



# Key Insights from the Research and Needs Analysis



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# RALExILA

## Key Insights from the Research and Needs Analysis

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## Introduction

The RALExILA (National Registries of Adult Learning and Education to support the deployment of Individual Learning Accounts) project is a strategic initiative to investigate and strengthen the structures that support adult learning (ALE) across Europe, with a particular focus on the potential of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). At a time when rapid technological advances, changing labour market demands and evolving skills requirements are creating new challenges for lifelong learning, this project responds to the urgent need for adaptable, user-centered systems that can support adult learners to improve their knowledge, skills and employability. By examining national ALE registers and models for the integration of ILAs, the [RALExILA research](#) aims to offer a comprehensive roadmap for education policy makers, institutions and other stakeholders to improve the accessibility, effectiveness and engagement of ALEs.

The short publication will aim to present some key insights from the project research that covers ten European countries – Cyprus, Croatia, Malta, Slovakia, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Ireland, Portugal, and Finland – each with unique educational frameworks, governance practices and socio-economic contexts. These different frameworks allow for a comparative analysis that reveals both common challenges and region-specific innovations. The main objective of the study is to identify the current gaps in the ALE registers of these countries, with a focus on governance, quality assurance and ease of access, exploring motivations, objectives and resource needs that influence the implementation of ILAs and their integration into existing adult education systems.

### Research objectives and scope

The primary objective of the [RALExILA research](#) was to generate actionable insights that can drive the design and implementation of user-centered ALE registries and improve the accessibility of ILAs for adult learners. This includes understanding and evaluating the structural and operational aspects of ALE registries, from governance frameworks to data quality and utilization, as well as assessing the readiness of various stakeholders – including adult learners, educators, policy makers, and employers – to use these systems.



### **Specific research objectives included:**

1. Mapping the structure and current functionality of ALE registers in ten national contexts to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement.
2. Investigate existing strategies and models for the use of ILA within ALE systems to assess their effectiveness and scalability.
3. Evaluate perspectives and awareness of ALE registers and ILAs, focusing on understanding the experiences, needs and barriers perceived by adult learners and employers.
4. To develop recommendations for the design of ALE registers that are inclusive, user-friendly and in line with both local and transnational policy objectives.

# ALE in the European Union

Adult education is crucial in shaping Europe's future. It provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to become active, responsible citizens who can positively impact their surroundings, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable future for all. It is essential not only for personal growth but also for the advancement of communities and society as a whole. Adult learning addresses labour market needs by offering opportunities for retraining and upskilling, while also promoting social inclusion and the well-being of individuals and society.

## Policy framework of ALE in the EU

The introduction of the ALE policy framework in the EU assumes that lifelong learning is crucial for the personal, social and professional development of citizens. The EU promotes policies to support access to adult learning that are linked to broader educational and social objectives. This framework includes a variety of programmes and initiatives aimed at increasing the availability, quality and effectiveness of adult learning across the region.

EU has several policies and strategies to promote ALE<sup>1</sup>. These policies and strategies are designed to:


- Increase adult participation in learning;
- Improve the quality of ALE provision;
- Ensure that ALE is accessible to all adults, regardless of their background or circumstances;
- Promote the recognition of ALE qualifications and competences.

EU stated that individuals participate in adult learning for a variety of reasons, such as:

- **Enhance their employment prospects.** Learning new skills and knowledge can increase competitiveness in the labour market and increase the chances of getting a job or promotion.

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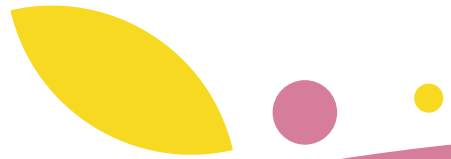
<sup>1</sup><https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/adult-learning/about-adult-learning>

- 
- **Develop personally or professionally.** Adult learning can help individuals to develop their interests, talents and knowledge, leading to greater personal and professional satisfaction.
  - **Obtain transferable skills, such as critical thinking.** Adult learning offerings often focus on developing transferable skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication, that can be applied in a variety of work and life situations.

EU has also pointed out that adult learning also contributes to society:

- **Improving social cohesion.** By providing opportunities for people from different backgrounds to learn together, ALE can promote social integration and understanding.
- **Promoting active citizenship.** Equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to actively participate in their communities.
- **Improving the competitiveness of businesses and European economies.** A skilled workforce is essential for economic growth and innovation.

With this in mind, the EU is pursuing a multi-pronged approach to supporting adult learning through various initiatives and programmes.



# European ALE and LL strategies

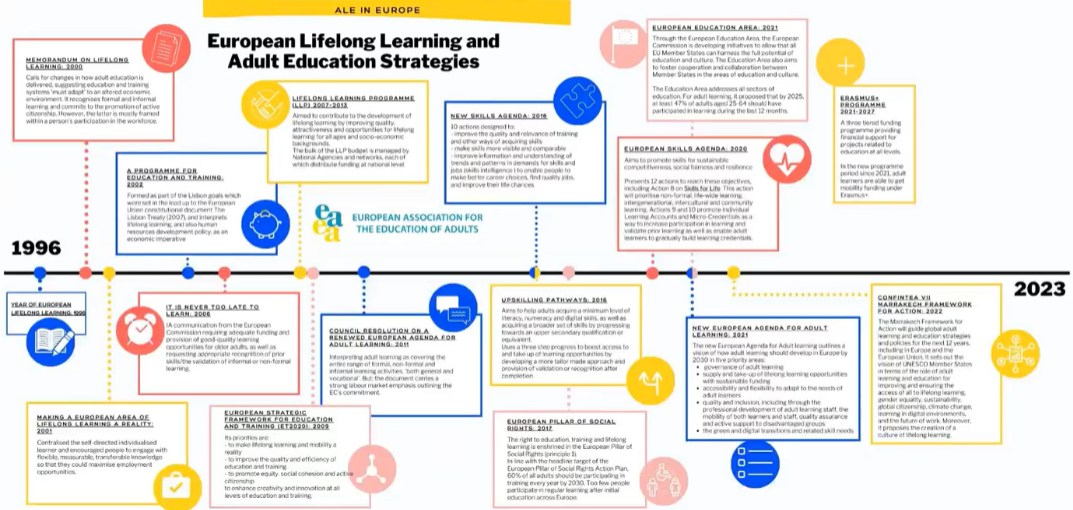


Figure x. European Lifelong Learning and Adult Education Strategies

Source: Webinar on New European Agenda for Adult Learning 2021-2030 and EU's New Skills Agenda<sup>2</sup>

