European Basic Skills Network

EBSN Policy Brief:
Upskilling and Reskilling for the Twin Transition

European Basic Skills Network

Annual
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Upskilling and Reskilling for the 'Twin Transition':
Digital and Green Transformation

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Table of contents

1 Introduction

Europe is undergoing a **twin transition**—a simultaneous shift toward a **digital and green economy,** which is reshaping the labour market and the skills required to participate in it. However, these changes risk exacerbating **existing inequalities**, as many adults lack the foundational skills necessary to adapt. **Literacy, numeracy, and digital competencies**, alongside **problem-solving, adaptability, teamwork, and critical thinking**, form the backbone of both employability and social participation in this evolving landscape.

The [2024 EBSN Annual Conference](#) and the findings from the **OECD PIAAC 2023 Survey** ([OECD, 2023](#)) reveal an urgent need to strengthen inclusive **upskilling and reskilling policies**. Without targeted interventions, gaps in foundational skills will hinder individuals' ability to transition into new roles **and adapt to changes in their personal and civic lives**, affecting both economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

To address this, policies must go beyond traditional education models. They must foster flexible, inclusive learning pathways that are both **work-relevant and life-relevant**, empowering individuals at all stages of life—not only to thrive in the labor market, but also to participate fully in society, engage civically, and navigate daily challenges. This policy brief presents **key challenges**, insights from European initiatives, and **actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders** to ensure that no one is left behind in the twin transition.

2 Key Challenges

2.1 The changing skills landscape in the twin transition

- The **digital and green transition** demands a workforce equipped not only with **technical expertise** but also with **strong foundational skills** that support continuous learning and adaptation.

- **OECD PIAAC 2023 findings reveal:**

  - **One in four adults in Europe lacks sufficient literacy and numeracy skills**, impeding their ability to engage in upskilling initiatives.

  - **29% of adults lack adaptive problem-solving skills**, limiting their ability to navigate technological and workplace changes.

  - **Nearly one-fifth of adults across OECD countries are low performers in all three foundational skill areas**.

- As the PIAAC Employer Module reveals, employers increasingly **demand transversal skills**—problem-solving, teamwork, and technical skills—while employees identify **digital skills** as their primary gap. However, **literacy** and **numeracy deficits** often remain hidden and unrecognised, yet they significantly impact productivity, adaptability, and the ability to acquire **new green and digital skills** for redesigned jobs in the twin transition.

- Many workers in routine, automatable or environmentally unsustainable jobs face a heightened risk of **displacement** due to digitalisation and the green transition, underscoring the **need for urgent reskilling and career transition support.** ([Cedefop, 2021](#))

2.2   Persistent skill gaps and social inequality risks

- **Workers with low levels of qualifications face disproportionate barriers** to accessing education and training, reinforcing patterns of inequality.

- Despite the **Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways**, many EU countries struggle to **implement effective basic skills programs**, with progress remaining **uneven**. (**Upskilling Pathways Evaluation**)

- Women, migrants, and older workers often **face multiple disadvantages**, making it essential to design **targeted interventions** that address their specific learning needs.

- **Without investment in foundational skills**, gaps in learning will continue to **undermine economic participation and social inclusion**, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas.

3   Insights from the 2024 EBSN Conference

3.1   Barriers to lifelong learning

- **Lack of awareness and engagement:** many adults and employers do not perceive **upskilling and reskilling as an urgent priority**, particularly among workers in at-risk sectors.

- **Financial and motivational barriers:** training costs, time constraints, and uncertainty about career benefits discourage participation.

- **Capacity gaps in education and training:** many countries lack **trained adult educators, relevant curricula, and accessible learning programs** to meet the rising demand for skills training.

- **Mismatch between training and labour market needs:** traditional education pathways often fail to incorporate **workplace-relevant digital and green skills**, limiting their positive impact on employability.

3.2   European policy tools supporting upskilling and reskilling

Several European initiatives provide frameworks and funding mechanisms to **support foundational skills development**:

- **Competence Frameworks:**
  - **DigComp** – Digital Skills
  - **GreenComp** – Sustainability Skills
  - **LifeComp** – Media, Financial, Environmental, and Health Literacies
  - **The TRANSVAL-EU Project** – Supporting **transversal skill validation** and training for lifelong learning practitioners. **Learn more**.

- **Microcredentials** – Enhancing recognition of prior learning in non-formal settings.

- **Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs)** – Providing personalized and flexible training pathways.

- **Pact for Skills** – Encouraging public-private cooperation in skills development.

- **EU Digital Education and Training Strategy** – Strengthening **digital skills provision across all education levels**.

3.3   Examples of good practices

- **Digital Inclusion Tools**
  The Basic Skills Network, part of the Nordic Network of Adult Learning (NVL), addresses digital inclusion challenges and offers both **policy recommendations** for **collaborative and co-creative solutions as well as practical tools**. The **digital toolkit** is an inclusive mapping tool highlighting blind spots and individual pain points regarding learning digital skills, helping practitioners identify barriers.

