, replacing both the vocational training contribution and the apprenticeship tax (which followed separate collection and management procedures). A single national body for the governance of the vocational training system, France Compétences, was created. This central authority is now responsible for 'financing, regulating and improving the vocational training and apprenticeship system'. It is in charge of managing company contributions and of allocating the funds to the various stakeholders and schemes (the 2018 reform also created or modified some) The Board of Directors of France Compétences (whose members are representatives of the State, the regions, trade unions and employer organisations) defines annually the amount of each financial package: in 2022 EUR 9.55 billion were collected from taxes and redistributed by France Competence Board.

The contributions are distributed as follows:

- to the skills development facilitators (*Opérateurs de compétences*, OPCO) managing and supporting apprenticeship and the Skill development plans; (*Plans*

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Annex to the Finance law 2023 - Vocational training.

⁽⁶¹⁾ The 'coherence of the career plan', the 'relevance of the training pathway', and the 'prospect of finding a job at the end of the training course' are the initial criteria for benefiting from *Projet de Transition Professionnelle* (PTP) funding. However, subsequently the low level of qualification is then the priority. The low level of qualification combines two criteria: according to occupational category (manual worker, clerical workers) and diploma level (\leq EQF3).

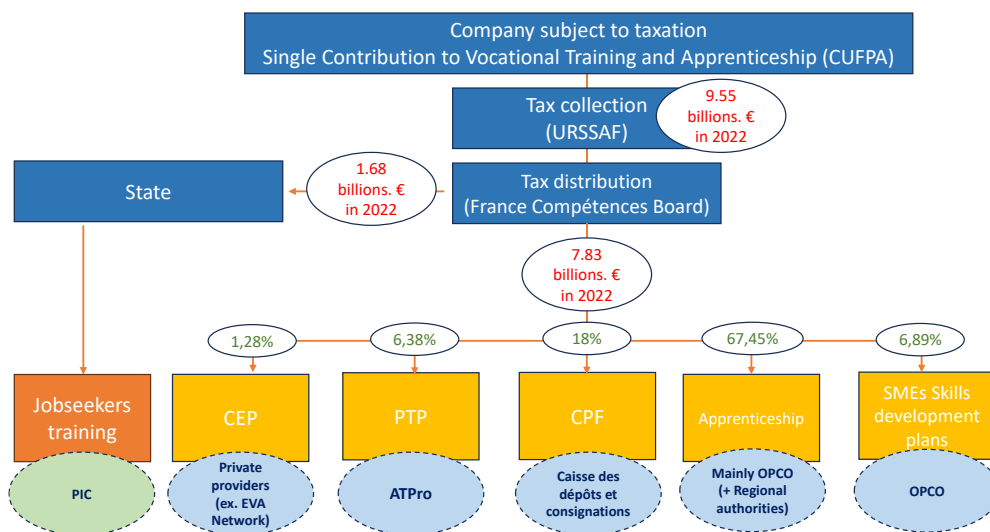
de développement des compétences, PDC) for companies with fewer than 50 employees;

- to the *Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations* managing the Personal training account (*Compte personnel de formation, CPF*);
- to the associations *Transitions pro (AT Pro)* managing the *Projet de Transition Professionnelle - PTP* scheme;
- to the regional providers of the Career development counselling scheme (*Conseil en Evolution Professionnelle, CEP*) for the employed or self-employed workers in the private sector;
- to the French government to contribute to the training of jobseekers (via the Skill investment plan (PIC));
- to the regional councils for supporting local level economic development and apprenticeship infrastructures;
- to the *Agence de Service et de Paiement (ASP)* for providing driving licence financial aid.

The diagram below shows the distribution of the company contributions for 2022. The total amount was EUR 9.547 billion (decreed by the Board of Directors of France Compétences).

Source: Cedefop.

Figure 4. **Company financial contribution to apprenticeship and training in 2022**



Source: Centre Inffo.

Issues concerning funding go beyond the overall amount made available to vocational training. The main issues at stake in funding lie in its distribution, its objectives, as well as the room for manoeuvre for stakeholders and in the (human) capacity to manage it. The different modes of funding also have an impact on many aspects: relationships between the stakeholders; internal workings of

organisations; target populations; types of activities proposed; the degree of flexibility and innovation; sustainability and dissemination; and the seamless and tailored nature of the individuals' pathways. Here are a few modes of funding that were identified in the surveys: project calls (e.g. NA Region's *Mobilisation towards Training* project call; project calls set up as part of Axis 3 of the PIC in PACA region); public contracts such as a service of general economic interest (SGEI), (e.g. DAQ 2.0 run by BFC Region authority); a specific training scheme contract (similar to the PIC Axis 2 contract run by Pôle Emploi in PACA region); public service authorisations (*Habilitations de Service Public*, HSP) run by the NA Region authority (funding model inspired by SGEI), framework agreements and subsequent contracts (e.g. CEP service for the employees and the self-employed in the private sector).

Extensive (almost overlapping) funding the less qualified unemployed

The funding available for unemployed adults offers opportunities for reaching out to the less qualified, providing guidance, in conjunction with training activities. The funding also makes it possible to experiment. It provides the means to reinforce what is already under way for the less qualified. It also makes it possible to offer more suitable measures to those who are on the periphery of employment and training. New possibilities have opened for the unemployed (including those who suffer from multiple difficulties) and for professionals, thanks to increased and diversified provision. Depending on the context, this has had a positive impact on both individuals and organisations (see below).

The benefits of this abundance of funding are welcome. However, these benefits could have been greater if the coordination of the distribution and use (particularly for calls for projects) had been more efficient. The 'abundance of funding and funders' and the 'crosscutting', without consultation, of the PIC/PRICs/European Social Fund (ESF) funding in the same domains and for the same target populations, caused adverse results. The logic of competition between stakeholders rather than working together sometimes emerged from this financial windfall; some stakeholders even spoke, for example, of 'infighting to reach out to people'. The windfall effect led to a sharp increase in stakeholders entering areas where they would not usually intervene. This new intervention is done with a view to attracting funding, sometimes to the detriment of smaller local organisations who better understand the local target populations and their needs, but who are less well equipped in terms of HR and financial engineering. In some areas, the increased number of the schemes that are similar in nature may have had counter-productive effects on the target populations. This is because the multitude of

schemes produces a lack of clarity, or over-enrolment of beneficiaries to various schemes without progression between them.

Funding distribution hampers the upskilling of less qualified employees

Stakeholder views differ funding mechanisms efficiency for adults in employment. On the one hand, there are the stakeholders whose assignments and budgets have been reorganised by the 2018 Reform (e.g. OPCOs, associations Transitions Pro). On the other hand, there are the stakeholders who were given new assignments and financial packages (e.g. CEP service providers for the employees and self-employed individuals in the private sector).

Box 6. 'Micro' phase issues on the limits of available funding

The interviews in the 'micro' phase showed that access to financing could be hampered for less qualified employees due to limited financial packages and digital barriers. The stakeholders interviewed in the 'meso' phase are less concerned about these questions (as the advisers provide guidance and support to these employees through the process). They do, however, agree on the problems caused by splitting the funding. 'Overall, we're not short of resources, that's not true, we have means. The only thing is that you have to have, I would say, a PhD in industrial plumbing to get the pipes to match up, it's just incredible'. The distribution of the funds is between stakeholders and per schemes, and the rules of financial arrangements are too rigid. The system is thus spread out means that bottom-up projects are not (entirely) funded, 'We all have funds, we all have resources, we all have things, except that we can never pool them together because everyone comes with their own pipe, with their own tube, and that tube doesn't correspond to this one, and we never manage to open up the valves'. (OPCO 1) The funds are too earmarked and tied to each scheme. The terms of use do not allow for financial arrangements to support upskilling pathways, especially for the less qualified employees. 'In other words, it's complicated today to help people set up projects that require funding when it's difficult to coordinate the funding, or when the access requirements are difficult, or when the finances aren't there'. (CEP provider). The stakeholders would like more flexibility and interplay.

Source: Cedefop.

Several stakeholders (particularly the OPCOs and the associations Transitions Pro) question the splitting of funding. According to them, it reflects a change in the rationale of public policies. It offers less room for manoeuvre for the stakeholders who feel they are less able to encourage comprehensive, long-term upskilling pathways for the less qualified.

The 2018 reform, for example, brought about important changes to the OPCOs, who manage a significant share of the companies' financial contribution to vocational training activities. The changes affect the amount and the nature of

the funds the OPCOs receive. There are also changes in the ability of OPCOs to define their own agendas, to be proactive and able to support upskilling pathways.

The former OPCAs ⁽⁶²⁾ had control over the joint vocational training funds coming from financial contributions of companies. This meant, for example, that they could set up projects to meet expressed or identified needs for upskilling or dealing with illiteracy issues, while covering the full cost of the training activities. In becoming OPCOs, the structures have become managers and implementers of funds. The funds are assigned *a priori* to schemes and made public through France Compétences. 'So the move to OPCO is a real problem, because we are no longer a private fund structure and we are no longer able completely to fund projects aimed at these groups [the less qualified], and who are not always the priority groups of our occupational branch members'. The changes also affect the relationship with companies, the development of local dynamics, as well as the alertness to respond to needs. 'It's very upsetting for companies because they keep coming to us, but they can't understand that the financial perimeter is no longer the same and that we are no longer in control of funds. So not a week goes by without companies calling us up and saying: I've got a project and I'd like to use your joint funds. We don't have any more joint funds. So before 2018 I think we were better equipped to meet companies' expectations, after 2018 we are less so.'

The changes are also taking place within the framework of policies that no longer appear to be geared towards developing employee skills and qualifications. The qualification of the employees in general, and the less qualified in particular, do not enjoy the same policy priority accorded to apprenticeship scheme for the young or the use of the Personal training account, and it is 'to the detriment of the skills development plans'. 'The rationale is driven towards apprenticeship and very little in developing skills. So, companies end up with very small budgets that they spend on one or two employees, or even three, and then nothing is left over. So, there is absolutely no thought given to a training strategy for employees. I think this is very risky, because it means that we are no longer maintaining the skills of the employees, and even more so of those with the lowest levels of qualification. They are more at risk of experiencing a drop in their skills and demobilisation. And they could potentially lose their jobs because they become underskilled' (OPCO). The individual learning account (ILA) cannot, on its own and as it stands, be a qualification tool, especially for the less qualified individuals who would require guidance in expressing informed training choices. 'That's what the 2018 reform is all about, declaring that the employees are responsible for their own career path and training [...] but the further you go down the ladder in terms of qualification

⁽⁶²⁾ *Organismes Paritaires Collecteurs Agréés* (OPCA). They have been replaced by the OPCOs as a result of the Law of 5 September 2018.

levels, the less true it becomes' (OPCO). The CEP service, which can give some advice for using the ILA, is still far from being widespread. The current framework for pooling funds from ILA with those from companies or occupational branches to finance upskilling pathways is not well-established. The key issue is the absence of a mutual commitment. Companies or branches perceive it as a substantial risk, considering the potential 'loss' incurred if an individual using an ILA opts not to complete the training course.

Several stakeholders share the feeling that their competences have been restricted and that their activities have increasingly shifted from the grassroots level because of top-down 'directives' combined with funding constraints. Some schemes/services (e.g. CEP service, PTP scheme) cannot be scaled up to meet a wider range of demands. The terms of use of the financial instruments do not make the support of upskilling pathways easy. 'There is a lot of technicalities and unfortunately too much technicality in our schemes'. In addition, validation of prior learning, the Cléa scheme (for developing and validating basic and digital skills), as well as long-term (over 2 years) training courses, and other activities to deal with illiteracy and e-illiteracy, do not benefit from dedicated funding. Therefore, they cannot easily be part of upskilling pathways for the less qualified individuals.

2.7.2. Effects of funding methods and terms on structures involved in upskilling

2.7.2.1. Medium-term contracts

Among the selected schemes and services, the CEP service for the employees and the self-employed in the private sector (run by France compétences), the DAQ 2.0 service of general economic interest (run by BFC Region authority) and the PIC Axis 2 specific training service scheme (run by Pôle emploi PACA) are subject to medium-term funding (4 to 5 years).

The stakeholders interviewed have a positive view of the methods and terms of the SGEI or specific training service contracts for unemployed adults. Without delving into technical details, they shared several characteristics. To ensure uniform service provision, multiple stakeholders or consortiums are commissioned and assigned components of the service in designated local areas. Multi-year framework agreements are established, supplemented by annual implementation agreements. DAQ 2.0 providers receive 'fair compensation' for fulfilling public service delivery obligations within a predefined budget. PIC Axis 2 providers receive a flat rate sum based on the overall volume of training or guidance hours, calculated according to the average duration of a pathway and the estimated number of participants.