## An overview of ILA as a support mechanism for adult learning

ILAs are an important mechanism for promoting ALE by providing direct financial support and other resources for the personal and professional development of individuals.<sup>3</sup>

### Objectives of ILAs<sup>4</sup>

- 1. Increase participation in training.** ILAs aim to enable more working-age adults to engage in relevant training, thus contributing to the overall competitiveness and social progress of the Union.
- 2. Support professional transitions.** ILAs provide support for individuals undergoing professional transitions, regardless of their current employment status.
- 3. Increase motivation to learn.** By offering financial entitlements and other support, ILAs incentivize and motivate individuals to seek training opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> [https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/LLL-ALE-policies-Europe\\_update-2022.pdf](https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/LLL-ALE-policies-Europe_update-2022.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(03))

<sup>4</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(03))



- 4. Empower individuals with control over their learning.** ILAs seek to provide individuals with greater autonomy over their learning by allowing them to manage their own learning funds or credits. This flexibility enables learners to select the timing, location, and type of education they need, supporting personal and professional development.
- 5. Support upskilling and reskilling.** ILAs are designed to facilitate upskilling and reskilling in response to shifting labour market demands, giving individuals the financial resources to develop new competencies and remain adaptable in a changing workforce.
- 6. Enhance employability and career development.** ILAs enhance employability by equipping individuals with modern skills, enabling them to pursue training aligned with their career aspirations and transition effectively within or across sectors.
- 7. Increase access to education and training.** ILAs broaden access to educational opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged groups such as low-skilled workers, the unemployed, and marginalized communities, helping reduce educational disparities and promoting inclusivity.
- 8. Facilitate adaptation to technological and economic changes.** ILAs support adaptation to technological advancements and economic shifts by providing flexible learning opportunities that keep workers up to date with emerging technologies and industry practices.
- 9. Support social inclusion and reduce inequalities.** By expanding access to lifelong learning, ILAs help reduce educational and economic inequalities, fostering social cohesion and inclusive growth within the EU.
- 10. Strengthen workforce competitiveness and economic growth.** By fostering continuous learning and development, ILAs contribute to a more skilled and resilient workforce, addressing skill shortages in key sectors and bolstering economic competitiveness.
- 11. Promote flexibility in learning pathways.** ILAs offer individuals the flexibility to choose part-time, full-time, or online learning options, allowing them to balance educational pursuits with work and personal commitments.
- 12. Encourage innovation in learning and training.** ILAs foster innovation by supporting **Empower individuals with control over their learning.** ILAs seek to provide individuals with greater autonomy over their learning by allowing them to manage their own learning funds or credits. This flexibility enables learners to select the timing, location, and type of education they need, supporting personal and professional development.
- 13. Support upskilling and reskilling.** ILAs are designed to facilitate upskilling and reskilling in response to shifting labour market demands, giving individuals the financial resources to develop new competencies and remain adaptable in a changing workforce.

## Quality Assurance in ALE

Quality in ALE plays a key role in ensuring an effective and efficient learning process that meets the needs of adult learners. High quality standards are essential to ensure that ALE programmes are appropriately designed, implemented and evaluated. The EU and other international organizations attach great importance to the development of policies and practices that promote quality and continuous improvement in the field of adult learning.

Quality assurance in ALE in the EU is a crucial aspect of ensuring the effectiveness, relevance and credibility of educational programmes for adult learners. The EU places great emphasis on quality assurance mechanisms to promote lifelong learning opportunities and support the personal and professional development of adults across Europe.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most important EU initiatives related to quality assurance in ALE is **the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)**. EQAVET provides a common reference framework of principles, quality criteria and indicators to support quality assurance in VET systems across Europe. It aims to improve the quality of vocational education and training by promoting a culture of continuous improvement and transparency.<sup>6</sup>

The **European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)** on quality assurance in higher education play an important role in ensuring quality in ALE. These standards contain principles for internal quality assurance in higher education institutions, standards for external assessment by quality assurance agencies and criteria for the quality assurance agencies themselves. By complying with the ESG, HEIs can improve the quality of their educational programmes and services.<sup>7</sup>

Various **transnational projects and initiatives** in the EU focus on the development of quality assurance systems and tools for ALE. These projects aim to improve the quality of adult learning, promote innovation in teaching and learning practice and ensure the cross-border recognition of skills and qualifications.<sup>8</sup>

The **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** facilitates the recognition of qualifications and competences across EU countries. The EQF helps to ensure that adult education programmes meet certain quality standards and are comparable at European level.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/AdultEducation/en/ThematicWorkingGroupOnQualityInAdultEducationFinalReport.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1536>

<sup>7</sup> <https://eha.info/page-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance>

<sup>8</sup> <https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Quality-Assurance-for-Adult-Learning.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://europass.europa.eu/en/europass-digital-tools/european-qualifications-framework>



The European Commission supports quality assurance in ALE through initiatives such as **the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)**. These initiatives promote the development of quality assurance systems, the use of quality criteria and indicators and the exchange of best practice between EU Member States.<sup>10</sup>

**Adult Education Survey (AES)** coordinated by Eurostat, gathers data on adult learning and education across EU Member States. While not directly a quality assurance system, the AES provides valuable insights into the participation, outcomes, and effectiveness of adult education programmes. These data are used to inform policy decisions and help monitor the quality of ALE provision. Regular surveys and reports contribute to the overall evaluation and improvement of ALE systems within the EU.<sup>11</sup>

**National Quality Assurance Systems.** Each EU Member State is responsible for developing its own national quality assurance systems for ALE, in line with European-level recommendations. These systems typically include mechanisms for accrediting adult learning providers, ensuring the quality of educational programmes, and evaluating the outcomes for adult learners. Many countries also have national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) that are aligned with the EQF to ensure that adult learning qualifications are recognized and meet quality standards across Europe.<sup>12</sup>

The EU promotes the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms that involve stakeholders, including adult learners, educators, employers and competent authorities. By involving stakeholders in the quality assurance process, ALE programmes can better respond to the diverse needs and expectations of adult learners and ensure that the education provided is relevant, up-to-date and of high quality.