- **Green Skills for Employees in Estonia** – this nationwide program creates **flexible learning opportunities** and **upskilling for green jobs** with special attention to employees with low foundational skills.

- **Back2Basics Erasmus+ Project** – Training **educators in digital and media literacy**. It offers a **modularised training course**, and a **handbook on teaching digital and media literacy**. This Erasmus+ project exemplifies the need to integrate transversal skills—such as critical thinking and online media literacy—into basic skills curricula to strengthen digital resilience and informed civic participation.

- **Financial Literacy in Slovenia** – A **financial education program** customised for younger and older adults. It offers three new 100-hour financial literacy courses in a modular format, allowing the creation of shorter informal programs for different adult needs.

4   Policy recommendations

To ensure **equitable and effective upskilling and reskilling pathways** that align with the **digital and green transitions**, the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) presents the following **policy recommendations**:

1. Broaden the scope of basic skills

- Adopt a broad, holistic definition of **basic skills** beyond **literacy and numeracy** to include **digital skills, transversal competencies** (e.g., problem-solving, adaptability, teamwork), and **sustainability literacy**.

- Align skill development with labour market needs by **integrating EU competence frameworks** such as **DigComp, GreenComp, and LifeComp**.

2. Ensure flexible and inclusive learning pathways

- **Flexible Programs:** Develop **modular, part-time, and blended learning options** to accommodate diverse learners, including **migrants, older adults, and individuals in rural areas**.

- **Upskilling Pathways:** Provide learners with **personalised training pathways** linked to **nationally recognised credentials, including in basic skills**.

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** Facilitate the **validation of informal and non-formal learning** through **micro-credentials, digital badges, and standardised assessments**.

3. Strengthen financial and non-financial support

- **Financial Incentives:** Introduce **funding mechanisms** covering **training costs, living expenses, and incentives for participation**. For example, **Spain's Recovery and Resilience Plan** subsidises digital and green skills training.

- **Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs):** Ensure that ILAs explicitly cover basic skills learning, including literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, recognizing their foundational role in enabling further education and labor market mobility.

- **Wraparound support services:** address non-financial barriers by offering **childcare, transportation subsidies, career counselling, and mentoring programs**.

4. Foster public-private partnerships for workforce alignment

- Strengthen **collaboration between governments, employers, and education providers** to ensure training programs are **industry-relevant**.

- Scale up **workplace-based learning models** that integrate **upskilling with career progression**, such as **Sweden's welfare worker program**.

- Support **employer-led initiatives** that **incentivise lifelong learning within workplaces**.

5. Invest in educator capacity and professionalisation

- Develop **comprehensive professional development programs** for **adult educators** to equip them with **competencies in digital, green, and transversal skills training**.

- Ensure that educators have access to **structured career pathways and continuous learning opportunities**, as seen in **Nordic educator training models**.

6. Establish inclusive monitoring and evaluation systems

- Implement **participatory evaluation frameworks** that involve **learners, educators, and employers** in assessing the effectiveness of the program.

- **Pilot and evaluate innovative approaches** before national implementation to ensure **scalability and impact**.

- Use **data-driven insights** to refine policies and improve lifelong learning strategies.

7. Increase awareness and motivation for lifelong learning

- Launch **targeted awareness campaigns** to increase participation in **upskilling programs**, particularly among **workers with low levels of qualifications, unemployed individuals, and marginalised communities**.

- Promote **learning opportunities in accessible, non-stigmatising ways**, ensuring that individuals feel **empowered rather than excluded** from skills development programs.

5 EBSN's role in implementing policy recommendations

1. **Supporting policy development**

- Facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange by sharing **best practices and case studies** from successful basic skills initiatives.

- Advocate for **policy frameworks that embed foundational skills** into upskilling and lifelong learning programs.

2. **Strengthening educator and teacher training**

- As part of the EBSN Professional Development Series (PDS) **targeted training programs** for adult educators.

- Build a **community of practice** among educators to foster innovation in adult learning.

3. **Promoting research and data collection**

- Promote a **Europe-wide landscape study** to map gaps and strengths in basic skills provision.

- Provide policymakers with **evidence-based recommendations** on integrating literacy, numeracy, and digital skills into economic transitions.

4. **Building cross-country collaborations**

- Organise **pilot projects** to test and evaluate new approaches in basic skills education across multiple countries.

- Foster **partnerships with 'pacts for skills'** to align basic skills training with workforce needs.

5. **Advocacy, policy awareness, and capacity building among policymakers**

- Contribute to campaigns to ensure **basic skills remain a priority** in European and national policies.

- Support policymakers with **toolkits and resources** to develop scalable basic skills strategies.