According to the stakeholders interviewed, these comprehensive means of financing (as opposed to the financing for example per trainee/training hour) with medium-term visibility, are more favourable to adapting and reinforcing pathways, to ensuring the sustainability of the schemes/services and to the internal workings of the scheme/service providing structures. The latter can run under more convenient terms and not under the constant pressure of raising funds. They can 'put resources in front of the trainees' (whether it be in terms of equipment or human resources). They can purchase equipment (e.g. computers, car simulators, virtual reality headsets) which will remain the property of the structure once/if the scheme comes to an end. They can also recruit staff on fixed term but more stable contracts. Sometimes, the sustainability of the provider structure is dependent on the scheme/service funding (it may represent from 40% to 60% of the overall budget of the organisation), enabling, for example, the financing, of a payroll manager for the whole structure. Thanks to these forms of financing, the providing structures have room for manoeuvre to invest in outreach and guidance activities for the target population, as well as to innovate, particularly in addressing job insertion obstacles that individuals may face. The medium-term contracts also appear to be more conducive to a joint construction approach between the funders and the scheme/service providing structures. Feedback and monitoring reports can be discussed and contribute to developing the schemes/services (e.g. DAQ 2.0 is the result of a process of improving the initial scheme which was launched in 2010).

While stakeholders were generally in favour of these forms of financing, they also pointed out a few downsides. The budget balance of the providing structures becomes strongly linked to the renewal of the contract at the end of the 4 or 5 years planned. The structures, therefore, become partly dependent on the funding of the schemes/services. The challenge of earning the next contract sometimes turns out to be a survival issue for them. It may have the effect of making their internal functioning more insecure, especially as the cost of the fundraising process cannot be covered by the scheme/service funding and sometimes proves difficult for the small structures to bear.

The surveys also revealed a lack of adaptability of the medium-term forms of financing to market uncertainties and fluctuations and to changes in the targeted populations. First, it is hard for the providing structures to anticipate the exact number of beneficiaries for each scheme/service. So, while some providing structures fail to meet the estimated number of beneficiaries, (either because they are not referred or because they are competing with other local schemes/services), others are the 'victims of their own success'. The principles of public service offers prevent them making selections. They are obliged to accept all the individuals who

want to register, even though capacity is exceeded and no additional funding can be received. According to the stakeholders interviewed, although the amount of funding is negotiated at the beginning of the multiyear contract, some extra resources should be negotiable during the contract and decided on a case-by-case basis. The providing structures would then not have to face deficit situations or put themselves in an illegal position by denying someone access to the scheme/service.

Other training organisations also mentioned that they could not keep up with increasing wages and absorb the inflation costs that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. In a situation of competition among training organisations for recruiting (Section 2.6), some organisations lost part of their staff because they could not match the salaries offered by the others. The guidance and counselling activities are thus impacted. The turnover of the advisers and trainers runs counter to the idea of a 'single pathway adviser', which is advocated for securing and ensuring seamless pathways.

Several providers mentioned that they did not have the means for adapting to the targeted population who were suffering from greater difficulties and were in more vulnerable situations because of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, they did not have the means for hiring a psychologist or a social worker because of the rigid budget terms. They had problems in upgrading the skills of their trainers and advisers. They chose to focus on the training activities that could give their staff the tools for managing conflict situations or for providing mental health first aid. But they could not afford, at the same time, the costs of other training activities more directly linked to the core of their occupations.

The providing structures support the idea of a more gradual entry into the schemes for the individuals who are furthest away from employment and training and who no longer have the basic social and/or professional codes. Just a few hours a week could be a starting point, to acclimatise progressively to the pace of the training pathway but also to protect the staff from too many stressful situations. However, when the funding for the course is only triggered after a certain number of hours have been completed, providers cannot afford gradual progression.

Different strategic effects of flat-rate and fee-for-activity payments

The ways providers get paid differ among the public contracts (either as flat-rate sums or on a fee-for-activity basis) and have different, even opposite, effects on the strategies the structures are developing. Comprehensive remuneration – fair compensation for public service offer – or flat-rate sums (that can include an advance paid when signing the annual implementation agreement) make it easier to adjust the type and the duration of the support according to the situation and the

needs of everyone, but also to have guidance counsellors/advisers who ensure long-term monitoring of participant progress. As one scheme funder put it: 'We worked on the specifications, including the level of remuneration for the providers. In fact, they have an objective of results and not necessarily an objective of means, [to] be able to give each person the time they need, whether it is short, medium or long time, depending precisely on the profile of the person'. What's more, 'the way training providers are remunerated is quite unprecedented, with a flat-rate system of 70% that is paid right from the start. And they themselves welcome this way of being paid, saying that this is really what was needed'.

Providers can also get paid on a fee-for-activity basis, as with the CEP service for employees and the self-employed in the private sector. This means that once the guidance work is completed (measured in 'unit of work') and the proof of completion (here, a deliverable signed by the individual) is provided to the funder, the payment is made. Whether the achievement of the 'unit of work' lasts 1 hour or 3 hours or more, the remuneration stands at the same level. In addition to the administrative burden put on the advisor ⁽⁶³⁾ to comply with the procedures, during and after the meeting with the individual, the time devoted to each individual support tends to be restricted to maintain a certain economic and financial balance from the provider's point of view. 'The CEP is a service that's supposed to be iterative, but it's not iterative enough; it's supposed to support people as much as they need it, but the reality is one of financial engineering. And most CEP advisers are also providing other services. So, there's a management... a management of activity, a management of planning which is extremely complex between the schemes which have a defined duration, and which can be planned, and a service like the CEP, which is provided at the request of the person and supposes a reactive response as soon as it's needed' (CEP provider). Even if they try to 'smooth out' the duration of their supporting and advising activities, spending more time with the individuals who need it most, and saving some time with the individuals who just come to get specific information, the room for manoeuvre for adapting the number of meetings and the duration of the whole counselling process remains limited. It's a matter of 'being able to listen carefully [...] And at the same time being able to keep pace with the numerous scheduled meetings. It's not easy. Because the structures are looking for profitability, which may fall rapidly when you don't get the [deliverable] signatures...' (CEP provider).

Several CEP providers point out that service funding was designed more for the counselling activities than for steering and managing. They consider the latter to be essential, even though not always quantifiable. They play a part both in terms

⁽⁶³⁾ See the first intermediate report on the key findings of the 'micro' research phase.

of promoting the service and developing local partnerships, and in terms of managing the internal work organisation, monitoring the service quality and providing support to the new CEP advisers. But these activities are often 'transparent' in terms of remuneration. 'It's often difficult for the structures to value the time we spend managing the service' 'Perhaps for the future we should think about recognising more the role of the steering and managing teams' (CEP provider).

2.7.2.2. *Call for projects funding*

The PIC and PRIC calls for projects encourage experiments and/or innovative initiatives: testing new approaches and methods (better suited to certain areas or certain target populations) for reaching out to the less qualified adults; providing them with suitable guidance and training; and trying to open up usually separate fields of action (e.g. social, training, employment). Project calls are often broken down into annual waves and are designed to support projects of limited duration. The grants awarded are generally for joint financing the projects, meaning that they do not cover all the costs⁽⁶⁴⁾. From the funders' point of view, calls for projects can be an opportunity for identifying good practices that can be disseminated or incorporated into mainstream action. From some providing structures' point of view, this form of financing can be an opportunity for launching new initiatives, or for supplementing the resources allocated to current activities so that they can adjust or expand implementation.

However, in the PACA region for instance, some (small) providing structures had difficulty in finding their way through the plethora of similar calls for projects and finding their place in the highly competitive fundraising context. The time and cost of the financial engineering and managing activities are bearable depending on the size of the structure. Opportunity costs are not very favourable to the small ones, especially when it comes to 'one shot' funding and small grants. In the NA region, the importance of the support given by the funder to the applying structures in the process of responding to the Mobilisation towards training call for projects, was emphasised. First, this support can offset the lack of experience and/or of human resources in financial engineering, which works to the disadvantage of the small structures with good ideas and high-quality field work. Second, the support can encourage the participation of stakeholders from remote areas or outside of the traditional vocational training sphere.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ For example, the projects from the 'Mobilisation - training' call for projects analysed in the previous 'micro' phase were part-financed to the tune of 60% of the total budget.

Although the (financial) capacity of the applicants to continue their projects once the funding from the call for projects has been used up is theoretically one of the criteria for assessing applications, it seems that not all the providing structures have sufficient financial strength to continue implementing their projects, let alone disseminating them.

Some stakeholders are calling for rationalisation and for a greater synergy between the funding and the funders who should listen and provide support to the stakeholders on the ground, including the beneficiaries themselves.

Box 7. Issues from the ‘micro’ phase on the sustainability of innovative practices and actions financed by the PICs/PRICs

The notion of ‘innovation’ is not unequivocal: there may be an ‘innovation’ because a new training method is used, because new stakeholders such as ‘conventional companies’ are involved, because the initiative ‘meets a need that was not being met’, etc. The term ‘innovation’ is also used to refer to the use of new technologies.

The trio composed of the regional authority, the regional Pôle Emploi and the DREETS (decentralised State authority) have worked on identifying the most promising practices and initiatives on a local level and in close collaboration with the schemes/services providing structures. They also have tried to work on the conditions for sustainability and dissemination, but there is still strong uncertainty. Above all, stakeholders fear that the financial conditions will not be met: ‘We’re not the only region where we’re going to find that, without the PIC resources, projects are going to come to an end’, ‘We’d really like to see a solution because, you know, with no additional funds, disseminating some projects will mean getting rid of others’. ESF funding cannot be the only solution: first, ESF criteria do not necessarily coincide with the PIC/PRIC criteria, and then the small providing structures are not sufficiently equipped to apply for this funding.

Nevertheless, some regional authorities are working on integrating some schemes into the usual regional policies, beyond the PIC funding, and some regional Pôle Emploi are envisaging forms of continuation through integration into the guidelines of the mainstream actions. ‘We’re going to try to expand and perpetuate, by integrating either the whole project or parts of the project into more traditional training courses’; ‘from the PIC Axis 2 specific training service, we’ve already integrated things, for example, refresher modules upstream of a qualification training course, so that the person who needs upskilling, whether for general or technical skills, can still access the training course directly without going through two different courses.’

Nevertheless, the uncertainty surrounding the post-PIC funding period and the sustainability of a number of schemes (including experiments) carries a non-negligible risk of fuelling feelings of disillusionment, disappointment and even mistrust among the populations previously reached out to. ‘First, we competed for the target populations and then everyone disappeared. It falls back like a soufflé. We haven’t finished with the ‘invisible’ people, because in the end there are going to be people who are disappointed by the public service’.

Source: Cedefop.

2.8. Stakeholder coordination, governance and public policy

2.8.1. Coordination and cooperation at regional and department levels

The distribution of roles and responsibilities among authorities varies

There is no doubt that the 2018 reform and PIC have had the effect of shifting the steering process of adult skills development policies towards the State authorities (particularly for the less qualified). The signing of the PRICs has (partially) rebalanced the power stakes with the regions by providing them with additional resources to fulfil their guidance and training provision mission. While policy level coordination is shared with the decentralised State authorities (particularly the DREETS), it is with PES actors that the Region authorities share roles and responsibilities for the implementation of guidance and training measures. In the three regions studied, the sharing of tasks and resources between the regional authorities and PES actors (particularly Pôle Emploi) varied.

In the BFC region, the authority maintains a strong focus on jobseeker guidance and training, particularly the less skilled, given that the working population in this area of the country is less qualified than the national average. The 'low-skilled [are our] enormous, enormous priority'. Therefore, it is towards this target population that the bulk of regional budget is allocated, but with an uneven connection with Pôle Emploi across the region. In urban areas, there is an effective distribution of less qualified jobseekers between regional PRIC supported schemes, such as DAQ 2.0 and Pôle Emploi schemes. In rural areas, competition is widespread to reach potential participants and meet the challenge of properly capitalising on the existing schemes (Section 2.3).

The NA authority also makes a point of indicating that the less qualified jobseekers are a priority in the regional strategy. So, while the authority and the PES actors divide up their funding (collective guidance/training at regional level; individual guidance/training at PES level), there are sometimes juxtapositions.

In the PACA region the roles and responsibilities are distributed in a fairly clear way; the regional authority has chosen to delegate to Pôle Emploi guidance/training schemes provision targeting the less qualified (with related regional financial envelopes), while keeping at regional policy level only actions targeted to longer-term training leading to qualifications. The two parties are satisfied with the 'strengthened partnership agreement' between them (now in its third wave), which has led to a high degree of complementarity and coordination in the programming

and financing of training activities ⁽⁶⁵⁾. In the PACA region, Pôle emploi has been given by the State the role of steering the PRIC. The regional authority has joined the initiative later through an additional PRIC agreement, limited in scope and mainly concerning reduction of job recruitment shortages.

In the background, the decentralised State authorities (the DREETS) have managed and monitored national PIC schemes (sometimes in competition with regional schemes for the same types of target population) while also seeking to coordinate with the regional authorities and Pôle Emploi on certain PRIC aspects (for example, by participating in the steering and monitoring of PACA PRIC axis 3, which focuses on innovative training practices and pedagogies).