Quality indicators and evaluation methods are crucial for assessing and improving the quality of ALE programmes. These tools provide valuable insights into the effectiveness, relevance and impact of educational initiatives for adult learners. Here are the key points to consider:

**Quality indicators.**<sup>13</sup> They are specific, measurable criteria used to evaluate the quality of ALE programmes. These indicators can relate to different aspects of adult learning, e.g. teaching and learning processes, learning outcomes, programme management and stakeholder involvement. Examples of quality indicators in ALE are:

- **Learner satisfaction rate.** This measures how satisfied learners are with the programme.
- **Completion rates.** Tracking the number of learners who complete the programme.
- **Employment outcomes.** Assessing the employability of graduates.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.enqa.eu>

<sup>11</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/adult-education-survey>

<sup>12</sup> <https://eurdice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems>

<sup>13</sup> <https://eaea.org/2022/12/14/for-a-new-approach-to-quality-in-ale/>

- **Skills development.** Assessing the expansion of specific skills.
- **Programme relevance.** Ensuring the programme meets the needs of the learners.
- **Participation rate.** This measures the proportion of the target population that participates in the programme.
- **Employability and career progression.** This assesses the impact of the programme on learners' career progression and their long-term employment prospects.

## Evaluation methods<sup>14</sup>

Evaluation methods are systematic approaches to assess the performance and impact of ALE programmes using quality indicators. Common methods include:

- **Surveys.** Gathering feedback from learners and stakeholders.
- **Interviews.** Gathering detailed insights through direct questioning.
- **Focus groups.** Engaging groups of stakeholders in discussions to gain different perspectives.
- **Observations.** Observing teaching and learning processes in real time.
- **Document analysis.** Reviewing programme-related documents and data.
- **External audit.** An independent evaluation by external experts who assess compliance with the standards and the overall effectiveness of the programme.
- **Benchmarking against established standards, best practices or other similar institutions or countries.** Comparing the programme's performance against recognized benchmarks to identify opportunities for improvement and ensure competitiveness.

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<sup>14</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/6fc940f9-0e08-4304-80a1-c340478be2d5/03%20EVA%20EN%20elearning%20Part%20181125\\_final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/6fc940f9-0e08-4304-80a1-c340478be2d5/03%20EVA%20EN%20elearning%20Part%20181125_final.pdf)



## Experiences and results with ILA at EU level

Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) have been explored as a means of promoting lifelong learning and improving the employability of workers in the Member States. The EU has recognized the importance of continuous skills development in maintaining competitiveness in a global economy and ILAs are seen as a strategic tool to achieve these goals. The EU has established a comprehensive policy framework to support lifelong learning. This includes initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights, which emphasizes the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning. The EU Skills Agenda also underlines the importance of equipping people with the skills needed for the modern labour market.<sup>15</sup>

The introduction of ILAs in the EU has led to a variety of experiences and results that are crucial for understanding their effectiveness. Different Member States have introduced unique ILA models to support the skills development of their citizens, allowing for a comparison of their effectiveness and adaptation. An analysis of these experiences at the EU level is necessary to assess the impact of ILA on the labour market and on the individual educational pathways of adults.

The EU has funded various pilot projects and studies to explore the implementation and effectiveness of ILAs in the Member States. These projects aim to identify best practices, potential challenges and the impact of ILAs on individuals' learning and career outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>

<sup>16</sup> [https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/individual-learning-accounts-where-are-we-now-2023-11-21\\_en](https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/individual-learning-accounts-where-are-we-now-2023-11-21_en)

## Key Findings from EU-Level Initiatives

- 1. Improved Access to Training.** ILAs have been found to significantly improve access to training and education for individuals, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. By providing financial support, ILAs help remove barriers to participation in learning activities.<sup>17</sup>
- 2. Enhanced Employability.** Studies have shown that individuals who utilize ILAs often experience improved employability and career progression. The flexibility to choose relevant courses allows individuals to tailor their learning to meet specific career goals and labour market needs.<sup>18</sup>
- 3. Promotion of Lifelong Learning Culture.** ILAs contribute to fostering a culture of lifelong learning within the EU. By encouraging continuous skills development, ILAs help create a more adaptable and resilient workforce capable of responding to changing economic conditions.<sup>19</sup>
- 4. Increased Flexibility in Learning.** ILAs have provided individuals with the flexibility to engage in learning on their own terms, which has been a key factor in their success. The ability to use learning credits for formal, non-formal, or informal education allows individuals to tailor their learning experience to fit their personal or professional needs. This flexibility has been particularly beneficial for working adults, parents, and those with limited time for traditional classroom education.<sup>20</sup>
- 5. Targeted Support for Disadvantaged Groups.** Another positive result of ILAs is their contribution to social inclusion. Several EU countries have used ILAs to target disadvantaged groups, such as low-skilled workers, the unemployed, or individuals from marginalized communities. ILAs have provided these groups with valuable opportunities to access education, which they might not have been able to afford otherwise.<sup>21</sup>
- 6. Alignment with Labor Market Needs.** ILAs are increasingly being designed to ensure that the training funded aligns with labour market needs, particularly in high-demand sectors. This has helped to reduce skill mismatches in the workforce and address labour shortages in critical areas such as technology, healthcare, and green industries.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3083>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/news-and-events/news/skills-future-managing-transition>

