



SKILL

Policy brief to enhance industrial relations and social dialogue on adult learning for an inclusive digital and climate-neutral economy

Deliverable 4.2

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Introduction

The EU and Member States are actively prioritising initiatives that promote adult learning. These policies are contextualised in a complex setting, where multiple forces are at work, including the twin transition and other fast-changing circumstances such as the ageing population, climate change, and globalisation. Furthermore, the labour market in the EU Member States is experiencing increasing strain as a result of global economic competitiveness.

In this context, the I SKILL project contributed, with its mixed-method methodology, to shed further light on different aspects of adult learning policies and on the role that social partners, social dialogue, industrial relations, and other relevant stakeholders may have in driving progress in adult learning in the EU and across a selected group of Member States.

The project's final delivery (D4.2) "Policy Brief on Enhancing Adult Learning Strategies for Social Partners and Other Relevant Stakeholders" seeks to gather a selection of the key messages and policy recommendations derived from the previous deliverables of the project and adhere to the structure of the overall I SKILL project¹.

1. Key messages and policy recommendations from deliverable D1.1

This section presents some of the key message and policy recommendations deriving from Deliverable D1.1² which is based on an extensive academic literature review. In particular, three topics will be touched upon: the strategies to promote adult learning in the context of the twin transition, the inequalities in adult learning participation highlighting some possible solutions, and the role of social dialogue in adult learning.

1.1.1 Key messages and recommendations on strategies to promote adult learning during the twin transitions

Enhancing adult learning systems is becoming an increasingly pressing challenge, especially in the face of digital and green transitions and other megatrends. To address these challenges, it is paramount to implement new strategies or revise existing ones in adult learning and continuing training, including up-skilling and re-skilling. Based on the review of the academic literature, the following is recommended:

- **Involve adults in educational pathways.** Equipping adults with market-required skills as quickly as possible is not sufficient. Rather, it is essential to foster their professional and personal development, which can be achieved in part through the application of transversal skills³. Adults must, thus, be engaged not merely in training, but also in educational pathways.

¹ The recurrence of some key messages and policy recommendations, as coming from multiple sources, should be recognised as a means of corroborating their validity.

² Astarita, C., Boyadjieva, P., Colombo, M., Engdal Vorting, K., Hassan, N., Kováčová, L., Kirov, V., Lanaerts, K., Studená, I., Tiraboschi, T., Toftild, L., and Yordanova, G. (2023), 'Working Paper on an analytical framework on industrial relations and social dialogue for adult learning in a changing Europe', Working Paper I SKILL Project - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue to Kick-in Inclusive Adult Learning – Deliverable 1.1 project report April 2023. <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/i-skill/>

³ See for example Ahlers (2021).

- **Rethink VET.** VETs have been recognised, more than others, as programmes that can contribute to up-skilling and re-skilling⁴. However, the cross-country heterogeneity at the level of development and effectiveness of VET has also been pointed out⁵. Thus, VET should be partially rethought to make it more flexible, able to integrate with national and international research agendas, and ready to establish new profiles and training possibilities to meet emerging demands. These should target young people and up-skilling/re-skilling workers.
- **Apply a holistic approach to up-skilling and re-skilling.** The most effective approach should not be limited to the construction of traditional training paths or the modification of school curricula. Rather, it should be based on collaboration between training systems, social partners, and the business world. Furthermore, it should be experimenting with diversified, customised tools, capable of adapting to the profiles of those involved and to the skills to be trained. It should underline that up-skilling and re-skilling is not a matter of working in a single direction, but of promoting different strategies to meet different needs in different contexts and production sectors⁶.
- **Update teaching methods and tools, preferring practical learning experiences.** Policies must maximise training to expand learning beyond classroom approaches. Workplace or practical experience-based initiatives should be implemented. New technology and organisational approaches develop tacit competencies in the skills-innovation life cycle⁷. Up-skilling and re-skilling training are increasingly administered by proximity and work-based methods. Since these abilities are related to innovations that must be experienced firsthand, they are typically learned on the job⁸.
- **Make use of 'support' instruments, which enable and foster access to lifelong learning pathways and develop transitional protections.** The twin transition can be read in light of transitional labour markets (TLM). From this perspective, the transitions are not limited to generating demand for new skills but to foster a rethinking of the very idea of the labour market. In this context instruments that guarantee the effectiveness of lifelong learning pathways – such as the certification of skills, which is necessary for transparency and recognisability on the market – are fundamental. Likewise, it is crucial to develop transitional protections capable of accompanying the worker throughout the multiple transitions of their working life. This means forms of safeguarding such as making acquired skills transparent, certifying them, and offering ongoing training, professional orientation, and assistance⁹.
- **Investments in adult learning need to be congruous, otherwise, there is the risk of them being ineffective.** National plans must be careful to avoid wasting available resources by adopting clear objectives and, above all, by putting into practice the long-term and holistic planning that alone can help realise the transition¹⁰.
- **Include up-skilling and re-skilling processes in a broader framework that rethinks the regulation of labour markets**, starting with the role played by institutions and, in