The relationships between the regional and the Department authorities also take different forms and degrees of coordination from one region to another, but also from one Department to another within the same region. However, the Region-Departments link appears to be important from an 'upskilling' perspective since it emphasises the value of multi-dimensional support for the less qualified populations and those on the periphery of training and employment. This is also the way that people receiving RSA support (managed by Departments) can easily obtain access to skill development schemes supported by the regional authorities. After an initial assessment by departmental advisers, RSA recipients can be referred to the vocational guidance/training offered by the Region or the PES. This connection is not always formalised and effective, and the continuity and depth of this cooperation varies.

The NA regional authority has opened up to the Departments and their expertise in social support (particularly through the Mobilisation-formation scheme observed in the TCR micro phase, Cedefop 2023), but this has not necessarily led to increased dialogue or the joint development of measures or even policies for common target populations. Nevertheless, the authority is working to integrate the Departments into the network of stakeholders who can refer jobseekers toward a particular region-funded scheme or upskilling instrument.

The BFC regional authority has undertaken to forge closer links with the Departments and has carried out a lengthy search for the right partnerships. The Region has signed partnership agreements with each Department, confirming particularly the role of the Departments in guiding people towards regional upskilling schemes.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Regional authorities and PES rely on public procurement to buy training services (including guidance and skills development) from private and public service providers, based on a forecast of potential beneficiaries over a given period, and designed to meet institutions' policy goals and upskilling strategies.

In the PACA region, since the PRIC is directly managed by Pôle emploi, it seems that the intensification of exchanges has taken place between Pôle emploi and the Department authorities, with the latter having the possibility to refer jobseekers to PRIC schemes.

Regional committees for employment, vocational training and guidance: a failed ambition?

The Regional committees for employment, vocational training and guidance (CREFOP) were conceived as forums involving authorities and socio-economic partners for sharing, coordinating and jointly designing regional guidance and training policies and strategies.

Some stakeholders point to the 'excellent cooperation' between the Region and Pôle emploi, for example, in drafting the CPRDFOP ⁽⁶⁶⁾, and praise the role of dialogue and consultation that the body can play: 'We need to challenge/question and exchange with them [the members of the CREFOP]'.

However, most interviewees seem to have very mixed views about this body, which is unable to ensure the shared construction of regional public policies or the operational coordination of stakeholders. Instead, it is seen as a place where everyone comes to promote their activities or results. Several stakeholders report that CREFOP operate as a 'recording office' for decisions taken upstream, or a place for 'sharing information' on each other's activities and actions, without succeeding in creating a collective drive. 'Depending on the region, it works well and on top-down approach. The social partners often have a rather wait-and-see attitude, so they listen, they take note, they put forward their positions as representatives, but it's still difficult to breathe life into it and to really be involved in a process of shared construction of public policies'.

Still, CREFOP remains one of the few institutional forums where institutional stakeholders (deconcentrated services of the State, Region authorities, PES actors) can work alongside economic players and social partners on issues relating to guidance and training tailored to local needs. For some, the idea would be to move towards an 'enhanced CREFOP body', with greater involvement in decision-making, and thus to go further than the purely consultative function of State/Region/social partners. There was also a desire to broaden participation to include the Department authorities, which do not yet sit on this body, and to include them in consultations for the design of the next CPRDFOPs.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Regional plan for the development of vocational training and guidance (*Contrat de plan régional de développement des formations et de l'orientation professionnelles*).

2.8.2. Struggle for effective coordination at local level

The regional authorities participate in the funding and/or governance of local platforms aimed at providing first level information and guidance towards services and schemes offered by the other stakeholders such as the PLIEs and the *Cités des métiers*. These initiatives coexist with those promoted by the State authorities.

Local guidance, training and job integration stakeholders are all keen to establish links and build partnerships in the framework of regional and/or national strategies. However, the impact of these activities remains limited, without really leading to strong coordination of services and funding schemes. Several of the stakeholders interviewed described a rather chaotic environment: 'Everyone is trying to coordinate, and no one is succeeding. Each player tries to coordinate, but according to its own viewpoint and aims: e.g. the departmental council, in the field of integration of RSA recipients, the Missions Locales for young people, the City councils for the priority urban districts. We're always invited to coordination meetings, and we always say the same thing' (PLIE).

Regional strategies (see, for example, the joint work with Pôle Emploi and other local stakeholders described above) do not always align with other initiatives promoted at national level. This is evident, for example, in the implementation of the Public Integration and Employment Service (SPIE) experiments, conceived as part of the national strategy to prevent and combat poverty. These trial experiments, setup in 2021, involved 31 French departments on a voluntary basis, aiming to establish consortia of local stakeholders and create a core of shared services. One of the departments surveyed is piloting a SPIE, with the support of a committee of stakeholders, which brings together a wide range of players working in social policies, job integration and employment ⁽⁶⁷⁾.

'We responded to a call of interest from the State, which wanted to experiment with the creation of a public service for job integration and employment in the region, with the aim of coordinating the work of the various stakeholders in a more coherent and regulated way, to help the most disadvantaged groups find employment. So, the Department responded to this pilot by creating a consortium with all the stakeholders - Pôle emploi, the Missions locales, all the associations. In short there are around fifty different stakeholders who have signed up to our project to create a public service for job integration and employment'. The SPIE has given 'the Department the legitimacy to coordinate the stakeholders and support a regional impetus'.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ The SPIE steering committee is made up of the Department, the Caisse d'Allocation Familiale, the Local Missions, Pôle Emploi and the DREETS (and to a lesser extent the Region).

However, it is recognised that the SPIE operates independently of, or even overlaps with, the regional Public Employment Service and other coordination bodies (run by other stakeholders such as the DREETS and the Region), which complicates the understanding of the stakeholder ecosystem. A similar example comes from another department surveyed, where the SPIE was intended to coordinate the stakeholders involved in employment, training, and labour market integration but faced difficulties due to the internal and, particularly, financial logic of each stakeholder. 'There are too many stakeholders, which is ultimately detrimental to the beneficiaries. We need to put our egos aside [...] We need to break down each other's scope of action [...] We need a method, not a structure - we have too many structures!' The multitude of coexisting coordination instances impairs efficiency, as stakeholders are invited to participate in multiple committees or bodies without a clear overall vision or joint initiative.

2.8.3. Effects of political guidelines and reforms on stakeholders

Top-down approaches lead to disruptions at the implementation level.

The interviewees express a sense of top-down roadmaps driven by quantitative targets, with a focus on 'enhancing employment' rather than 'enhancing competences'. This perspective does not necessarily align with the underlying logic of upskilling pathways and only marginally addresses the emerging needs from the field. For example, 'we have a PTP scheme that is much more supervised than the CIF ⁽⁶⁸⁾ scheme might have been, now it must be a certification aimed at professional retraining, a change of ROME code ⁽⁶⁹⁾, and so on and so forth. It's no longer a choice that's a bit disconnected from the world of work, ... and it's been moving in that direction year on year' (AT Pro). Stakeholders regret the agreements on objectives and means imposed by the funding bodies, which place greater emphasis on the quantitative targets and set conditions (e.g. number of persons to be supported, maximum duration of guidance activities, etc.) that cannot all be met if the target populations are those furthest from employment and training. Sometimes, trying to achieve these objectives can lead to a selection process (for accessing a scheme or a training programme) that is unfavourable to less qualified individuals.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ *Congé individuel de formation* (CIF): Individual training leave scheme that was replaced by the PTP scheme with the 2018 reform.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ *Répertoire opérationnel des métiers et emplois* is a reference system created by Pôle emploi. A ROME code, made up of a letter and four numbers, refers to a job description.

Some stakeholders also consider that the 2018 reform impairs self-governance and the room for manoeuvre they might have for developing upskilling pathways and outreach work and for providing tailored support to the issues identified. 'And that changes the game and completely changes the dynamic too. In other words, what used to be bottom-up projects, as part of our role of getting closer to the needs, setting up collective action, federating around an issue, that's no longer what drives us. Now it's deployment, at the risk of being a bit trivial, but industrial deployment of a policy' (OPCO).

Regarding the CEP service for the employed and self-employed individuals in the private sector more specifically, France Compétences managing it through a public contract means a more top-down implementation than before. Although the newly commissioned providing structures say that they appreciate being 'in a logic of dialogue between the commissioning party, and of continuous improvement', the withdrawal of the service provision from the joint stakeholders was not so smooth. In addition, according to the concerned stakeholders, it led to a loss of local dynamics which were working well, as well as to more confusion.

The professionals of the schemes/services providing structures are exhausted from successively reorganising, constantly evaluating the new or revised schemes/services and anticipating new adjustments. Accountability, compliance with protocols and quantitative targets are a burden, and particularly on the small structures, sometimes with a detrimental effect on the support they provide.

'Work first' approaches: the case of RSA recipients

'Work first' approaches are also observed for the Department authorities and their target populations: the RSA recipients. The objective of getting people into employment induces a shorter timeframe and a faster tempo for the individual pathways than the objective of getting an upper qualification. It also changes the approach to (social) support, which falls within the remit of the Department authorities.

The interviewed Department authorities report that they have been more or less urged to reduce the number of the RSA recipients and to push to a quicker return to employment. To this end, some of them have been reinforcing the guidance they provide to the RSA recipients, monitoring closer beneficiaries' commitment to undertake concrete actions towards employment. The rationale is that employment is the goal of any social support but is also the only solution to all the problems and obstacles faced by the individuals. 'We can't offer social support without offering people a job perspective. We can't say that we're going to resolve one's situation without offering the prospect of financial emancipation in the long term, and so, social work must provide a more comprehensive support.

'Employment should be the guiding principle for all social workers and for all target populations', 'there is no other or better lever than employment to make social difficulties disappear'. The other rationale is one of economic efficiency, which would lead to reducing the number of (long-term) RSA recipients thanks to emphasis on job insertion guidance (more than on social support) ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

The same rationale applies to the 'renewed RSA' experiments. In agreement with the PES stakeholders, the aim is to provide more intensive and active guidance to the RSA recipients. These include more regular meetings between the individuals and their advisers, as well as 15 to 20 hours a week filled with specific activities (possibly within a company, association or local authority). 'We're going to provide active assistance to the beneficiaries for 15 to 20 hours (a week), so the idea isn't to get people to work for free, that's not it at all. It's more like [...] a reactivating guidance'. A total of 19 Departments in France were engaged in the experiment in 2023.

Opposing voices can be heard. Some of them focus on the lack of human and financial resources to provide such reinforced guidance: 'It requires colossal resources that are far from being available today'. Others are disagreeing with the substance and they advocate for a Department approach leaning 'to guide the individuals towards employment, but not at any cost nor at any price'. The social issues need to be considered: 'before job integration, we sometimes have to take other detours' and 'act with a certain benevolence'. The priority given to work and employment is part of a larger policy-making process towards the setting up of the ongoing PES reform.

PES reform: between apprehensions and expectations

The surveys revealed stakeholder concerns about the PES reform that seems to have 'fallen in their lap', even though forms of anticipation could be seen through prelude initiatives, such as the rapprochement undertaken between Cap emploi and Pôle emploi, the SPIE experiments and the reinforced experiments for the RSA recipients (see above).

The aims of the PES reform are to set up a single desk for all the jobseekers and to unify the databases of the different PES actors, to get to know the individuals and the businesses better and provide both with tailored support, and ultimately to lower the unemployment rate and HR shortages. The aim is to achieve full employment by the end of the presidential term (2027), i.e. an ILO unemployment

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Once the access to the RSA allowance is confirmed, an adviser from the *Département* is appointed and refers the individual to the most appropriate support, either a social support or a job insertion support.

rate of 5%, compared with the 7.2% ⁽⁷¹⁾ recorded in France in the first quarter of 2023. At the time of the 'meso' surveys, the contours of PES reform were still unclear, but a twofold trajectory was envisaged: reorganisation of PES working in synergy and complementarity, without cutting back on their respective missions and competences, and better and broader coordination of stakeholders, orchestrated by the future Network. The outlines of the changes were presented in the spring of 2023, after most of the interviews were carried out. They revealed some financial, governance and power balance issues.

The multiplicity of structures and schemes, the poor knowledge of what each does, the problems of competition and the lack of coordination between the various partners (each has its own method, codes of competence) is mentioned repeatedly and can be seen as a form of justification for the PES reform. At a time when public action is moving towards opening up approaches, for some, the uncertainty leads to fighting their own corner (with a view to preserving 'their' target populations and 'their' methods). One of the Departments is concerned: 'in a way, (this) could once again call the competences entrusted to the Departments into question'. So, whether they play a role in referring, in providing support, in training or in funding, interdependence among stakeholders does not exclude a certain rate of competition. Some mentioned the power balance issue: 'we would have to "examine" all the PES institutions and look at who does what, what links there are between the structures, what power relationships exist between them, on what funding they rely on, etc.'.