<sup>19</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>

<sup>20</sup> P. Cummins, A.K. Harrington, Individual Learning Accounts: A Comparison of Implemented and Proposed Initiatives, 2021, DOI:10.1177/10451595211046971

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/11/individual-learning-accounts\\_a06e7b80/203b21a8-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2019/11/individual-learning-accounts_a06e7b80/203b21a8-en.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem



## Challenges in Implementation

- 1. Administrative Complexity.** One of the main challenges identified in the implementation of ILAs is the administrative complexity involved. Setting up and managing ILAs requires significant coordination between various stakeholders, including governments, employers, and training providers.<sup>23</sup>
- 2. Ensuring Equitable Access.** Ensuring that all individuals, particularly those from marginalized groups, can access and benefit from ILAs remains a challenge. Strategies to address this include targeted outreach and additional support measures for disadvantaged populations.<sup>24</sup>
- 3. Sustainable Funding.** Developing a sustainable funding model for ILAs is crucial for their long-term success. This involves balancing contributions from governments, employers, and individuals while ensuring that the funds are used effectively and efficiently.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3083>

<sup>24</sup> [https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/individual-learning-accounts-where-are-we-now-2023-11-21\\_en](https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/individual-learning-accounts-where-are-we-now-2023-11-21_en)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/news-and-events/news/skills-future-managing-transition>

# ALE and ILA in selected EU countries

This section provides an executive summary on the key findings of our [desk research](#) in ten European countries – Cyprus, Croatia, Malta, Slovakia, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Ireland, Portugal and Finland – each selected for their unique approach and the current state of ALE and ILA systems.

Each country has its own ALE landscape, shaped by its socio-political, economic and cultural context. The results briefly presented below aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how national registers and ILA models can better meet the needs of adult learning.

## France

**France** is the only country with a fully integrated ILA-like system that closely follows the European model for ILAs proposed by the European Commission and the Council. The national framework includes comprehensive information systems that are valuable for exploring how ILAs can be standardized and scaled. **France's** well-developed adult education system focuses on accessibility, quality and labour market orientation. Notable programmes include the Individual Learning Account (CPF) and the Law on the Freedom to Choose One's Professional Future, which focus on reforming vocational training. Funding sources are diverse, combining state, regional, corporate and EU support, with a focus on disadvantaged groups. Quality assurance is ensured through accreditation, national standards and competence frameworks. Challenges include the need for specialized skills in the green and digital sectors and combating fraud within the CPF system.

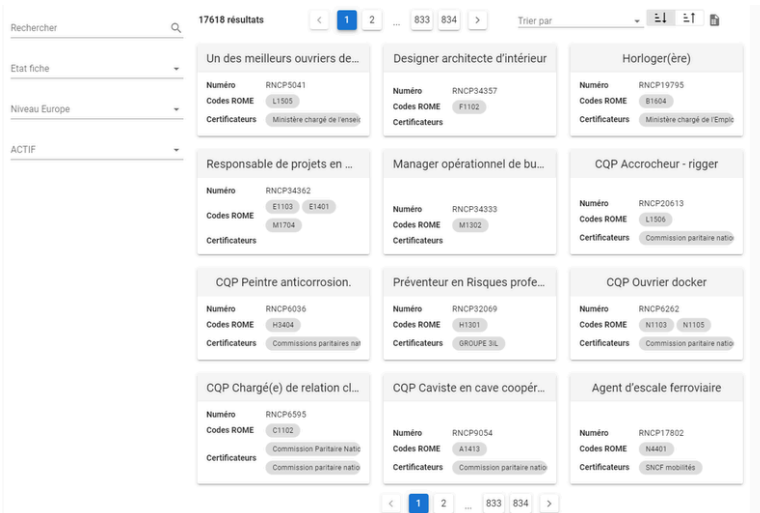


Figure 2.  
RNCP search  
example

Source:  
National  
Directory of  
Professional  
Certifications<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/reuses/liste-des-certifications-rncp>



## The Netherlands

**The Netherlands** provides a model for close collaboration between educational institutions and social partners, especially employers. With a well-developed ALE registration system, they offer insights into the role of employee stakeholders in ALE. **The Netherlands** has a mature adult education system that addresses workforce upskilling and retraining. Key government agencies include the Ministries of Education, Social Affairs and Economic Affairs. Initiatives such as the STAP Budget and the Levenlangere Krediet provide financial support for individual learning and professional development. Quality is maintained through accreditation and competence frameworks, but challenges remain in ensuring equitable access, particularly for disadvantaged groups, and in addressing skills gaps in emerging sectors.

The screenshot shows the NLQF website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links to 'Algebra', 'Algebra LAB', 'Projecti', 'AI Tools', and 'Maja'. The NLQF logo is prominently displayed, along with language selection buttons for 'NL' and 'EN'. A search bar is located below the logo. Below the search bar, there are four search filters: 'Level', 'Field', 'Owner', and 'Database', each with a 'SEARCH' button. The 'Level' filter is selected. Below the filters, there is a section titled 'NLQF Qualifications Database' with a brief description and a link to the database. To the right, there is a 'SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW OF THE CLASSIFICATION IN THE NLQF OF QUALIFICATIONS REGULATED BY DUTCH MINISTRY OF DOW' which is a circular diagram showing the structure of the NLQF framework, including levels (EOP 1 to EOP 5) and fields (NLQF 41 to NLQF 45).

Figure 3. NQF Database

Source: National Qualifications Framework<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> <https://database.nlqf.nl>

# Slovenia

**Slovenia** stands out for its centralized approach to adult certification and data collection in informal learning, offering perspectives on data-driven methods to support ALE initiatives. **The Slovenian** adult education system, which is overseen by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, offers comprehensive programmes for upskilling the workforce. The Slovenian Qualifications Framework and the Lifelong Learning Strategy serve as a guideline for the quality and relevance of the programmes. Funding is provided by the state, regional governments and the EU, with priority given to disadvantaged groups. Quality control includes accreditation, national standards and programme evaluations.