⁴ See for example Cedefop (2020).

⁵ See for example Markowitsch and Hefler (2019).

⁶ See for example Adapt (2021).

⁷ See for example Vona and Consoli (2014); Polanyi (1966).

⁸ See for example Chen et al. (2020); Leahy and Wilson (2014).

⁹ See for example Casano (2019).

¹⁰ See for example Casano (2019); Kangera et al. (2020); Zachariadis (2021).

particular, by social partners in relationship with the public sector. The active participation of various stakeholders in the creation of new training opportunities is crucial. Undergoing a transition that is not governed, which is limited to identifying targets to reach and new technologies to adopt, without assisting workers (and others) to acquire new skills or change jobs or sectors when necessary, is a risk to avoid. Hence, there is a need to reinforce coordination and synergy among all players involved.

- **Elaborate strategies in the name of public-private logic.** Lifelong learning based on a renewed alliance and capacity for collaboration between training systems and businesses – the latter being called upon to rediscover their training value, and with it that of workplaces as informal contexts of continual learning – is crucial in ensuring a fair transition and in fostering the employability of workers¹¹.
- **Social governance of the transition also entails the renewed centrality of local territories and communities.** With the involvement of the latter, lifelong learning paths can be better determined at the local, and consequently more personalised level¹². Considering local-level systems indicates which areas are most affected by the transition in employment and social terms.

1.1.2 Key messages and recommendations on inequalities in adult learning participation

Empirical data and assorted studies point towards the fact that participation in adult learning is not equally distributed among adult learners. Indeed, the categories of people who in principle need it the most are those who participate the least. Looking at individual characteristics, the following categories tend to participate less in adult learning as identified by the literature: women¹³; middle-aged and older adults¹⁴; individuals with a lower level of education/qualifications¹⁵; individuals with a disadvantaged parental background/low education level¹⁶; members of ethnic minority groups, young refugees, and migrants¹⁷; blue-collar workers¹⁸; workers whose occupation is at risk of automation¹⁹; workers under non-standard contracts²⁰.

- As well as individual characteristics, some authors underline that the rate of participation in adult learning depends on the country considered²¹, institutional

¹¹ See for example Manyika (2017).

¹² See for example Krawchenko and Gordon (2021); Pai et al. (2020).

¹³ See for example Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2015); Cedefop (2020).

¹⁴ See for example Desjardins et al. (2006); Paccagnella (2016); Cedefop (2020).

¹⁵ See for example Desjardins et al. (2006); Boeren (2009); Roosmaa and Saar (2012); Kyndt and Baert (2013); European Commission, ECEA and Eurydice (2015); Cedefop (2020); European Commission, ECEA and Eurydice (2021).

¹⁶ See for example Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2015).

¹⁷ See for example Kersh et al. (2021).

¹⁸ See for example Desjardins et al. (2006).

¹⁹ See for example Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018); Pouliakas (2018); Cedefop (2020).

²⁰ See for example Cedefop (2020).

²¹ See for example Boeren (2009); Boeren and Holford (2016).

features of the adult learning system²², the choice made by firms²³, the internal organisation of individual firms²⁴, the dimension of the firm²⁵, and the Matthew effect²⁶.

- Concerning the choice not to participate in training, reasoning is complex. Among the most established classifications are Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) division of the obstacles to involvement in lifelong learning into three categories: “situational barriers, dispositional barriers, and institutional barriers”.