The prospect of PES reform generates varied reactions. Some stakeholders regret not being involved in the process, not having any information. Others express a form of anxiety linked to the uncertainty (associated with the potential impact of the reform on their scope of action, on their budget envelopes, on their room for manoeuvre...), or fear that it will break down territorial dynamics. In contrast, some stakeholders are optimistic and hope 'that the rules of the game will let the stakeholders keep acting on a local ground'. They see it as an opportunity to provide monitored support to individuals, to keep an eye on those who move from one scheme to another or even combine them, to ensure complementarity, and to improve fluidity. They also stress the benefits of shared information between stakeholders for individuals who would not have to repeat the same things and start again from scratch. They also think the reform could lead to a more rational distribution of the State funds among proven schemes and services. Finally, some stakeholders choose to adopt a wait and see attitude: 'I think that in the future, in the coming weeks or months, new instructions will be given to us'.

⁽⁷¹⁾ AEF article, 19/04/2023.

Box 8. 'Micro' phase issues the on integrating competences and policies

The 'micro' surveys revealed contrasting trends, stemming from the reforms. For employed adults, some stakeholders highlighted the counterproductive effects of the 2018 reform. The fragmentation of the schemes and services among many stakeholders runs counter to the logic of opening up. It does not benefit comprehensive upskilling projects, nor does it make the system easier to understand for individuals (particularly the less qualified), companies (particularly the small ones) and the professionals themselves. By way of illustration, before the reform, a complete range of services could be reached within the 'old' OPCA (in relation to funding the training activities, to the CEP counselling, to setting up companies' training plans for their employees). Those services are now distributed between several stakeholders who cannot always work in synergy, in a complementary and synchronous way.

For unemployed adults, there are several indications that the PRICs may have led to kinds of hybridisation of the competences assigned to the stakeholders. One of the interviewees felt that 'we were a bit deluded about the division of the competences', referring to the remits partitioning between the Region, the Department authorities, etc. The regional authorities are opening training and job integration policies to more social support: 'The more we move towards the 'invisible' population, the less the issue of partitioning the competences makes sense, because developing technical skills is no longer the central issue, we are upstream on transversal competences, etc. And there, the line between the social field and the training field is more tenuous.' However, the social support provided by the Department authorities tends to open up to the job integration and employment issues. Then, the dividing lines with the vocational support provided by the PES stakeholders, for example, are diluting towards the provision of a tailor-made shared support. According to one of the interviewees, this would mean 'repositioning the Department as one of the public employment service stakeholders'. If there are incentives for opening up, which are sometimes materialising on the ground, there are still strong political, institutional and financial challenges, as illustrated by the multiplying coordination attempts.

Source: Cedefop.

2.8.4. CEP provider network in upskilling stakeholder ecosystem for employees

In coordinating services offered to employees, stakeholders have to deal with the major reconfiguration of the landscape brought about by the 2018 reform. The reform has redefined the scope of each stakeholder's activities and led to a new distribution of tasks between the different stakeholders. It overhauled the CEP service for employees in the private sector and changed its management by withdrawing it from the joint parity bodies and entrusting it to private providers mandated by France Compétences. For these stakeholders, who have been given a new mission, the challenge is to find their place in an ecosystem that has been thoroughly modified and start again to build bridges with the other actors.

Discussions with executives and managers of CEP providers confirm the importance of the partnership issue which, from their point of view, is expressed at two levels: the regional level and the local level.

At regional level, priority is given to political and institutional partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- (a) AT Pro on the issues of employee professional transitions and their financing;
- (b) OPCOs in awareness actions towards companies and on the training offer;
- (c) regional authorities, for example, in terms of participation in working groups on economic development issues, or for the use of region funded shared local facilities that welcome all types of public and can help to reach potential CEP users;
- (d) occupational medicine bodies on the issues of workplace health and the design of forms of joint support;
- (e) other CEP providers for target groups other than the employees and self-employed from the private sector (Pôle emploi, Cap emploi, APEC, Missions locales), in particular to agree on CEP communication, create conditions conducive to cooperation and coordination on the ground, and work jointly on complex situations;
- (f) DREETS to a lesser extent, particularly regarding the TransCo scheme which foresees compulsory transition to the CEP for workers affected by company restructuring process, and the (potential) role that the CEP can play in the context of economic reconversion processes.

On a local level:

- (a) the first step is to build and reinforce the EVA network ⁽⁷²⁾, which is based on many stakeholders who contribute to the dense local coverage of the service. They provide the network with their respective expertise, which must be coordinated to ensure the quality and harmonisation of service offered. The EVA networks have developed mainly from existing links (for example, between CIBCs (Inter-institutional skills assessment centres) and CCIs (Chamber of Commerce and Industry) or CMAs (Chamber of Trades and Crafts). There are also other underlying reasons for creating new links: shared values (including a public service culture, sensitivity to the general interest), local roots, knowledge of local stakeholders, and accessibility to the public;
- (b) regional institutional partnerships (see above) need to be rolled out and made operational at local level. To do this they have to take account of specific local features and build on interpersonal relationships that may already exist. Local stakeholders organise local activities to promote the service and create

⁽⁷²⁾ Network of CEP service providers on a given regional territory.

synergies across work and training, as well as related fields (e.g. social support), with the aim of stimulating the use of the CEP service. Some of the joint contracting providers emphasise that building close relationships is a long-term process, which needs to be cultivated, and which was often initiated well before joining the EVA network. Personal knowledge (of the advisor, the manager) often takes precedence over knowledge of the entity to which they are attached, to encourage relations between local stakeholders.

CHAPTER 3.

Key findings of the ‘macro’ research phase

3.1. Objective and scope

The final stage of the TCR France takes place at the 'macro' level and draws on the main lessons learned from the previous phases of the field work, at the 'micro' and 'meso' levels.

Following the validation workshop held on 5 July 2023 with the members of the TCR's steering group ⁽⁷³⁾, it was agreed that the final phase of the field work would take the form of a workshop. This workshop would bring together key stakeholders at national level (excluding the institutions represented on the steering group ⁽⁷⁴⁾), to gather their points of view and insights into the main findings of the two rounds of field work and collect ideas for further policy action. A list of potential stakeholders was drawn up: the mission setting up the PES reform by the High Commissioner for Employment and Business Commitment ⁽⁷⁵⁾; France Stratégie; the associations of French Regions and Departments; representative trade unions and employer organisations at national and inter-occupational level; a professional organisation representing training bodies; and the National Federation of Centres Interinstitutionnels de Bilans de Compétences (CIBC) ⁽⁷⁶⁾. For each stakeholder, the individuals contacted were identified as competent in the areas of guidance, support and training. The half-day workshop, held in Paris in November 2023, was attended by a relatively wide range of participants from three trade union organisations, employers' organisations representing small and medium-sized companies, a professional organisation representing training bodies, and an institution reporting to the Prime Minister.

The workshop focused on three areas to encourage discussion and ensure that useful considerations and proposals were gathered for the formulation of the

⁽⁷³⁾ The aim of the validation workshop was to discuss the findings of the second phase of the field work, i.e. the 'meso' phase, and the strategy for the third phase of the field work, i.e. the 'macro' phase.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ The steering group includes representatives from the Ministry of Labour, France Compétences, Pôle Emploi, and the Carif-Oref network.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Under the aegis of the Minister of Labour, it 'assists in defining and implementing employment and business commitment policies'.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ The CIBCs are among the providers selected by France Compétences to deliver the CEP (Conseil en évolution professionnelle) scheme for employed persons in the private sector. The CIBCs were leaders of the regional consortia of CEP providers in the regions studied in the 'micro' and 'meso' phases of the thematic review.

final proposals for action for the TCR on UP. These were determined based on the prominent issues raised in the previous two phases of the field work and were:

- (a) changing responsibilities and roles of professionals in UP;
- (b) use of funds for powering upskilling pathways;
- (c) coordination of UP stakeholders.

This chapter provides an analytical summary of the views expressed by the workshop participants on the main results of the 'micro' and 'meso' phases of survey related to the three above areas. It also, highlights their suggestions for action in further developing UP policies. The views expressed and the suggestions for action were discussed with the members of the steering group of the thematic review in a final meeting of the group on 1 December 2023. The chapter is structured around the three areas of discussion at the workshop.

3.2. Changing responsibilities and roles of professionals in UP

The 2018 reform, with the PIC and PRICs, has dramatically changed the scope of intervention for upskilling pathways (UP) stakeholders, accentuating the overlap between the fields of guidance, training, job integration, and work development. Guidance and training professionals (counsellors, advisors, trainers) face an increased demand for adaptability when dealing with less-skilled, highly heterogeneous groups experiencing a wide range of 'external obstacles' to job insertion. Simultaneously, organisations providing guidance and training are increasingly operating on a commercial basis and in a competitive environment, facing high turnover (multi-factorial) of their human resources. This situation has raised questions about their core business and the roles, tasks, profiles, and skills of the professionals involved in UP.

The first part of the workshop focused on the implications of these changes for professionals involved in upskilling pathways. Participants explored strategies for pooling different types of expertise and stabilising job roles to provide comprehensive support for less qualified adults. The discussion centred on adapting guidance and training professions to meet the specific requirements of upskilling initiatives targeted at less qualified groups. This raised questions about the definition of guidance and training professions and the necessary training pathways for professionals. Participants considered whether new qualification standards and training courses were needed to prepare professionals adequately for their evolving roles. The definition of these professions and the associated training pathways should also consider the hybridisation of practices and the

pooling of skills from different occupational fields. This approach recognises the need for a more holistic and collaborative approach to supporting less qualified adults in their upskilling journeys.

Discussions echoed what also emerged from the previous phases of the TCR: although several reforms since 2014 have significantly changed the way organisations provide guidance and training schemes and the way they operate, the less qualified population generally experience the same obstacles as before ⁽⁷⁷⁾. However, due to the PIC, the COVID-19 pandemic and the upturn in employment in 2021, those who are on the periphery of employment, training or even institutions have been enrolled on a larger scale. This has led to a change in the groups benefiting from guidance and training schemes and services, with an increase in precarious situations and a greater need for multiple forms of support (Chapter 2).

Similar political and financial support (to the PIC) has not been forthcoming for employees in general and the less qualified in particular. However, the workshop stakeholders felt that this was necessary. The less qualified workers are also those who have less access to vocational training. The role of guidance and training within companies should also not be overlooked. It is necessary to ensure that existing measures and tools (e.g. professional interviews ⁽⁷⁸⁾) are applied effectively, and more from a UP perspective. More resources should be also injected to support companies (particularly small and medium-sized ones) on HR, training and career development issues and to encourage them to get involved in upskilling (Section 2.4).

Consideration of skills and practices varies for provider organisations, depending on whether they are working with less qualified employees or jobseekers. However, all the stakeholders present at the workshop agree that the general trend towards individualised guidance requires a broadening of the tasks assigned to the various schemes and services. The nature of guidance is multifaceted to adapt it to individual situations. There is no single form of support but many. This approach implies complementary professional positions.

This complementarity can be achieved by relying on ‘generalists’ in charge of the monitoring of pathways. Such generalists can refer individuals to ‘specialists’ at different stages of the pathway and according to specific need. It is necessary to ensure that these guidance pathways are used in a reflective way, to help the

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Even though, as one of the workshop participants pointed out, the importance of digital obstacles and the worsening of certain obstacles (particularly psycho-social) as a result of the health crisis should be noted.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ *Entretiens professionnels*, a major HR tool available to a company to take stock of employees career trajectories and skill needs.

recipient to learn from the situation. Complementarity can be achieved through cooperation between different professionals in guidance, job integration, employment and training. If necessary, cooperation can also be carried out with social or even medico-social services, at local level. There is agreement on this first approach, but it requires clear definition of the objectives and recipients of the guidance activities. This is to define the process and the professions to be involved.

A second option has been suggested: develop the different professions within the provider organisations ⁽⁷⁹⁾, with clear distribution of tasks. However, this option would run the risk of giving the largest structures ⁽⁸⁰⁾ access to public contracts, to the detriment of smaller local organisations.

In terms of a mapping of the skills, the guidance provided within the framework of the Conseil en évolution professionnelle (CEP) or the Plans locaux pour l'insertion et l'emploi (PLIE) could serve as a basis for defining the generalist function. This function would benefit from being maintained (permanent employment contract), recognised (improved pay) and enhanced (training leading to certification).

In the design of UP schemes for the unemployed, the objectives are set by several funders but there is not always consistency between the various schemes. The main aim of these schemes can be to meet the recruitment needs of a sector, without any real improvement in the skills and qualifications of the individuals concerned. In guidance, many doctrines coexist ('work first', 'train first'), which do not refer to the same approach or the same occupations.

The shift from 'objective-based support' (meant as the achievement of predetermined goals such as employment or a qualification) to 'holistic support' (based on the analysis of needs of the individual and individualised guidance) also blurs lines and impacts professional skills. The requirement to be flexible weakens core professions. It can lead to a loss of meaning, deterioration of work conditions and staff motivation, on top of precarious employment conditions ⁽⁸¹⁾. Being

⁽⁷⁹⁾ These are often large structures, with sufficient human resources and financial engineering to respond to a wide range of national procurement markets and tenders with varied objectives, from job integration to professional development, including training and certification. This option is not without reservations, linked to the constraints of competition rules and the risks of conflict of interest that can arise when the same structure covers both guidance and training/certifications functions.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ There are at least three reasons for this: 1) large organisations have the HR resources needed to deal with the formalities of this type of order; 2) they are more easily able to compete with the economies of scale of large groups; 3) they are strong enough to cope with public payment deadlines.