## 031 Digital literacy (advanced)

### Program content

The workshop is an extension of the workshop Digital Literacy - Basics. In the first part, it improves the knowledge of secondary functions in the mobile phone, in the second part it complements the knowledge of the connectivity of the mobile phone with the computer using cloud services such as e.g. DropBox, Google Drive, iCloud, etc., with knowledge of the risk of others accessing an individual's personal devices (GPS tracking, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth) and e-learning services (paying bills, etc.). The third module is aimed at getting to know Google applications such as maps, drive, calendar, translate, docs.

### The program is intended

- To all adults
- To the elderly
- To the unemployed
- To entrepreneurs
- To experts (pedagogues, andragogues, leaders, managers...)
- To my parents
- Employees
- To students

### Method of execution

- Course
- Workshop

### Other

The workshop will start in October 2023 - subject to a sufficient number of pre-registrations, and will take place in the morning and afternoon at our premises.

### NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR ENROLLMENT IN THE PROGRAM

It is not necessary to fulfil any conditions to enroll in the program.

### Name of acquired professional/professional education

/

### Public validity of the program

No, the program is not publicly available

### Type of education

Additional education

### Content area of education

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)  
Computer use



### Name of the institution

University Correspondence Education Center -  
CDI University  
CDI University

### Place of implementation of the program

CDI University, Grobljeva 4, 1000 Ljubljana

### Duration of the program

Hours: 9:00 - 13:00

### Date of implementation of the program

For additional information on the implementation of the educational program, contact the educational provider.

### Program price

€366.00

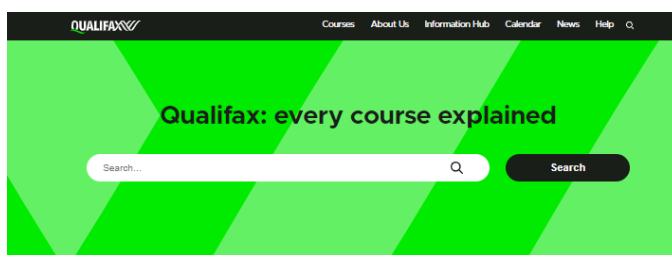
Figure 4. Example of course description - Automated translation from Slovenia  
Source: Kam Po Znanje<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> <https://kampoznanje.si>



## Ireland

**Ireland** has advanced micro-credentialing at different levels of education and demonstrates innovative ways for adult learning, quality assurance and flexible credentialing. The **Irish** Further Education and Training (FET) system, administered by SOLAS, supports workforce upskilling, social inclusion and bridging skills gaps. Based on the Further Education and Training Act 2013 and the FET Strategy, funding is mainly provided by the state, with additional support from the EU. Quality assurance includes planning, funding oversight and monitoring, with the challenge of maintaining programme relevance in the face of changing job requirements.



**When it comes to your learning journey, the possibilities are endless. But it can be a little overwhelming. Qualifax can help you discover your pathway.**

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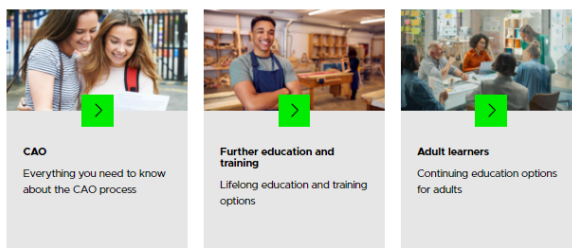


Figure 5. Qualifax database  
Source: Qualifax<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.qualifax.ie>

# Portugal

**Portugal** emphasizes social inclusion in ALE, focusing on disadvantaged groups. The extensive legacy of **Portugal's** ALE policy, particularly in the recognition of prior learning, reflects a long-standing commitment to accessible adult education and skills development. Portugal's adult education system is supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the IEFP and the DGERT. Programs such as POCH, which is funded by the EU, focus on skills development and social inclusion. DGERT accreditation ensures compliance with programme standards and adaptation to the labour market. The challenges are to maintain the efficiency and adaptability of the system in a rapidly changing economy.



Dual Certification Qualifications ▾ Basic and Secondary Reference (Adults) ▾ Short and medium-length routes Soft Skills Sectoral Councils for Qualification Documentation ▾

**DUAL CERTIFICATION QUALIFICATIONS**  
Qualifications Search

Designation

NQF/EQF Level   
None selected ▾

Areas of Education and Training

Search results : **0 Qualifications**

DOWNLOAD LISTING

NQF/EQF Level **4**  
Code **212362**

Education and Training Area : 212 - Performing Arts

Music Production and Technology Technician

TO SEE

NQF/EQF Level

Education and Training Area : 212 - Performing Arts

Figure 6. Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações

Source: Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> <https://catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/qualificacoesPesquisa>



## Finland

**Finland** integrates higher education into continuing education, opens access to ALE to all levels of society and provides a solid framework for lifelong learning. **Finland** has a well-established adult education system, led by the Ministry of Education and Culture, with initiatives such as the adult education Allowance and student loan guarantees. Funding sources include state, regional and employer contributions, with a focus on developing vocational and technical skills. Quality assurance is achieved through accreditation, competency frameworks and program assessments. However, the recent removal of the adult education grant could make access to training opportunities more difficult.



Figure 7. Studyinfo platform

Source: Studyinfo<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> <https://opintopoiku.fi/konfo/en/>

## Croatia

**Croatia** has a good adult education and lifelong learning system with numerous programmes focusing on the qualification and retraining of the workforce. The Ministry of Science and Education oversees policy development, which is enshrined in the Adult Education Act and the **Croatian** Qualifications Framework, which regulate quality and ensure relevance. Funding sources include state, regional and EU contributions, with priority given to supporting the unemployed, low-skilled workers and vulnerable groups. Quality assurance includes accreditation of providers, evaluation of programs and compliance with national standards and competency frameworks.