As for the possible recommendations to increase the inclusiveness and the participation rate:

- **Stakeholders must commit to making adult learning paths, up-skilling, and reskilling more inclusive** – limiting the negative externalities of the twin transition on categories of workers who are more exposed to the risk of being further marginalised or even excluded from employment. Improvements to the system must not exacerbate differences among workers, which are already broad in terms of skills and salary gaps, on the contrary, they must help to mitigate them.
- **A broader set of policies must be put in place.** The proposed changes in EU policies for lifelong learning may encourage individual participation to a limited extent, but to better deal with inclusiveness and the needs of disadvantaged groups, a wider range of policy tools to ensure equity and equality in adult learning is needed. This includes: “providing financial and non-financial incentives, advertising, developing new programmes, and establishing new delivery systems, as well as better-targeted policies”.²⁷
- Inclusivity is a wide notion, which is difficult to define and operationalise. **Making adult learning inclusive implies first of all that the right to adult learning is legally (universally) recognised.**
- **Skills strategies need to address more than just basic skills** and digital and green skills should be further developed along with transversal skills. This may entail a revision and broadening of how ‘skills’ is currently defined, as well as consideration of which barriers need to be removed according to those directly concerned. Eurostat provides a series of data for 2022²⁸ on the percentage of the population aged 25-64 wanting to participate in education and training, but not doing so for numerous reasons. These include costs, distance, schedule, family reasons, other personal reasons, health or age, no suitable opportunity for education or training, and lack of support from an employer or public services.
- **Adult learning needs to be accessible.** In this context, accessibility is a complex concept encompassing all the measures that enable the right to adult learning and which accommodate difficulties under the headings of distance, schedule, family, and other personal reasons. Among the measures adopted or which may be adopted by Member States to overcome these obstacles are the following:

²² See for example Desjardins and Ioannidou (2020).

²³ See for example Desjardins and Ioannidou (2020); Pouliakas (2018).

²⁴ See for example Hefler and Studená (2023); Brandi et al. (2023); Kirov et al. (2023); Clancy et al. (2023).

²⁵ See for example Baiocco (2020); Baiocco et al. (2020).

²⁶ See for example Blossfeld et al. (2014); Bask and Bask (2015).

²⁷ See for example Tuparevska et al. (2019).

²⁸ AES database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/database>

- *Distance learning and blended learning* are different forms of learning where the former is well-known and fully exploits digital tools to ensure the training can be undertaken remotely. The latter takes place with interaction maintained in person, with a teacher or tutor, aided by online tools and resources.
- *Modularisation* is the process of breaking down certifications and/or education and training programmes into smaller pieces or modules. This is often seen as a means of increasing learners' options to move in and out of education and training and gain recognised credentials over extended periods.
- *Credits* encourage the accumulation of learning outcomes, which may enable learners to obtain certifications at their own speed.
- *Opportunities to move from one learning environment to another*, across various levels/sectors/countries in pursuing education may also enhance an individual's employability and quality of life.

1.1.3 Key messages and recommendations about the role of social partners

Based on the overview of the academic and grey literature on how industrial relations and social dialogue can contribute to adult learning in Europe, key messages and recommendations can be drawn:

- **The role of social partners is key and their involvement in adult learning should continue to grow for addressing the remaining obstacles in this area.** Education, learning, and training are core topics for social partners at the Member State and EU levels. Social partners can foster adult learning through many different channels, from playing their role as decision-makers in various stages of the policy cycle, to managing education and training programmes and running training funds, concluding collective agreements in which training and skills are explicitly addressed, and so on.
- **Through collective agreements, social partners should expand their efforts and influence to broaden coverage to a greater number of workers and firms.** Training is not always a priority for trade unions or employers' organisations, and social partners do not always have a strategy or policy regarding broadening existing collective agreements. In addition, trade union presence in the workplace remains often mostly restricted to larger companies, leaving especially micro- and small companies with weaker social dialogue overall. However, research indicates that the employees of smaller companies, in particular, face more constraints in up-skilling and re-skilling overall (e.g. in terms of participation, quality of training offer, etc.).
- **Social partners play a crucial role in up-skilling and re-skilling.** In the aftermath of the pandemic and in the context of global trends reshaping labour markets, economies, and societies in Europe, up-skilling and re-skilling needs are now more important than ever. Formal education will likely no longer be sufficient; meanwhile, other forms of training and learning have gained prominence. This opens up a critical role for social partners to support workers and companies going through such transitions, in the short and longer term.