⁽⁸¹⁾ In Nouvelle-Aquitaine, for example, fixed-term contracts and self-employed status are more prevalent in the sector (25% and 24%) than in all sectors of activity (8.7% and 8.9%) (Insee - Population census 2017).

undermined by an unstable job does not help professionals to resolve complex social situations that require long-term support. 'It's the organisations themselves that have started to operate in this way, but they have done so in order to survive', point out the representatives of guidance organisations, in referring to the effects of the 'market logic of funding arrangements' for guidance and training schemes. They also emphasised the need for coherence between schemes through strategic steering, mentioning the possibility of a 'conference of funders'. The issue of funding is central to the employment conditions of professionals. It explains the strong competition that exists between organisations and the high turnover in terms of HR, both of which were observed during the previous phases of the field work.

Competition is also reflected in the training needs and requirements of the professionals involved in UP. The stakeholders defend the need to consider each other's work and encourage local forms of collaboration, rather than the hybridisation of work practices or homogenisation. However, they mention the required need to adapt to the commercial logic of the system, leading professionals to develop 'commercial' and 'marketing' skills to develop a 'sales stance' and be 'capable of bringing in funding'.

3.3. Use of funds for powering upskilling pathways

The financial stakes are not necessarily related to the overall volume of funding for vocational training. They are related more to how they are used for upskilling less-qualified individuals, whether unemployed or in employment. These issues arise in different ways, depending on the persistent segmentation of the French system: a 'jobseekers' sub-system and a 'employees' sub-system. For the former, the PIC with the PRIC make it possible to invest in or strengthen UP activities. However, they face a lack of coordination. In addition, funding methods are more or less favourable to the stability and development of human resources (Section 2.6), on the one hand, and to the adaptation of upskilling pathways, on the other (Section 2.5). For the latter, highly segmented and rigid funding, which is designed for reskilling rather than upskilling of individuals in employment, makes it difficult to offer support tailored to where it is needed (Section 2.7).

The second part of the workshop looked at the scope for financial manoeuvre with a view to suggesting solutions for the upskilling of less qualified adults. This part of the workshop discussed the conditions and levels of funding that could be envisaged to guarantee the quality, flexibility and effectiveness of the schemes and services, while at the same time ensuring that the structures have long-term support.

In France the training system is divided based on the status of individuals on the labour market. This was mentioned in the previous phases of the field work and emphasised by the stakeholders taking part in the 'macro' workshop. This division is also apparent from a financial point of view. Jobseekers receive public funding for training ⁽⁸²⁾, while employees receive funding from private sources ⁽⁸³⁾. The findings and proposals that emerged from the workshop were therefore initially based on this dual reality. Attempts were then made to move away from it.

For jobseekers, 'we need to move away from payment by the number of training hours' and from funding methods based on purely quantitative objectives. The Service of General Economic Interest (SGEI) is in great demand. This public procurement format provides medium-term strategic visibility, enables teams to be stabilised and developed, invests in their training, and maintains in-depth local relationships. The SGEI is a means of reducing the uncertainties associated with public calls (its content and the chances of being selected as part of the tendering process). Otherwise, organisations that position themselves on the jobseeker guidance and training market are in a permanent risk situation (contract losses, instability in the nature of the content, volume and area covered by their offer). This risk brings with it the potential for precarious employment conditions for professionals. It also brings the risk of a reduction in the number of organisations, or even the predominance of para-public organisations, as observed in one of the Departments surveyed (Chapter 2).

For individuals in employment, the levers highlighted by the workshop participants are to re-evaluate the contribution made by companies (currently 1% of the gross wage bill, compared with 1.6% before the last reform), and to increase the integration of UP into HR policies specifically aimed at the less qualified. Another of the levers mentioned is to extend access to mutualised vocational training funds to medium-sized companies (which was lost with the reform). Other points for improvement include the idea of increasing the fungibility of budget envelopes to encourage more responsive financial packages that can be adapted to the needs identified for less qualified employees. This also includes reviewing the distribution of funds (by prioritising the development of skills and qualifications, CEP service provision, and support for professional transitions) and the nature of

⁽⁸²⁾ Regions/Pôle emploi/State. Guidance support and training courses can be provided by private sector organisations. The trainee can contribute to the funding via their CPF or other means.

⁽⁸³⁾ Companies/OPCO/Transitions Pro associations (themselves financed via the redistribution of the *Contribution unique à la formation professionnelle et à l'apprentissage* (CUFPA) tax paid by companies). Employees undergoing training can contribute to the financing via their CPF or personal funds, and a company can contribute on top of the fiscal obligations.

these open/closed financial envelopes ⁽⁸⁴⁾. It also involves directing them 'towards those who need them most'. The development of HR, career development and training strategies (moving beyond the question of job adaptation) and towards UP could be facilitated by granting the relevant stakeholders the resources to enable them to 'reach out' to companies (particularly small and medium-sized ones) with companies thus becoming part of a support process. This development of strategies can also be done by ensuring compliance with legal obligations (such as companies informing employees about the individual learning account, the CEP service and the Validation of acquired experience scheme) and the effective application of existing measures (e.g. in-house professional interviews, skills development plans) geared to UP.

Although the same provider organisation can work with both types of population (unemployed and employed), the financial channels are different. According to the participants, this division should be questioned. Stakeholders advocate the introduction of national steering of policies, and their related budgets ⁽⁸⁵⁾. For a less qualified worker, even more than for a qualified worker, status (employed or unemployed) ⁽⁸⁶⁾ can vary. An overall view of the system would encourage a more UP strategy in France. Reducing the segmentation and rigidity of funding is, in their view, a necessary condition.

The participants also pointed out the increasing link between funding and guidance towards shortage occupations which 'unashamedly' reproduces 'adequationist' logics. These logics leave aside the upskilling aspirations of individuals and prioritise the response to short-term employment needs. Without reviewing the vast literature on the subject, it is worth pointing out here that, 'all the measurements show (...) that matching training to a job, except of a few occupations, is not the norm on the labour market' (Giret, 2015) ⁽⁸⁷⁾.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ The principle of an open envelope applies, for example, to the CPF or apprenticeship funding, for which there are no predefined budgetary limits, thus satisfying all requests if they are formally admissible. In the case of closed envelopes, there is a ceiling on the amount of funding available.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ France Compétences is seen only as 'a body for regulating the funding' of vocational training.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ 'Senior managers and intermediate professions are virtually at full employment, with unemployment rates of 3.5% and 4.7% respectively in 2019. The unemployment rate for unskilled workers (17.7%) is five times higher than that for managers, while the unemployment rate for white-collar workers (9.2%) is almost three times higher'. (Insee - 2019 data - Observatoire des inégalités. www.inegalites.fr/Chomage-les-ouvriers-non-qualifies-beaucoup-plus-touchees).

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Jean-François Giret, 'Les mesures de la relation formation-emploi', Revue française de pédagogie 192, July-August-September 2015.

For the social partners, 'making training a social dialogue issue' would help to encourage greater use of it. The individual responsibility set out in the 2018 law is not sufficiently backed up by collective guarantees. To put it in terms of Amartya Sen's capability approach ⁽⁸⁸⁾, resources exist (the individual learning account, the CEP service, job transitions support) but are not converted into achievements (increasing skills and qualifications). In the absence of conversion factors (information on accessible resources, effective use of the internal HR channels for this purpose, HR support for companies, political/media awareness campaigns for the CEP), the right to training struggles to materialise.

3.4. UP stakeholder coordination

The previous phases of the survey highlighted the fact that efforts to coordinate and cooperate between stakeholders were scattered, as well as indicating the shortcomings of four-party governance (State, regional level, trade union organisations, employer organisations). This dispersal in terms of coordination and cooperation ran from the design level to the implementation of policies. It has led to an almost chronic instability in the guidance and training system due to the succession of reforms, which weighs on the stakeholders, adds uncertainty and provokes contradictory dynamics between protecting one's portfolio and pooling efforts.

The final part of the workshop was devoted to the forms of governance supporting the development and implementation of UP policies. It sought to examine the institutional configurations that encourage synergies between stakeholders in the shared construction of policies for less qualified adults. There were questions on the possible complementarities capable of developing convergent strategies for all less qualified adults, as well as the distribution of roles and responsibilities between stakeholders at the different levels of governance.

In funding, the various target populations, whether jobseekers or employees, are covered by multiple structures with independent rationales. The result is a lack of co-ordination between initiatives, which can even lead to a degree of competition between stakeholders.

To support change, the stakeholders called for an overall evaluation of the system resulting from the 2018 reform. However, they also admitted that putting it into operation *ex post* would be complex. The many evaluations of individual schemes only give a fragmented picture and do not provide an overall vision from

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Among the numerous works we quote: Sen (2003), *L'économie est une science morale*, La Découverte, Paris.

which to draw lessons. For example, it has not been possible to estimate the return on investment of the PIC, the mainstay of the reform. PIC evaluation could not produce reliable indications according to the participants, as it is scattered across several structures and complicated by the heterogeneity of the experiments ⁽⁸⁹⁾. Similarly, it is difficult to find a complete assessment of the SPIE experiments. So, without capitalising on experience, how can change be nurtured? In this shared observation of a lack of governance, evaluative action would represent 'one of the means of questioning the political-administrative arrangements made by other institutional stakeholders' ⁽⁹⁰⁾. More broadly, it would be a matter of developing evaluation approaches with the stakeholders concerned; this would be, at the policy design stage. Indicators and methods need to be devised to capture the qualitative effects of policies.

In addition to the evaluation aspects, the participants were unanimous in noting a lack of multi-stakeholder governance and the means to ensure it at the various levels.

At national level, it has been suggested that a new body be set up to be responsible for policy direction and strategic steering, but no agreement has been reached on its format. The trade unions would like to create a solely joint political body (with local declinations). Others are banking on a four-party system at a 'supra-ministerial' level with political and strategic legitimacy and mandate.

At regional level, it would be essential to guarantee the conditions under which the existing bodies can operate effectively. This would lead the body not to be limited to the role of 'recording chambers' for policies and measures that have already been defined. Guaranteeing real decision-making powers for all stakeholders, including the social partners, joint construction powers, and allocating the human resources and financial resources necessary for the operation of the CREFOPs ⁽⁹¹⁾ are claimed to be levers conducive to multi-stakeholder governance.

The sub-regional level of the employment area is then recommended as the level at which strategic programmes should be put into operation, with ad hoc forms of governance to orchestrate it (the CLEFOP in Pays de la Loire is cited as an example).

⁽⁸⁹⁾ The evaluation work carried out by the scientific committee of the PIC (DARES 2020, 2021, 2022) should be mentioned; this highlighted a quantitative assessment of the of upskilling investments under the auspices of the PIC, and qualitative analysis supported by case studies. However, it produced only partial results in the connotation suggested by the workshop participants.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ Hassenteufel P., *Sociologie politique: l'action publique*, Colin, 2011.

⁽⁹¹⁾ Regional employment, training and vocational guidance committees.

However, it is difficult to discuss the issues of governance in more detail as they are affected by the upcoming Full Employment Law ⁽⁹²⁾, the details of which were not known at the time of the workshop (December 2023). Questions and concerns have been raised about the implementation of France Travail (the structure replacing Pôle emploi) and the Network for employment. These questions and concerns are about the time lag between the implementation of the scheme providing for the populations and the implementation of the governance arrangements planned at national, regional, departmental and local levels.

Beyond governance, the stakeholders agree on the need for coordination and even regulation concerning the '*millefeuille*' of schemes and funding promoted in parallel by several national and regional institutions via (too) many calls for applications, which leads to a 'waste of energy'. The relaunch of the PIC for the period 2024-27 is open to comment, because of the risk of reproducing the counter-productive effects of the confusion of funding sources, without a coherent financial response to individuals and local areas. This relaunch also raised questions concerning the need for more qualitative monitoring of its achievements, particularly in terms of support for those who are on the periphery of employment, training or even institutions.

From governance to tools, almost all the stakeholders present recommended moving beyond the jobseeker/employee binary. Schemes should be targeted more at the less qualified, regardless of their status on the labour market. This opening up of practices would also provide a response to the lack of targeted support for less qualified employees, considered to be a real 'unthinkable aspect of the reforms'. This would involve emphasising their rights to upskilling and retraining, and providing significant resources for available tools such as Cléa certification, measures to combat illiteracy and e-illiteracy, and validation of acquired experience (whose recent revisions, including a reverse VAE modality, encourage its wider use, particularly by the less qualified). The provision of dedicated resources and the dissemination of information to the less qualified should be a priority.

⁽⁹²⁾ The Law for full employment, adopted in November 2023 and awaiting promulgation, is based on the report of the France travail / PSE reform prefiguration mission of the High Commissioner for Employment and Business Commitment (April 2023). It sets out a series of measures designed to achieve the objective of reducing unemployment to around 5% by 2027. These measures include the transformation of Pôle emploi into France travail, the establishment of an Employment Network, and the introduction of a commitment contract for all unemployed people registered with France Travail (including RSA recipients), etc.