CROATIAN

ABOUT VOUCHER CATALOGUE OF PROGRAMMES SUPPORT APPLY NOW

# Voucher for learning Croatian language

For foreign workers learning Croatian as a foreign language  
[Learn more >](#)

[Explore voucher programmes](#)

Figure 8. Voucher system for ALE in Croatia  
Source: Voucher for learning<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> <https://vauceri.hzz.hr/en>



## Malta

**Malta's** adult education system is administered by the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth and the National Skills Council and offers a wide range of programmes to improve the skills and employability of the workforce. Financial assistance schemes such as the Training Pays Scheme and the Get Qualified Scheme, funded by the European Social Fund, support individual educational efforts. Quality assurance is regulated by the **Malta** Further and Higher Education Authority, although there are problems with the coordination and standardization of non-accredited programmes.

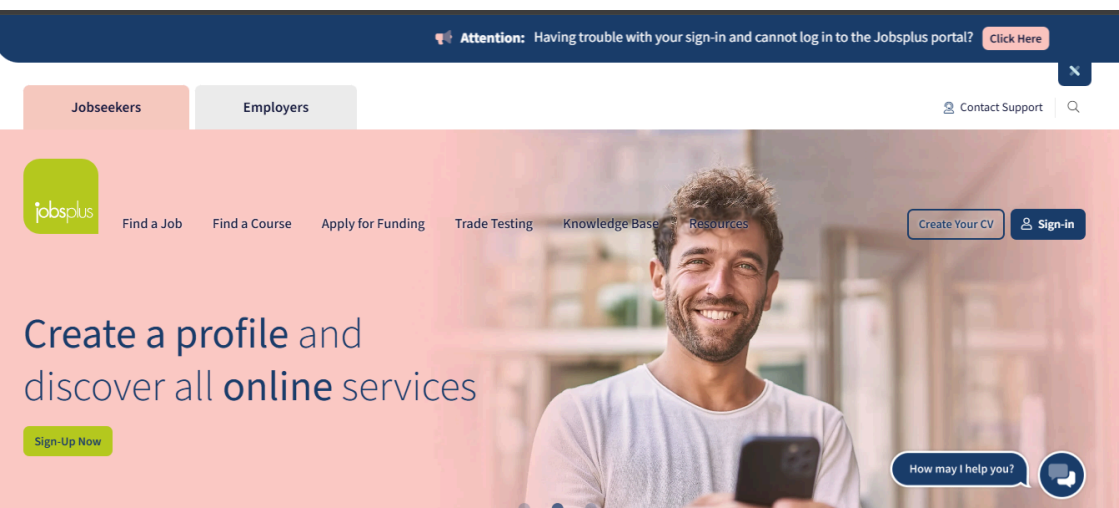


Figure 9. Jobplus portal

Source: Jobplus<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> <https://jobsplus.gov.mt>

# Cyprus

**Cyprus** has a decentralized adult education system run by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth. Other important authorities are the Human Resource Development Authority and the **Cyprus** Productivity Centre. The programmes focus on digital skills, closing skills gaps and promoting lifelong learning and are often supported by EU funds. The Cyprus Qualifications Framework and the MoESY and HRDA accreditations ensure quality standards. However, the low participation of adults in further training and a fragmented system continue to pose a challenge.

Home

**MERCURY web portal**  
You have gained remote access to HRD services and can manage your profile, roles and details, participate in or organize training programs, participate in the assessment and certification of professional qualifications and manage your applications.

The screenshot displays a user interface for the MERCURY web portal. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a 'Home' link and a 'More' button. Below the navigation bar, there are five main service categories, each represented by a card with a header image, a title, a brief description, and a blue button at the bottom. The categories are: 1. Participation in training programs, 2. Organization of training programs, 3. System of Professional Qualifications, 4. Application Management, and 5. Profiles, Roles, Details. Each card contains a small image related to the service, a title, a short paragraph of text, and a blue button with the service name.

- Participation in training programs**  
Select the specific category if you are an employee, entrepreneur, or union/organization of workers' trade Unions and intend to apply for participation in training programs.  
Participation
- Organization of training programs**  
Choose the specific category if you are an employee, Vocational Training Center (VTC) or Trade Union Training Center (UTC) and intend to organize and implement training programs.  
Organization
- System of Professional Qualifications**  
Select the specific category in case you intend to participate in the professional qualifications assessment and certification procedure as a Professional Qualifications Assessment Centre, assessor, employee, unemployed or inactive person.  
Certifications
- Application Management**  
Select the specific category in case you want to be updated or manage your requests related to your entity, your roles, Schemes, Professional Qualification Systems, Incentives, training plan and your tasks if you have the assessor role.  
Application Management
- Profiles, Roles, Details**  
Select this category if you want to update or manage your profile, apply for a role, register, manage or update your financial details, submit a CV or change your password.  
Profiles, Roles, Details

Figure 10. Hermes platform

Source: Hermes<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> <https://ermis.anad.org.cy/#/front>



## Slovakia

**Slovakia** is in the early stages of planning and implementing ILA as part of its Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Guidance Strategy 2021-2030. The strategy outlines measures to pilot ILA schemes and increase adult participation in education, indicating a recognition of the need to improve adult education and training to meet the changing demands of the labour market. The MLSAF plays an important role in ALE, particularly in coordinating and funding training programmes aimed at improving workforce skills and aligning ALE with the evolving needs of the labour market.

**edumio** Prihlásenie

### Komplexné zabezpečenie BOZP, OPP a PZS

*rýchlo a jednoducho*

Povinné školenia zamestnancov online.  
4x rýchlejšie, až 40 % úspora nákladov.