2.1. Key messages from the quantitative analysis of the relationship between social dialogue and adult learning outcomes

In Deliverable 2.1²⁹ the authors found empirical evidence on the low training participation rate of low-skilled and a positive and statistically significant relationship between some indicators of the presence of social dialogue and the participation rate. This empirical evidence corroborates the **recommendation regarding the critical significance of an inclusive adult education system and the importance of ongoing efforts by social partners to foster its development.**

Among the results of the paper:

- Low-skilled individuals have consistently lower adult learning participation rates compared to both medium and high-skilled individuals across the EU Member States, including those where the overall adult learning participation rates are high.
- The relationship between social dialogue and adult learning participation rate, is, in general, statistically significant, albeit fairly small. More specifically, it was found:
 - a positive and statistically significant relationship between union density indicators and adult learning participation rates as well as between bargaining coverage indicators and adult learning participation rates.
 - a not statistically significant relationship between employer association density and adult learning participation rates.

2.2 Key messages and policy recommendations on EU-level adult learning-related measures: individual learning accounts and micro-credentials

As far as Deliverable 2.2³⁰ is concerned, focus is given to key messages and policy recommendations relative to 'individual learning accounts' (ILAs) and the 'European approach to micro-credentials'. These measures are the object of two Council Recommendations³¹ whose declared common goal is to enhance the accessibility to quality learning and training possibilities, increase the visibility of individuals' skills, and provide support in identifying opportunities for career advancement and personal growth. These measures would also contribute to attaining the ambitious target set by the European Pillar of

²⁹ Kureková, L.M., Lenaerts, K., Studená, I., Štefánik, M., Tobbyback, I. and Vangeel, N. (2023), 'Working Paper on the Role of Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue in Improving Adult Learning Outcomes and Equity', I SKILL Project - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue to Kick-in Inclusive Adult Learning – Deliverable 2.1. <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/i-skill/>

³⁰ Astarita, C., Hassan, N., and Postica, D. (2024). "Working paper on EU social dialogue for up- and re-skilling: qualitative analysis and skill intelligence-based quantitative analysis on sectors and occupations.", I SKILL Project - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue to Kick-in Inclusive Adult Learning – Deliverable 2.2 <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/i-skill/>

³¹ EU Ministers adopted two Council Recommendations on individual learning accounts and on micro-credentials in Spring 2022. The Council Recommendations are based on proposals adopted by the Commission in December 2021, which were first announced in the Skills Agenda in 2020. Both were preceded by extensive preparatory work in which social partners and other stakeholders were requested to voice their views via a variety of mechanisms.

Social Rights Action Plan³² whereby at least 60 % of all adults should participate in training every year by 2030.

Key messages and policy recommendations are based on the analysis of the grey literature and on the replies given during the semistructured interviews conducted by CEPS in Spring 2023 with European-level representatives of social partners, other relevant stakeholders, and academic experts.

Before delving into the specifics of the two measures, it is important to highlight that various social partners, stakeholders, and experts, although generally supportive of individual learning accounts and the European approach to micro-credentials, would have preferred more definitive actions towards establishing a universal right to training. Such actions would have had a more significant effect in terms of reducing inequalities and including the most vulnerable groups.

Regarding both ILAs and micro-credentials:

- The (governing) body(ies) responsible(s) for determining whether to implement ILAs or micro-credentials in the context of enhancing adult learning should consider that:
 - A one-size-fits-all solution may turn out to be not appropriate.
 - The specific measure needs to fit the existing adult learning system and be interoperable with already existing measures. An effective interconnection between the different measures is based on the country-specific institutional structure.
 - A decision should be based on theoretical and empirical research done at the EU level and/or for specific Member States regarding the potential advantages and disadvantages, as well as the documented outcomes, of the implementation of both measures. Collecting information is necessary, as well, to understand to what extent the transferability of good practice across EU countries is feasible.
- Data collection as a standard practice, both quantitative and qualitative and related to specific measures, needs to be enhanced. In addition to determining whether targets regarding training participation rates will be achieved, data collection should encompass an evaluation of the training's quality, the productivity boosts it generates, and the level of individual satisfaction with different facets of the training.

As far as ILAs are specifically concerned, it is advisable to:

- Maximise both the autonomy of the individual in selecting the training and the guarantee that the decision is taken with comprehensive information.
- Address the motivational barriers facing low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups that need training the most, and who may not access the measure. Indeed, as suggested by social partners and other relevant stakeholders and experts, ILAs may not be able to deliver with respect to inclusiveness.