CHAPTER 4.

Areas for policy intervention and progress

The work of the TCR France is punctuated by final policy proposals. They are intended for stakeholders involved in defining and implementing UP policies in France and other EU countries, so they have a dual purpose. They are based on the lessons learned from the three phases of the field work (micro, meso and macro) in the French national context and highlight the points for attention, areas for improvement or levers that may have been identified or suggested by the stakeholders interviewed. There are six policy proposals, all designed to help identify, continue to encourage and support less qualified adults, as well as the forms of financial and non-financial support and governance arrangements most conducive to upskilling pathways.

4.1. **Policy area 1: Encourage approaches that ‘reach out’ to the less qualified adults, whether unemployed or employed, and enable them to express a desire and/or ability to undertake upskilling pathway**

The TCR surveys highlighted the importance of 'reaching out' to less qualified adults, and not just providing general information on existing resources or identifying participants eligible to enrol in a support scheme.

The aim is to provide accessible, clear, and comprehensive information on the range of services available, enabling target publics to feel involved, to make informed choices and to plan.

The choice of information channels is not a trivial one and must consider the heterogenic nature of the population. Information channels are necessarily diversified and cannot rely exclusively on digital media. While social networks can be a powerful tool for reaching certain target populations, digital channels can represent an obstacle to access information for those who are on the outside (in terms of equipment and/or proficiency in its use).

The intermediate means of information also plays a part in how information is taken on board by target populations. In this respect, close contact is essential, particularly in challenged urban neighbourhoods, rural areas and inside companies, to reach target populations. This can be achieved by using intermediaries and local stakeholders, including small organisations. They do not

necessarily belong strictly to the field of vocational training but can come from more or less related fields (social, medico-social, sport). The aim is to capitalise on the mutual knowledge of organisations and on local collaborative dynamics to help identify and refer target groups.

As well as being firmly rooted in their local communities, these approaches to 'reaching out' to the target populations also seek to go beyond one-off interactions and are based on establishing a relationship. The emphasis is on actively listening to people, taking account of their unique situation and their day-to-day, sometimes urgent, problems. The search for solutions to these problems, which are often of various kinds, means that training/employment/career development issues are gradually brought into the equation, sometimes only as a further step. In parallel, the process should also include some methods or activities (collaborative work, sporting or cultural activities, socialising opportunities) that help to empower the individual and continue to encourage the intrinsic motivation to move forward on an upskilling pathway. These methods or activities act on the inhibiting situations of self-exclusion, acquiring (again) social and/or work codes, the (re)discovering and (re)evaluating of one's skills, enabling the individuals involved to (re)find momentum.

As the processes involved in 'reaching out' to the target populations are multi-faceted and take place over varying periods of time, depending on the population concerned, it seems essential to provide adequate levels and conditions of resources (HR, financial means, time) to the stakeholders with expertise in this area.

4.2. **Policy area 2: Maintain the skills of the professionals involved in upskilling support and encourage the complementary nature of professions that meet the needs of the less qualified adults**

The working environment in which UP professionals operate is of major importance. The market logic behind the implementation of guidance and training strategies and the funding methods, leads to competition between service providers; this has an impact on the working and employment conditions of professionals, particularly in terms of contract length and pay, but also on staff turnover. The need for professionals to be versatile and to produce reporting work using quantitative indicators to meet the requirements of service contracts and

schemes funders, questions fundamentals as well as the meaning of work and the development of UP professions.

Faced with these trends, the stakeholders agree on the need to support professionals in maintaining their respective areas of expertise and their methods, within a framework of complementarity and multidisciplinary in the guidance process. One idea from the TCR is that of organising the guidance action around two main categories of professionals. The first take a generalist approach, focusing on the tailored monitoring of pathways, able to take advantage of what exists to refer people towards the second-type specialist professionals (guidance, integration, employment, training, and, if necessary, from the social or medico-social sector) and appropriate resources on a case-by-case basis. Guidance, seen as a common thread, directs individuals to specific support at different stages of the pathway, depending on their needs, and provides feedback for educational purposes.

The generalist approach has already been widely used in France in previous programmes aimed at low-skilled groups, such as the Youth Guarantee ⁽⁹³⁾, local plans for job integration and employment (PLIE) and career development counselling service (CEP). It presupposes the identification of resources that can be used and a detailed knowledge of the stakeholder's ecosystem, as well as the possibility of being deployed over a period that is not limited in advance, which is necessary for the reactivation and development of the individual's autonomy. The TCR on UP showed that, in the case of the CEP service, the temporal element of guidance was subject to constraint due to the funding model, which favoured paying the service provider at the end of each completed service act. The new version of the 2024-27 specifications sought to remove this constraint by distinguishing between a one-off level of service, limited in time, to meet specific needs, and a second level with no time limits to provide long-term guidance, with a 'common thread' approach.

To ensure that guidance is tailored to the individual, cooperation and partnership dynamics should be encouraged and strengthened, so that pathways are part of a process that relies more on the complementary nature of professions than on their intermingling. This can take the form of collaboration on the ground between professionals from different fields, or by bringing together these different professions within a larger structure covering different fields. This second option must, however, be seen in the context of the types of stakeholders present in the regions and avoid the risk of favouring access to public contracts for the largest structures to the detriment of small local organisations (Chapter 3). The search for

⁽⁹³⁾ Youth Commitment Contract (*Contrat d'engagement jeune* - CEJ) since 2022.

complementarity and the mapping of the skills and stakeholders available in each area will help to equip UP professionals, as will the contribution of additional skills that will enrich their core activities without distorting them, in order to facilitate the identification and management of the multiple obstacles (economic, social, psychological, health, etc.) faced by a significant proportion of individuals.

Preserving professional skills means encouraging forms of recognition for the professions involved in UP pathways. Certification would seem to be an essential step towards validating skills, clearly defining status and valuing the work of the people involved. Their commitment and the qualitative results they deliver should be (re)considered in the light of objectives that are not limited to the job integration of the individuals they support, or to the quantitative indicators reported to funders; they should also consider the solution or mitigation of external obstacles identified (see policy area #1). Giving organisations the human, financial and institutional resources they need is an essential condition for stabilising the human resources responsible for UP.

4.3. **Policy area 3: Rethink funding and design flexible upskilling instruments for less qualified, regardless of their labour market status**

A wide range of stakeholders contribute to the funding of UP policies. The State and PES actors, together with the regions, support schemes aimed at jobseekers. *France Compétences*, in conjunction with the joint bodies, distributes funding dedicated to developing employee skills (other than that intended to support the apprenticeship system). The multiplicity of funding sources and methods requires a high level of coordination and a search for complementarity between the various stakeholders when designing and steering UP policies and the associated budgets (see policy area #5).

The aim of this coordination could be to simplify funding circuits and create bridges between the two ecosystems (jobseekers and employees), which would be more favourable to individuals whose situation on the labour market fluctuates or is precarious (not negligible in quantitative terms). Other bridges could be built based on the PES range of activities, which has now been extended to include relations with companies, or by extending the resources available to joint bodies to provide responsive support tailored to the upskilling needs of less qualified employees, who are most at risk of their skills becoming obsolete and of losing their jobs (see policy area #4).

In devising ways of funding upskilling schemes, it is important to think in terms of mechanisms that are simple and accessible to all (and which therefore take account of the problems of those who are less involved in such schemes). As part of the public procurement process and the procedures for allocating and managing funding, it is a good idea, for example, to consider the characteristics and constraints of small organisations, which often come up with good ideas and have detailed knowledge of their local area and the individuals in question. Some stakeholders emphasised the importance of the funder providing support to organisations bidding for calls for projects or for specific contracts, to counterbalance their lack of human resources and skills in financial engineering, which works to the disadvantage of small organisations, and to encourage the participation of new organisations.

The surveys show that medium-term financing (at least 4/5 years) is also to be favoured to enable service providers to ensure continuity of the service, without always being in the rush to find funding, and thus to put teams in good working conditions, reducing job insecurity. This is the case, for example, with public service delegations based on the Service of General Economic Interest (SGEI) model, where the structures are paid based on 'fair compensation' for the net costs of providing the service and a flexible term of office.

For schemes aimed at less qualified individuals who are far from the labour market, a few precautions seem appropriate: adaptability of funding over time to absorb economic and labour market fluctuations over the medium term (4 to 5 years); financial leeway for adjustments linked to variability in the types and duration (often long) of support, depending on the situation and needs of each individual; ensuring that the organisation providing the service has a balanced budget and reducing the risk of dependence on the public service delegation, the non-renewal of which could jeopardise its survival.

Other forms of remuneration for service providers based on a breakdown of the services delivered appear to be less appropriate. This is the case with 'fee-for-service' pay, which is triggered once the defined guidance or training activity has been completed and justified, or the model - still dominant in France - of pay per hour/trainee, which encourages individuals to fill up guidance/training schemes and limits the participation of the most disadvantaged groups, who are more likely to be absent or drop out.

While medium-term funding (in the form of SGEIs, for example) allows for better organisation and efficiency in the provision of guidance/training services, the provision of funding under the form of calls for projects is still useful for stimulating experimental and/or innovative initiatives that can be scaled up or subsequently integrated into longer-term action plans. It enables providers to benefit from

subsidies to test methods, launch new initiatives or disseminate existing initiatives more widely (to other areas or other types of target population).

When the schemes and services funded are geared towards providing comprehensive support for individuals who are on the periphery of employment, training or career development, it is important to link them to monitoring indicators capable of capturing the diversity and nuances of the effects of this support, and not just the achievement of quantifiable objectives. There are many ways in which progress can be made, over and above the rate of individuals entering employment or training at the end of the scheme programme. Empowerment, regaining self-confidence, overcoming social or health conditions that prevent integration into - or progress in - the labour market (see policy area #1) should all be considered as favourable effects of an upskilling pathway.

4.4. **Policy area 4: Encourage companies to take part in upskilling pathways to support the less-qualified (employees and jobseekers), together with the social partners and the other ecosystem stakeholders**

The TCR placed great emphasis on the role of companies in building upskilling pathways. Their involvement is not limited to complying with tax obligations relating to the funding of employee training; it also involves the possibility, in a bottom-up approach, of influencing the destination of these resources, by accessing the funds thus pooled to meet identified upskilling needs. An acculturation effort needs to be made to encourage greater support for upskilling among less qualified adults, whether they are already in work or potential human resources.

Companies' primary motivation is often to respond to urgent needs to adapt jobs (to new technologies or new processes), or to recruit (or maintain) HR in short-staffed, sometimes unattractive occupations. Recent French employment policies have looked for ways to encourage the long-term unemployed (the vast majority of whom are low-skilled) to enter short-staffed occupations. At the same time, against a backdrop of shortages in the labour market and a favourable economic climate, some companies are showing a greater willingness to open up to the less qualified jobseekers. While this trend may provide an opportunity for some individuals to enter the labour market, it runs the risk of neglecting the motivational aspects at the root of reactivation programmes for individuals who are on the periphery of employment, as well as progression towards long-term training aimed at obtaining a qualification. The involvement of companies must therefore also be sought by

other means and for objectives less linked to economic trends or immediate recruitment needs.

French policies emphasise the freedom of individuals to choose their work-related future, with the idea of developing each person's capacity to act. This same idea could be applied to companies themselves as 'legal persons', capable of developing a willingness to take action primarily to develop the skills and qualifications of their less qualified employees, but also to contribute to supporting less qualified unemployed adults, in line with an approach of social responsibility (potentially backed by the conditionality of aid, see *below*).

The public employment services and the joint bodies (in France, the OPCOs, the occupational branches attached to them, the Transitions pro associations) should have enough resources dedicated to developing a coordinated policy of 'going towards' companies. They should broaden and optimise their organisation to change scale in relation to the number of companies involved (particularly SMEs). In this way, they will increase awareness-raising actions and information provision on available schemes and existing funding, as part of a process of supporting companies to develop their own UP projects. In the same vein, companies should be encouraged to adopt HR policies that are more attentive to less qualified employees, with the effective implementation of regular professional interviews (distinct from appraisal interviews) with each employee and the establishment of skills development plans. Companies should be also involved in schemes aimed at jobseekers or employees to undergo in-company immersive experiences (e.g. work-based placements, job/career discovery initiatives) in collaboration with the PES and the CEP providers. In addition to encouraging action, some forms of company injunction actions may be also introduced to ensure compliance with the measures in force (e.g. in terms of informing employees about schemes opening to individualised support like CEP, CPF, VAE, etc.), or to introduce conditionalities for obtaining financial support (e.g. obligation to engage in UP projects).

Scaling up requires resources to be made available. The highly codified system of funding, strengthened by the 2018 reform, could be improved by introducing greater interoperability between the budget envelopes allocated to support for upskilling and professional transitions (see policy area #3). In this way, joint providers could regain the room for manoeuvre they need to make more proposals to companies. They would be in a better position to set up projects to meet expressed or identified needs in terms of developing basic skills and combating illiteracy or e-illiteracy, and to cover the full cost of training. This optimisation of resources can be complemented by better coordination between public and private funding of occupational branches or companies.