Bezplatná konzultácia

Figure 11. Portal education.sk <sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.education.sk>

## Conclusions

We recognise that different national approaches to ALE in European countries and highlights several key strategies and challenges:

- **Individual Learning Accounts.** Some countries have introduced ILAs to provide financial support and incentives for adult education and training. Examples include Malta's "Get Qualified" programme, France's "Compte Personnel de Formation" and the Netherlands' "STAP Budget" These accounts aim to increase adult participation in lifelong learning and skills development.
- **Governance and cooperation.** ALE systems are usually steered by coordinated efforts of different ministries, authorities and social partners, including employers' organizations and trade unions. This collaborative structure helps to align ALE programmes with labour market needs, ensure the relevance of training and improve workforce integration.
- **Quality assurance.** National qualification frameworks and accreditation procedures are used in various countries (e.g. Cyprus and the Netherlands) to ensure high standards in ALE programmes. These frameworks ensure that training meets certain quality criteria and is relevant to industry needs.
- **Funding sources.** ALE funding is based on a mix of public funds, EU support (such as the European Social Fund) and contributions from employers and individuals. Financial support is provided in the form of grants, vouchers and loans to reduce barriers to participation and make ALE more accessible to different population groups.
- **Focus areas.** ALE strategies typically focus on upskilling and reskilling to meet the changing needs of the workforce, improving digital skills, supporting disadvantaged groups and smoother transitions between education and employment pathways.
- **Ongoing challenges.** Despite these initiatives, challenges remain in some countries, including low adult participation in VET, gaps in digital skills and fragmentation of ALE systems. Policy reforms and new programmes are being introduced to address these issues and improve overall effectiveness.

In summary, the European countries included in this study have taken different and tailored approaches to improving their ALE systems through financial incentives, management frameworks, quality standards and targeted programmes. However, further improvements are needed to ensure equitable access, increase participation and meet the changing demands of the digital and knowledge economy.



## Glossary

### Key concepts of ALE

**Andragogy.** The EU is guided by Knowles' principles of promoting learner autonomy and creating learning environments that cater for the diverse experiences and motivations of adults.<sup>36</sup> The European Commission *Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways* emphasizes the importance of providing adults with learning opportunities that are tailored to their individual needs and aspirations.<sup>37</sup>

**Transformative Learning.** The EU recognizes the transformative potential of adult learning in promoting active citizenship and social inclusion. Eurydice, the information network for education in Europe, highlights the role of ALE in promoting critical thinking, active citizenship and social inclusion.

**Experiential Learning.** The EU promotes learner-centred approaches that emphasize active participation and experiential learning. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) promotes learning by doing approaches in adult learning programmes.<sup>38</sup>

Building on the identified key theoretical perspectives of andragogy, transformative learning and experiential learning in the EU context, this study will take a closer look at how the EU literature addresses lifelong learning, social inclusion and skills development.

**Lifelong learning.** The concept of lifelong learning is enshrined in numerous EU documents and is a central pillar for ALE. In its *A New Skills Agenda for Europe* (2016), the European Commission emphasizes that lifelong learning is essential to equip all Europeans with the knowledge, skills and competences needed to navigate a rapidly changing world of work.<sup>39</sup> This focus on lifelong learning is reflected in the theoretical underpinnings of ALE in the EU. Learning environments for adults are seen as crucial components for promoting a culture of continuous learning throughout life. *The Council Recommendation* on key competences for lifelong learning underlines the importance of ALE for the acquisition and development of key competences needed for a lifelong learning perspective.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Knowles, M. (1984). *Andragogy in action: Applying modern principles of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

<sup>37</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>

<sup>38</sup> <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/adult-education-and-training-europe-building-inclusive-pathways-skills-and>

<sup>39</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/skills-agenda>

<sup>40</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01))

**Social inclusion.** Social inclusion is a core principle of the EU, and the literature emphasizes the role of ALE in promoting equal access to learning opportunities for all adults. The *Education and Training 2020* states that adult learning plays a crucial role in promoting social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development.<sup>41</sup>

EU literature examines how ALE can address the particular challenges faced by disadvantaged groups, such as low-skilled adults, migrants and people with disabilities. The Eurydice report *Adult education and training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications* highlights the importance of designing ALE programmes to be accessible and meet the diverse needs of adult learners.<sup>42</sup>

**Skills development.** Against the backdrop of a rapidly changing labour market, the EU is prioritizing adult learning to give people the skills they need to adapt and succeed. The *New Skills Agenda for Europe* emphasizes the need to invest in adult learning to ensure a skilled workforce that can drive innovation and growth.<sup>43</sup>

## Key Definitions of ILA in ALE

**Individual training entitlement** means the right to access a personal budget at an individual's disposal to cover the direct costs of labour-market-relevant training, guidance and counselling, skills assessment or validation that are eligible for funding.

**Individual learning account** is a delivery mode for individual training entitlements. It is a personal account that allows individuals to accumulate and preserve their entitlements over time, for whichever eligible training, guidance or validation opportunity they deem most useful and whenever they want to, in line with national rules. It grants the individual full ownership of the entitlements, irrespective of the funding source.

**Transferability** of individual training entitlements means that, once conferred, such entitlements remain in the possession of the individual concerned, including during transitions, such as between jobs, from job to learning, from employment to unemployment, and between activity and inactivity.

**Enabling framework** comprises support that promotes the effective take-up of individual training entitlements. This includes career guidance and validation opportunities, a national registry of

<sup>41</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a1ffa81-8ac4-11eb-b85c-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>42</sup> <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/adult-education-and-training-europe-building-inclusive-pathways-skills-and>

<sup>43</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>



opportunities that are eligible for funding from individual training entitlements, a single national digital portal to access the individual learning account and national registry, and paid training leave

**Lifelong learning** is a broad concept concerning an individual's education that is viewed as flexible, diverse and available at different times and places throughout life. The scale of current economic and social change, the rapid transition to a knowledge-based society and demographic pressures resulting from an ageing population in Europe are all challenges that demand a new approach to education and training, within the framework of lifelong learning.<sup>44</sup> Lifelong learning refers to the ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge and skills for personal or professional reasons. In the EU context, lifelong learning is a central principle aimed at ensuring that individuals can access learning opportunities throughout their lives, regardless of age, and across various settings. ILAs are a key tool in promoting lifelong learning by providing individuals with the means to finance their education and training at different stages of life.