³² European Commission (2021), *The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

- Avoid the risk of deadweight loss i.e. the risk that ILAs will be used to fund the training that either an individual or an employer would be willing to sponsor from their resources.
- Improve ILAs' effectiveness by reinforcing the Member States' current paid training leave arrangements.

As far as micro-credentials are specifically concerned, it is advisable to:

- Ensure that micro-credentials are used to address both employment and labour market demands, as well as the personal growth and satisfaction of learners.
- Guarantee quality through quality assessment of training and training providers.
- Find an equilibrium between the comprehensive education offered by complete qualifications and the skill-oriented learning provided by micro-credentials.
- Pay particular attention to micro-credential stackability to ensure that the process of accumulation of multiple micro-credentials, while possibly leading to qualifications, diplomas, or degrees, is designed in such a way that does not undermine the value of the latter.

Regarding social partners:

- Social partners should further increase their involvement, intervention, and collaboration in the actual implementation of ILAs and micro-credentials. Indeed, they possess – at the national, sub-national, sectoral, and company level – a privileged viewpoint and a comprehensive understanding of specific circumstances and, thus, more than other actors, are capable of acting with increased effectiveness and efficiency.
- The effectiveness of ILAs and micro-credentials is strongly linked to their design, thus the involvement of social partners is essential in shaping and improving their implementation and in preventing and avoiding drawbacks. In particular social partners can:
 - Anticipate skill needs and targeting skills.
 - Contribute to the specific design and implementation of tools for the quality check processes of the training and of the training providers.
 - Provide individuals with information, advice, and guidance in the selection of the most suitable training. This can happen through constant dialogue between employees and their management at the organisation level, in addition to sectoral and cross-industry collective bargaining.
 - Promote the inclusiveness of the measures by enhancing the learning culture in general, providing support for accessing, information, guidance, and motivation.
 - Further collaborate with other relevant stakeholders, particularly, with adult learning providers (public and private).

3. Key findings and recommendations from National case studies and their comparative analysis

The comparative analysis of the five national case studies, Deliverables 3.1³³, of Belgium (Flanders), Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, and Slovakia, as presented in Deliverable 4.1³⁴ “Comparative report”, unveiled differences and similarities between the Member States under scrutiny. This analysis led to the identification of 15 key messages and recommendations. On some occasions, these are broad enough to be relevant to policymakers at both the European and national levels, beyond the immediate interest of the Member States under scrutiny in this study.

- **Foster a culture of lifelong and adult learning.** The need for an improved lifelong and adult learning culture is especially urgent in some Member States. Its enhancement is advised for all actors and levels. It necessitates the provision of personalised, flexible, and accessible learning opportunities for all adults. But it should be based also on informing and convincing both employers and employees about the value of lifelong learning and its immediate and long-term benefits.
- **Consider the relationships between adult learning policies and other policy areas.** Actual adult learning policies and their future improvement may be interwoven with the development of other policies, for example, social policies, active labour market policies, or industrial policies. It is crucial, then, to intervene in the latter to enhance the effectiveness of the former.
- **Prioritise the equality and inclusiveness aspects of adult learning policies.** The various deliverables of the present I SKILL study have consistently identified low levels of adult learning participation among low-skilled or other disadvantaged groups through the use of different research methodologies, including literature reviews and quantitative and qualitative research. It is therefore imperative to move quickly and decisively to support worker groups more heavily burdened by institutional, situational,

³³

- Habraken, M., Stepman, M. and Lenaerts, K. (2023). I SKILL National Report – Belgium (Flanders). Working Paper I SKILL Project - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue to Kick-in Inclusive Adult Learning – Deliverable 3.1
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<https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/i-skill/>

³⁴ Astarita, C., Boyadjieva, P., Colombo, M., Engdal Vorting, K., Habraken, M., Kirov, V., Kováčová, L., Kureková, L.M., Lanaerts, K., Stepman, M., Studená, I., Tiraboschi, T., Toftild, L., and Yordanova, G. (2024). ‘Comparative Report’, I SKILL Project - Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue to Kick-in Inclusive Adult Learning – Deliverable 4.1
<https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/i-skill/>

and dispositional barriers that prevent them from engaging in adult learning. This must be done to avoid an increase in income inequality and/or the further polarization of skills.