4.5. Policy area 5: Ensure multi-stakeholder governance (State, regional and local authorities, partners) for UP at the most appropriate territorial level

The TCR shows the importance of organising efficient systemic governance to optimise the efforts of a plurality of stakeholders, bodies and territorial levels. Even if the dividing lines between the State, the regions and other local authorities (plus other intermediary bodies that may complement the institutional framework ⁽⁹⁴⁾) are defined in the law, as far as responsibilities for training, guidance and integration are concerned, the boundaries can be much more porous in reality. The role of multi-stakeholder governance is to distribute tasks, share the construction and guide the actions of institutions without encroaching on their perimeters and distribution of competences. The various institutions, particularly at local and regional level, seem to recognise the risk of overlapping measures, funding and systems, and often seek to establish links, share information and engage in dialogue, without however managing to ensure coordinated strategic convergence (Section 2.8).

It seems important to reaffirm the principle of multi-stakeholder governance (State, regional and local authorities, social partners), which would address all UP policies and issues relating to less qualified adults (regardless of status), from their development to their implementation, at the most appropriate territorial levels.

The complex exercise of joint construction requires decision-making skills, a balanced sharing of roles and responsibilities, as well as human and financial resources (e.g. permanent teams to support operations, financial allocations to ensure the active and constructive participation of the stakeholders concerned) capable of making the governing bodies work, whatever the scale considered. Shared construction is based on efforts to ensure that objectives, strategies and systems complement each other before they are put into operation, and this benefits implementation in terms of clarity of objectives (which can be evaluated), convergence of actions, pooling of resources and, ultimately, political capitalisation of the results obtained (evaluations).

This governance must take place at the most appropriate territorial levels. The first level is the national level for defining main policy orientations, the format of which remains to be defined according to the different State configurations, the

⁽⁹⁴⁾ Such as metropolitan councils, agglomerations of municipalities, devolved government departments for regional and sub-regional areas, joint bodies.

administrative organisation, the degree of autonomy of the territorial levels, the plurality of stakeholders and the involvement of the social partners.

There is an open debate on the form that this governance of policy guidelines and strategic steering could take in France (Chapter 3). The stakeholders (particularly the social partners) agree that the current configuration is lacking. They are counting on a body with a voice and decision-making powers distributed in a balanced way between public stakeholders, at all levels, and the social partners, to determine policies and budget allocations.

At regional level, the uneven operation of the CREFOPs from one region to another illustrates the difficulties in influencing and ensuring the effectiveness of territorial bodies without the allocation of decision-making mandates and operating resources (human and financial) commensurate with their ambitions (Section 2.8).

While the regional steering committee implements the national strategic guidelines within its administrative perimeter, it is important to operationalise them at a smaller territorial level. The sub-regional level is recognised as the appropriate level for this, in *ad hoc* bodies bringing together local stakeholders, including economic stakeholders, who can work in a network to adjust the solutions (operationalise the strategic guidelines) to the specific challenges of the territories concerned.

4.6. **Policy area 6: Design UP public policies addressed to all less qualified groups, keeping in mind a broad definition of successful upskilling pathway**

The TCR has highlighted a specific feature of UP policies in France. The closed nature of the ecosystem of stakeholders in charge of jobseekers and employees, and of the policies aimed at them, hinders the pooling of the financial and human resources deployed. Upskilling pathways for less qualified employees appear to be overlooked in recent policies, especially in the absence of targeted forms of support.

The policies and schemes deployed in this context should therefore target individuals with low-level qualifications (or obsolete qualifications), regardless of their status on the labour market, to overcome the separation of the two ecosystems. Upskilling policies could thus be extended to all those who are on the periphery of training and/or employment and/or career development. A more holistic conception of upskilling bringing on board all the stakeholders, including

the social partners, would enable resources to be pooled and a broader acceptance of the upskilling rationale to be achieved.

It seems appropriate to reweave the threads with the objectives of the European recommendation on Upskilling Pathways, the basis of this TCR on UP. It sets out various objectives characterising the success of an upskilling pathway, understood as progress towards a higher stage in an individual's life. This progression can take the form of obtaining a higher-level qualification, (re)gaining autonomy, escaping a situation of isolation, and reducing social barriers.

This broad vision appears to be losing ground in France, with a pronounced emphasis on workfare or work first approaches, emphasising employment as the central criterion for (re)integrating and (re)activating low-skilled and/or disadvantaged individuals. This approach is intended to be combined with the idea that this support towards employment helps to reduce labour shortages in certain professional sectors. The aspects of progression towards a more solid skills base, the achievement of a qualification, or the completion of a vocational pathway leading to a new profession seem forgotten.

Consequently, it seems important to reaffirm the general principle of the Upskilling Pathways recommendation and its ambition to enable adults not only to 'access and progress in the labour market', but also to 'achieve their full potential', 'engage in further education and training' and 'play an active part in society'.

With a view to ensuring consistency with the European recommendation while responding to the challenges of the French context, it would seem necessary to design upskilling policies and their evaluation procedures at the same time, for all the less qualified groups (in compliance with this general principle), in conjunction with the stakeholders concerned.

Political investment in upskilling cannot be made independently of a systemic evaluation of the measures deployed. However, public policy evaluation practices tend to focus on ex-post evaluation, entrusted to various experts and external service providers who are not involved in the design of these schemes and who do not work in concert with each other. When common indicators are defined upstream by the funders, they are hard to prove relevant once they have been confronted with the specificities of the regions and the actual work of the stakeholders involved. Drawing the conclusions and recommendations needed to improve programmes and ensure the sustainability of schemes that have proved their worth is ultimately difficult, as the meta-evaluation exercise to be carried out is confronted with the heterogeneity of the evaluation approaches and indicators used. As a result, it seems necessary to consider evaluation more from an *ex ante* or even *in itinere* perspective, from the policy design phase onwards and by involving the stakeholders who run the programmes in the process.

CHAPTER 5.

Concluding remarks

The TCR on UP for the less qualified adults was carried out in France over a 3-year period (2021-23) characterised by numerous reforms and adjustments in French employment, vocational training and guidance.

During the surveys, at the micro, meso and then macro levels, the research team had a finger on the pulse of an effervescent context, reacting to a series of measures, some of them associated with ambitious policy statements and others stemming from exceptional circumstances. When the TCR on UP work began, the ‘training big bang’⁽⁹⁵⁾ announced when the Law of 5 September 2018 on the ‘Freedom to choose one’s professional future’ was introduced, was itself being hit by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgent responses adopted in the [Recovery plan for the French economy](#). It first aimed at providing significant support to businesses to limit the economic impact of the pandemic situation and to ‘safeguard jobs, skills and the French industrial fabric’. Beyond that, the Recovery plan had a more structural objective of ensuring that the country emerged ‘strengthened’ from the health crisis, and of ‘speeding the ecological, industrial and social transformations’. The social pillar of the Plan aimed at a ‘major revolution in trades and skills’⁽⁹⁶⁾ and urged increased attention to professional transitions. As from 2022, the post-pandemic economic recovery on track and the positive macroeconomic indicators led to policies designed to ‘a collective action to achieve full employment and thus give everyone access to autonomy and dignity through work’⁽⁹⁷⁾.

The TCR on UP tried to grasp a changing framework of public policies on job market integration, training and career development. Out of any evaluative intent, providing a snapshot of this moving system of strategies, stakeholders and schemes, in order to set out its strengths and points for attention in relation to the UP Recommendation, proved to be a delicate exercise. It had to deal with the confusion generated by the context, with the asynchronous speeds of the policy agendas, and the implementation of a profusion of measures, in an attempt to assess the UP dimensions of the French system.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ Statement by the Minister of Labour, Le Monde 23/02/2018.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ Statement by the Minister for Labour, AEF 03/11/2021.

⁽⁹⁷⁾ France Travail prefiguration report, April 2023.

The TCR on UP was conducted using key analytical points, a progressive methodology (micro, meso, macro) and given timeframes which enabled it to highlight a variety of instructive aspects of UP in the French context but failed to grasp the full extent of certain specific issues. One of these is the separation between an ecosystem (policies/funding/stakeholders) dedicated to the unemployed and an ecosystem (policies/funding/stakeholders) dedicated to the employed, and the range of UP measures, budgets and stakeholders that it generates. It makes the waters muddy and stresses the lack of a coherent and coordinated approach for providing tailored support to less qualified adults. Discussions with the TCR steering group raised the need to go beyond the notification of the separation and its undesirable effects, to find solutions. A further study should look at the reasons for this persistent dichotomy.

The TCR on UP made it possible to question (or re-question) the relationship between national and European policies. It made it possible to look at the UP inclinations of the French system in the light of the lines suggested by the corresponding European Recommendation. French policies did not wait for the latter before establishing a right to continuing vocational training, in the early 1970s, or a right to lifelong vocational guidance, at the end of the 2000s, but they have drawn on European iterations over time. While there is no mechanism for integrating and implementing European guidelines at national level, and work agendas may differ, there is a search for mutual coherence and enrichment, particularly through shared objectives and results. The TCR on UP first set out to identify the 'functional equivalents' of the UP Recommendation in France, although this link of equivalence is not necessarily explicit or formalised in national regulations. Additionally, the TCR on UP illustrated many points of contact between French policies and the key principles of the UP Recommendation, highlighting accomplishments and points of improvement.

Among the accomplishments it is to mentioning the diversified approaches aimed at identifying and (re)mobilising those who are on the periphery of training, employment and institutional resources, and the activation of a free career development counselling service (CEP) open to all, which is currently being disseminated throughout the territories. Other identified key elements are the in-depth analysis of career paths and the provision of a multitude of tools and financial support to help people to progress. However, some challenges persist, particularly in terms of governance. The TCR steering group highlighted discrepancies between the design of strategies and related measures, which are expressed through specifications that are a priori complete and appropriate, the financial instruments accompanying their implementation, and their operationalisation,

which often struggles to follow the guidelines. Here too, there is considerable scope for further investigation.

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

Acronyms

AàP MF	<i>Appel à projets Mobilisation vers la formation</i> (Call for projects support for training)
AFPA	<i>Agence nationale pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes</i> (National agency of vocational training for adults)
Agefiph	Association de gestion du fonds pour l'insertion professionnelle des personnes handicapées (Association for the management of the funds for the professional activation of persons with difficulties)
APEC	Association pour l'emploi des cadres (Association for the employability of executives)
AT Pro	Association transitions professionnelles regional joint (Association supporting employee retraining projects).
BFC	Bourgogne France Comté (one of the 13 regions of France)
BIT	Bureau international du travail (International Office for Work)
BRSA	Bénéficiaire du revenu de solidarité active (Beneficiaries of active solidarity income)
CA	Conseil d'administration (Management council)
Carif-Oref	Centres d'animation, de ressources et d'information sur la formation – Observatoires régionaux de l'emploi et de la formation (Centres of organisation, resources and information on training – Regional observatories on employment and training)
CCI	Chambre de commerce et d'industrie (Chambers of commerce and industry)
CDD	Contrat à durée déterminée (Open-ended contract)
CEP	Conseil en évolution professionnelle (Career development counselling service)
Céreq	Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications (Centre of Studies and Research on Qualifications)
Cheops	Conseil national handicap et emploi des organismes de placement spécialisés (National council handicap and work of the organisations for special placement)
CIBC	Centre interinstitutionnel de bilan de compétences (Inter-institutional centre for skills assessments)
CIDFF	Centre d'information sur les droits des femmes et des familles (Information centre for the rights of women and family)
CIF	Congé individuel de formation (Individual training leave)
CIP	Conseiller en insertion professionnelle (Professional insertion counsellor)
CMA	Chambre des métiers et de l'artisanat (Chamber of jobs and crafts)
CPF	Compte personnel de formation (Individual training account)
CPRDFOP	Contrat de plan régional de développement de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelles

CQP	Certificat de qualification professionnelle
CREFOP	Comité régional de l'emploi, de la formation et de l'orientation professionnelles (Regional Committee for Employment, Orientation and Vocational Training)
CUFPA	Contribution unique à la formation professionnelle et à l'apprentissage (Integrated contribution for the professional training and apprenticeship)
DAQ 2.0	Dispositif en amont de la qualification 2.0 (Pre-qualification service 2.0)
DARP	Délégué à l'accompagnement des reconversions professionnelles (Delegate for the guidance of professionals in transitions)
DREETS	Direction régionale de l'économie, de l'emploi, du travail et des solidarités (Regional directorate for economy, employment and welfare)
EQF	European qualification framework
ERIP	Espace régional d'information de proximité (Regional bureau for proximity information)
EU	European Union
FP	Formation professionnelle (professional training)
FONGECIF	Fonds de gestion des congés individuels de formation (Management funds for the individual training leaves)
FSE	Fonds social européen (European Social Fund)
HSP	Habilitation de service public (Public service accreditation)
IAE	<i>Insertion par l'Activité Economique</i> (Integration through economic activity scheme)
ILA	Individual learning account
INSEE	Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)
Iredu	Institut de recherche sur l'éducation (Institute of Research on Education)
NA	Nouvelle Aquitaine (one of the 13 regions of France)
OF	Organisme de formation (training provider)
OPCA	Organisme paritaire collecteur agréé (approved fund collecting tripartite body)
OPCO	Opérateur de compétences (skills facilitator)
PACA	Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur (one of the 13 regions of France)
PDC	Plan de développement des compétences (skill development plan)
PE	Pôle emploi (public employment service)
PES	public employment service
PIC	Plan d'investissement dans les compétences (skills investment plan)
PLIE	Plan local pour l'insertion et l'emploi (local partnership scheme for labour market integration and employment)

PME	Petite et moyenne entreprise (small and medium enterprise)
PRIC	Pacte régional d'investissement dans les compétences ((regional skills investment agreements)
PTP	Projet de transition professionnelle (financial instrument for vocational retraining)
QPV	Quartier prioritaire de la ville (priority city area)
RH	Ressources humaines (human resources)
ROME	Répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois (operational repository for jobs and employment)
RSA	Revenu de solidarité active (active solidarity income)
RSE	Responsabilité sociale et environnementale (social and environmental responsibility)
RTP	Revue thématique pays (thematic country review)
SIAEs	Structures of insertion through the economic activity (bodies for integration through economic activity)
SIEG	Service d'intérêt économique général (general economic interest service)
SPE	Service public de l'emploi (public employment service)
SPIE	Service public de l'insertion et de l'emploi (public service for integration and employment)
TCR	thematic country review
TPE	Très petite entreprise (very small enterprise)
TransCo	Transitions collectives (collective transitions)
UE	Union européenne (European Union)
UP	upskilling pathways
VET	vocational education and training

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Annex 1.