**Upskilling** is a process of learning new skills or of teaching workers new skills.<sup>45</sup> It refers to acquiring new and improved skills within an individual's existing field or job role. ILAs are often used to fund upskilling opportunities to ensure that workers remain competitive and can adapt to technological advancements or changes in their sectors.

**Reskilling** is the process of learning new skills so you can do a different job, or of training people to do a different job<sup>46</sup> and involves learning new skills to transition to a different job or career field. ILAs are increasingly used as a tool to support individuals in shifting to new industries, particularly in response to economic transitions, automation, or digital transformation.

**Personalized learning** is a process of tailoring education to a learner's current situation, characteristics and needs to help achieve the best possible progress and outcomes. Personalised learning can include personalising the curriculum, courses, learning materials and activities, and different forms of learning support. Each learner is provided with education that is tailored to their individual characteristics and needs. They learn in a way that is most suitable for them, resulting in different learning experiences for each learner.

<sup>47</sup> In the context of ILAs personalised learning refers to the ability of individuals to tailor their learning experiences according to their

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/european-industrial-relations-dictionary/lifelong-learning>

<sup>45</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/upskilling>

<sup>46</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reskilling>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.european-agency.org/resources/glossary/personalisation-personalised-learning>

personal needs, goals, and career aspirations. ILAs give individuals flexibility in choosing when, how, and what to learn, empowering them to take control of their educational pathways.

**Portability** the level of possibility of something happening or being true.<sup>48</sup> In the context of ILAs, probability refers to the ability of individuals to carry their learning accounts with them across different jobs, sectors, or even regions within the EU. The idea of portability is fundamental to the ILA system, allowing individuals to use their accumulated credits or funds throughout their lives, regardless of changes in employment or location.

**Public-private partnerships (PPPs)** is a long-term contract between a private party and a government entity, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility, and remuneration is linked to performance.<sup>49</sup> PPPs play a significant role in the development and funding of ILAs. In some countries, ILAs are co-financed by both the government and private sector employers to ensure broad access to training and education opportunities. PPPs are essential for creating sustainable funding models for ILAs and ensuring that the training provided aligns with labour market needs.

**Accredited training providers.** Accreditation is the last level of public control in the European conformity assessment system. It is designed to ensure that conformity assessment bodies (e.g. laboratories, inspection or certification bodies) have the technical capacity to perform their duties.<sup>50</sup> Accredited training providers are educational institutions or organizations that meet specific quality standards and are authorized to offer learning programmes funded by ILAs. These providers can include HEIs, vocational schools, private training institutions, and online learning platforms. Ensuring the accreditation of providers is crucial for maintaining the quality of education and training offered through ILAs.

**Learning credits** means prepaid credit units which customer may redeem for learning services, including instructor-led trainings, packaged certifications, certification exams, and/or membership subscriptions.<sup>51</sup> Learning credits refer to the financial resources or points allocated to an individual's ILA, which can be redeemed for education and training programmes. Learning credits can be accumulated over time and are often provided by governments, employers, or other stakeholders as part of an individual's professional development. Credits can be used to cover tuition fees, certification programmes, or other educational expenses.

<sup>48</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/probability>

<sup>49</sup> <https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/what-ppp-defining-public-private-partnership>

<sup>50</sup> [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/goods/building-blocks/accreditation-conformity-assessment-bodies\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/goods/building-blocks/accreditation-conformity-assessment-bodies_en)

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/learning-credits>



**Flexibility in learning** systems enable learners to move within and across education, training and employment. Flexibility means that young people can adapt their learning pathway as they go along, to suit their interests and abilities.<sup>52</sup> Flexibility in learning is a core principle of ILAs. Individuals can choose from a wide range of learning options, including part-time, full-time, in-person, or online courses. ILAs offer the flexibility to fit learning around personal and professional commitments, making education more accessible for adults in different life stages.

**Targeted learning support**<sup>53</sup> refers to specific measures within ILA systems that aim to assist disadvantaged or marginalized groups in accessing education and training. This can include additional funding, guidance, or personalized learning plans to support individuals with low skills, unemployment, or those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Blended learning** is a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching.<sup>54</sup> Blended learning is an educational approach that combines online and face-to-face learning. In the context of ILAs, blended learning offers flexibility for adult learners to participate in courses that fit their schedules, making it easier to balance learning with other commitments such as work or family.

**Learning pathways** are the chosen route taken by a learner through a range of (commonly) e-learning activities, which allows them to build knowledge progressively.<sup>55</sup> Learning pathways refer to the routes that individuals take to achieve their educational or career goals. ILAs support the creation of personalized learning pathways, allowing learners to choose from a variety of educational and training options that best meet their needs.

**Work-based learning** refers to all forms of learning that takes place in a real work environment. It provides individuals with the skills needed to obtain and keep jobs and progress in their professional development.<sup>56</sup> Work-based learning involves acquiring new skills and competencies through practical experience in a work environment. ILAs can fund work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships, internships, or on-the-job training, enabling individuals to gain practical skills while continuing to work.

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-toolkit-tackling-early-leaving/intervention-approaches/flexible-education-and-training-systems>

<sup>53</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C\\_202403364](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202403364)

<sup>54</sup> <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en>

<sup>55</sup> Scott, P.H. (1991). "Pathways in Learning Science: A case study of the development of one student's ideas relating to the structure of matter". In Duit, R.; Goldberg, F.; Niedderer, H. (eds.). *International Workshop on Research in Physics Learning: Theoretical Issues and Empirical Studies*

<sup>56</sup> <https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/tvetipedia+glossary/lang=en/show=term/term=Work-based+learning>



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