- **Value the work-life balance, mental health, and well-being of employees.** The introduction of automation and technological changes at various stages of production and development presents issues in terms of mental health and well-being, due to the growing load of responsibility. The enhancement of employees' skills and their ability to cope with challenges should be aligned with work-life balance rules, as to avoid additional strain on workers' overall well-being.
- **Streamline administrative processes and ease the bureaucratic burden.** This includes simplifying administrative constraints in the context of EU-funded public learning initiatives in businesses; promoting a more flexible education system for relieving educational institutions of the weight of burdensome rules; and reducing the administrative burden of publicly funded schemes faced by employers, allowing them to make progress in terms of employee outreach and dealing with skills challenges.
- **Reduce various sources of fragmentation both at the geographic and institutional levels.**
- **Develop a career guidance policy during school years, including a more attractive presentation of sectors and occupations requiring technical skills.** One of the most serious difficulties encountered in some Member States is a lack of enthusiasm among young people to enrol in STEM and other technical degrees or programmes. In this regard, it is critical to develop measures to increase the attractiveness of the occupations a STEM degree would lead to. More broadly, it could be necessary to develop a new mindset, moving towards the formation of untrained skills, and collaborating with educational institutions to intercept young people before they complete their studies: offering support to schools and universities, providing teachers from the world of work (professional experts), developing training modules by hosting students in companies, to help them not drop out.
- **Enhance the support for the development of 'transversal' skills.** The adult learning system should improve support for developing soft skills, including social and critical thinking, both in formal and non-formal education and training programs.
- **Boost training quality through training quality assessment.** While the objective of achieving a specific training participation rate is significant, it is not without its limitations. One shortcoming is its exclusive focus on quantity, rather than the extent to which workers' experience the desired improvements as a result of the training. Enhancing the *quality* of adult education is crucial and the evaluation of adult learning is a valuable tool in this regard. Conducting evaluation surveys following individual training courses enables the collection of data that can be used for reporting at the aggregated level. Additionally, it serves as a foundation for incorporating a quality element into the existing quantitatively focused lifelong learning objectives.
- **Promote and further develop the validation process of skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning and practice.** Although non-formal and informal learning are important forms of learning in the workplace setting, an employee's competences are often more likely to be weighed against the formal qualifications possessed. The knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal or informal training prove more difficult to validate. This validation is particularly relevant for blue-collar workers.

- **Keep up with new training techniques, including digital tools, while keeping them inclusive.** It is important to introduce modern training techniques, adapted for adult learners, and a personalised approach, especially for low-skilled and less educated social groups. The impact of digitalization can be observed in the emergence of tools designed to enhance adult learning in various Member States. Nevertheless, as the instruments being discussed are digital, it is important to highlight the issue of digital illiteracy. Those with little or no digital proficiency need to be able to navigate digital technologies and effectively use them. Action is needed at the national and regional levels to ensure the accessibility of these tools, while social partners could also work to ensure that the opportunities (and the related resources) made available are effectively accessible to all companies in the sectors and territories they represent.
- **Assess the skill requirements associated with the context, the market, the company, and employees.** The mapping, anticipation, and sharing of skill requirements and needs, both for companies and for their employees, is a prerequisite to efficiently contributing to developing paths of continuing education. Social partners can play a crucial role in this regard.
- **Support SMEs.** Employers face several obstacles to lifelong learning (including costs, market failures, and an inadequate offer of educational opportunities). These challenges particularly affect micro-sized, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) due to limited resources and knowledge. SMEs should be assisted, for example, in identifying relevant courses, applying for subsidies, and systematically planning their educational and training activities.
- **Further improve the activity of social partners and collective bargaining in the adult learning system, depending on the particularities of the individual Member State.** While social partners are qualified to participate in the implementation of most of the aforementioned recommendations, there is additional room for them to intervene depending on the specific reality of the individual Member State. For example, the Bulgarian National report suggests promoting collective bargaining to improve the overall working conditions to stimulate training. The Italian National report underlines the necessity of intervening at the level of company collective agreements, as these do not contain almost any provision for training. The Slovakian national report emphasises the importance of equity and highlights the current limited role of social dialogue in its promotion.
- **Foster collaboration between all stakeholders involved.** Creating and consolidating the relationship between various stakeholders involved in the adult learning system can be beneficial in several respects by exploiting different points of view and expertise. Nevertheless, the coordination of multiple actors is complex and the strategies to smoothly and efficiently manage these relationships should be promptly developed.

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