Basic concepts for this TCR

<p>Didactic (learning) approach to guidance</p>	<p>A new paradigm or approach which refers to a new articulation of the functions of outreach, support, guidance and training in a seamless logic bringing a learning dimension and a capacity for empowerment of the individual, who is increasingly capable of taking ownership of his/her way to enhance skills. Didactic (learning) approach requires professional counsellors to be in capacity to give to low-skilled adults the tools which will enable them to think and build their UP pathways on their own. Thus, they should be able to inform on benefits of a plurality of tools and pedagogical methods which can represent single bricks in the construction of an individualised upskilling pathway. These bricks can be mobilised sequentially or together in a complementary manner. They can also be completed with additional actions like skills assessment, further training or certification.</p>
<p>Individualised guidance</p>	<p>The aim of individualisation is to adapt guidance and training actions to the individual, avoiding having the individual adapt to predetermined schemes or instruments, particularly in terms of learning content and guidance duration. Individualised pathways are not an end in themselves. It is a consequence of a coherent and ambitious approach of differentiated pedagogy. Differentiation means to offer to each individual optimal support and learning situations in terms of his or her progress towards the learning objectives (Perrenoud 2001).</p>
<p>Seamless pathway</p>	<p>As mentioned in the European recommendation, all European citizens should be able to develop competences and skills throughout life by making training choices from the available options. All citizens should have the freedom to build their own upskilling pathways. However, the public services have the responsibility to support the less qualified, most isolated, less autonomous individuals 'to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and / or acquire a broader set of skills'. In order to reduce dropout risks, upskilling should be 'seamless', that is to say that is possible to benefit from the various instruments/schemes to navigate from one to another, without interruption or waiting periods.</p>
<p>Upskilling scheme / upskilling instrument</p>	<p>In this report we use the terms 'scheme' or 'instrument' to translate the French concept of '<i>dispositif</i>' which identifies a 'coherent and organised set of elements (methods, tools, procedures, routines, principles of action) articulated to facilitate a guidance and learning process' (Le Boterf). It also refers to pedagogical, organisational and technological conditions in which the service provision take place. In the context of the TCR we have analysed instruments and schemes designed and funded by national, regional or local authorities aimed at supporting low skilled adults towards higher qualification or employment. The implementation of these schemes is entrusted to public or private organisations who acquire, through public procurement process, a public service agreement to implement the schemes in a given territory or area.</p>

Annex 2.

Interview guide 'meso' phase

Details of guide content and use

This document proposes a general guide for all the actors to be targeted in the 'meso' phase. The general nature of the guide makes it possible to have a basis for questioning that covers both unemployed and employed adults. It was constructed considering the four structuring axes of the RT UP, as well as the questions raised at the end of the 'micro' phase.

As a result, the number of questions is large and the phrasing is rather general. However, for each interview, the most relevant questions in relation to the interviewed actor are prioritised: the questions are clarified and reformulated in a way that is appropriate to the interviewee. The present document is a working document from which adjusted versions are drawn up according to the targeted actors.

The less qualified adults remain the target populations; particular attention is paid to those who are the most excluded from upskilling/career development, to those who are excluded from the digital world, and to those who frequently alternate periods of employment and unemployment. All these details on the target groups are not repeated in the wording of each question, for the sake of brevity. Nevertheless, during the interviews, the focus on the target populations of RT UP is emphasised and the questions formulated with regard to these populations.

Preamble

- Biographical presentation of the interviewee
- In a few words, could you introduce yourself, the position you currently hold and your tasks?
- Setting the agenda and designing the action on skills development pathways for less qualified adults
- Does your organisation have a specific strategy for the development of the skills of the less qualified adults, and if so, could you explain how it is implemented?

Axis 1: Issues of identifying and reaching out to less qualified adults to encourage their involvement in upskilling / professional development

1.1 Information and visibility of strategies and services - upskilling / professional development schemes (risks of exclusion of the less-qualified adults, especially those with precarious status or without access to information disseminated by digital means)

- 1.1.1 In what way(s) is information on the upskilling/career development services you offer disseminated?
- 1.1.2 Who have been the target populations and actors so far; are other target populations and actors envisaged?
- 1.1.3 Do you communicate in the same way to all populations/stakeholders? If not, what is different?
- 1.1.4 What visibility do you have of the upskilling/career development strategies and services of other actors in the region?
- 1.1.5 What perception and what expectations do you have of them?

1.2 Reaching out to and receiving a variety of different populations of less qualified adults

- 1.2.1 How do people access and register for the services you offer?
- 1.2.2 Do you carry out specific or adapted actions to reach different less qualified adult populations? If so, which ones?
- 1.2.3 In order to promote the identification and encouragement of the least-qualified adult population, does your organisation rely on (or encourage) the development of cooperation/partnerships with other actors in the region?
If yes, in what way(s) and with what types of actors?
If not, why not? What are the main obstacles?
- 1.2.4 In your opinion, does the reception of very diverse profiles of low-skilled adults have consequences (especially organisational and HR) for the structures?
If so, what are they?
- 1.2.5 Today, in your opinion, what would be the facilitating conditions to identify and encourage the involvement of the less qualified adults in upskilling / professional development?

Axis 2: Issues of support for the least-qualified adults in individualised and seamless upskilling/career development paths

2.1 Ways and means of adapting support to the least-qualified adults

- 2.1.1 In your opinion, in what way(s) and under what conditions is the individualisation of pathways and the adaptation of support to the varied profiles of the least qualified adults possible?
- 2.1.2 In your opinion, what are the obstacles or limits to the individualisation of pathways, to the adaptation of support?
- 2.1.3 In your opinion, how can a balance be found between individualised pathways for the development of skills/professional development of the least qualified adults on the one hand, and the response to recruitment tensions encountered by companies on the other?
- 2.1.4 In your opinion, what are the challenges for companies and OPCOs in supporting the less qualified adults in upskilling/professional development?

2.1.5 Are innovative practices to support the different profiles of the less qualified adults encouraged by your organisation? If so, in what way? To what extent are they likely to continue?

2.2 Perceptions and conditions of 'seamless' and 'successful' pathways for less qualified adults

2.2.1 'Integrated pathway' or 'seamless pathway', could you describe what these two notions mean to you; in what ways are they different or similar?

2.2.2 In your opinion, what are the necessary conditions for seamless pathways?

2.2.3 In order to promote the links between services and the sequence of steps in the pathways of individuals, does your organisation rely on (or encourage) the development of cooperation/partnerships with other actors?

If yes, in what way(s) and with what types of actors?

If not, why not? What are the main obstacles?

2.2.4 In the same perspective, do you think that there is sufficient knowledge-sharing between actors (and services) in the region? If yes, how is it achieved? If not, what are the main challenges to improve it?

2.2.5 In your opinion, what is a 'successful' pathway and what are the conditions for this success?

Axis 3: Issues of (non-)financial support for upskilling/career development pathways taking into account the multi-dimensional problems of less qualified adults

3.1 Taking into account the so-called peripheral (but often central for individuals) obstacles to upskilling/career development

3.1.1 What are the types of so-called peripheral obstacles that you identify as barriers to the sustainable inclusion of less qualified adults in upskilling / career development pathways?

3.1.2 In what way(s) does your organisation intervene to contribute to the removal of these obstacles? With what resources? Within what timeframe?

3.1.3 What obstacles remain to the removal of so-called peripheral obstacles? What avenues could be envisaged to alleviate the accumulation of these obstacles?

3.1.4 Do you think that the compartmentalisation of support (financial and non-financial) according to the status of less qualified individuals in relation to the labour market may have an impact on their will to participate or not? If so, how and what developments could you imagine?

3.2 Management and organisation of effective human resources necessary for the removal of so-called peripheral obstacles

3.2.1 What human resources does your organisation rely on to integrate different forms of support in the accompaniment of less qualified adults?

3.2.2 In order to promote the integration of different forms of support in the accompaniment of less qualified adults, does your organisation rely on (or encourage) the development of cooperation/partnerships with other actors?

If yes, in which way(s) and with which types of actors?

If not, why not? What are the main obstacles?

3.3 Focus on the sustainability of schemes and financial support at the level of individuals and organisations

3.3.1 To your knowledge, what types of financial support are available to less qualified adults who wish to engage in upskilling / professional development? Do you think they are appropriate (e.g. in terms of access route, eligibility conditions, amount, duration...)?

3.3.2 What funding can your organisation use to support less qualified adults in upskilling / professional development? What is your opinion on these (e.g. in terms of amount, duration, method of agreement, etc.)?

Axis 4: Issues of governance, coordination of actors, articulation of services - devices in an ecosystem favourable to upskilling / professional development pathways for less qualified adults

4.1 Positioning and evolution of partnership practices in the ecosystem of actors involved in skills development / professional development pathways for less qualified adults

4.1.1 In your opinion, which actors play a decisive role in the pathways for skills development/professional development of less qualified adults?

4.1.2 What forms of cooperation (formal and informal) does your organisation have with other actors in relation to the pathways for the development of competences/vocational change of less qualified adults?

What are the main obstacles to the development of cooperation?

4.1.3 Do you have the impression that the Law of 5 September 2018 and / or the PIC / PRIC have influenced your cooperation with other actors; if so, in what way(s)?

4.2 Towards a de-compartmentalisation of the actors' fields of competence and measures less linked to the status of individuals in relation to the labour market?

4.2.1 In your opinion, have the initiatives encouraging synergies between actors with different fields of competence been successful? If so, in what way(s) / if not, why not and what developments could be envisaged?

4.2.2 In your opinion, how would it be possible to create/strengthen bridges, to go beyond the categorisation of services and facilities according to the status of individuals in relation to the labour market?

4.2.3 What forms of inter-institutional cooperation and coordination should be strengthened/imagined in order to build policies adapted to the less qualified adult population (whatever their status)?

Conclusion, opening up, conditions for sustainability / scaling up / spin offs

- In your opinion, what future should be envisaged for the services-schemes implemented within the framework of the PIC / PRIC, on the one hand, and for the private sector employed CEP market, on the other hand, which will soon expire; under what conditions?

- From your point of view, what should be retained/strengthened/adjusted in relation to the developments resulting from the 2018 Reform and/or the PIC / PRIC (in terms of identification - support - financial and non-financial support - coordination)?
- How can we replicate the partnership dynamics that have been successful in a given region? How can they be reproduced elsewhere and developed at the system level?
- How can we avoid distorting the underlying philosophy of global support, based on the interactions and cooperation of local actors, by scaling up to national level, with what means?

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

Key findings of the second and third research phases and suggestions for future action

This final report on thematic country reviews (TCRs) on upskilling pathways, conducted in France from 2021 to 2023, serves as a valuable resource for policy-makers, social partners, and all stakeholders involved in upskilling. It summarises the outcomes of the second (meso) and third (macro) phases of the review and complements a [report published in April 2023 containing the outcomes of the first \(micro\) phase](#).

The report approaches upskilling pathways from the perspectives of outreach, guidance, governance, and both financial and non-financial support. It is based on the analysis of stakeholders' first-hand insights and views on the national approach to upskilling pathways, highlighting its challenges, strengths, and opportunities for progress. Designed for an audience unfamiliar with the French system, the report avoids oversimplification that would dilute the findings. For national stakeholders, it offers a fresh perspective on familiar issues, encouraging new insights and actions.



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