Empowering Learners for Workforce Transitions

A webinar by the Community for Educational Innovation

Background note

The Community for Educational Innovation (CEI) webinars bring together education, research, industry, civil society and public sector stakeholders to share good practices and discuss innovation in education. This background note outlines the context and key terms for the Webinar Empowering Learners for Workforce Transitions, on 2 December 2026.

Workforce transitions are a regular part of working life. People move from education into a first job, between jobs and sectors, and back into work after unemployment or career breaks. Additionally, the green and digital transitions, as well as artificial intelligence (AI), are changing many jobs, increasing the need for workers to update their competences. In this regard, the European Commission communication on the Union of Skills states that "upskilling and reskilling will be essential throughout people's lives and careers"[1].

Europe faces widespread skills shortages and a growing digital gap. "Nearly four in five SMEs [Small and Medium-sized Enterprises] cannot find the talent they need"[2]. Furthermore, "in 2026, over 60% of Europeans possess basic digital literacy and basic technical knowledge", but Information and Communications Technology (ICT) specialists made up only 5% of the total workforce in 2025[3]. AI is also spreading faster than training: 92% of EU workers use digital technologies in their jobs and 30% use AI systems, yet "only 15% have received AI training"[4].

Education and training are central to the response. Working with employers, public employment services (PES) and civil society, providers can offer short, flexible and recognised learning that helps people enter work, change careers and keep pace with technological change.

The key terms used in the webinar *Empowering learners for workforce transitions* are:

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[1] European Commission, *The Union of Skills*, COM(2025) 90 final, 5 March 2025, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0090

[2] Union of Skills, COM(2025).

[3] European Commission, *2026 State of the Digital Decade Report*, 17 June 2026, https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/latest/news/state-digital-decade-2026-without-urgent-action-eu-risks-missing-out-20-million-ict

[4] European Commission, Joint Research Centre, *European Commission updates its Digital Competence Framework (DigComp)*, 2025, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/european-commission-updates-its-digital-competence-framework-digcomp-2025-11-27_en

Workforce transition:	Changes in jobs and skills as labour markets respond to economic, technological, environmental, demographic and social change. The term includes people developing and using their skills as they move into, within or between jobs[5].
Upskilling:	"Short-term targeted training typically provided following initial education or training, and aimed at supplementing, improving or updating knowledge, skills and competences"[6].
Reskilling:	"Training enabling individuals to acquire new skills giving access either to a new occupation or to new professional activities"[7].
Lifelong guidance:	Activities that enable individuals "at any age and at any stage of life" to identify their capacities, competences and interests, make education, training and occupational decisions, and manage their paths in learning and work[8].
Digital competence:	"The confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society". This note uses *digital literacy* for the level that all workers need[9].
AI literacy:	The "skills, knowledge and understanding" needed "to make an informed deployment of AI systems" and to understand their opportunities and risks[10].
Individual learning account (ILA):	"A delivery mode for individual training entitlements", that is, a personal budget for labour-market-relevant training, guidance, skills assessment or validation[11].

[5] Cedefop, *Skills in transition: The way to 2035*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, https://doi.org/10.2801/438491

[6] Cedefop, Definitions of upskilling, *Terminology of European education and training policy*, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-glossary/glossary?letter=U#glossary-150380

[7] Cedefop, Definitions of reskilling, *Terminology of European education and training policy*, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-glossary/glossary?letter=R

[8] Cedefop, *An EU reference framework for lifelong guidance: 18 guidelines for policy and systems development*, Cedefop reference series No 128, Publications Office of the European Union, p. 9, 2026, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3098

[9] Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (2018/C 189/01), as restated in European Commission, Joint Research Centre (2025), *DigComp 3.0: European Digital Competence Framework*, fifth edition, p. 7, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/0001149

[10] Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (AI Act), Article 3(56), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj

[11] Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on individual learning accounts (2022/C 243/03), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(03)

01. EU policy framework for workforce transitions

The following instruments move from setting targets to helping individuals through transitions. The Digital Decade targets set the level of ambition, and the Union of Skills frames EU action. They are connected by, first, learning follows the person: individual learning accounts give adults their own training entitlement, while micro-credentials and the Skills Portability Initiative make the results visible and recognised across borders. Second, entitlements need support, as guidance, validation and training leaves that help adults choose a course, start it and finish it. Third, transitions are a shared responsibility, with employers, PES, social partners and providers designing and delivering training together, often during working time.

2022	**Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030** Sets 2030 targets for at least 80% of people aged 16–74 to have basic digital skills and for 20 million ICT specialists to be employed. It also promotes women's participation in the field[12].
2022	**Council Recommendation on individual learning accounts** Encourages Member States to develop individual learning accounts for working-age adults, supported by guidance, validation, a registry of learning opportunities, a single digital portal and paid training leave[13].
2023	**Council Recommendation on digital skills and competences** Calls for flexible, tailored and digitally accessible learning in advanced and specialist digital skills, including short courses leading to micro-credentials. It encourages employers to prioritise upskilling and reskilling during working time[14].
2025	**Skills Guarantee pilot** A Union of Skills initiative testing support for workers at risk of unemployment. Projects combine workplace learning with targeted reskilling and involve companies, PES, social partners and education providers in at least two Member States.[15].
2026	**EU reference framework for lifelong guidance** Cedefop's framework sets out 18 guidelines for policy and systems development. It presents guidance as a tool for supporting career transitions and links it with skills intelligence, validation and individual learning accounts[16].

[12] Decision (EU) 2022/2481 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, Article 4, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481/oj

[13] Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on individual learning accounts, 2022/C 243/03, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(03)

[14] Council Recommendation of 23 November 2023 on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training, C/2024/1030, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1030/oj

[15] European Commission, *Commission launches Skills Guarantee to support workers in transition*, 27 November 2025, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-launches-skills-guarantee-support-workers-transition-learning-new-skills-strategic-2025-11-27_en

[16] Cedefop, *An EU reference framework for lifelong guidance*, pp. 10 and 17. Developed with the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and the CareersNet network, 2026, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3098

2026

Skills Portability Initiative

A proposed initiative to make qualifications easier to verify digitally and speed up recognition procedures for regulated professions across borders[17].

02. Institutional approaches in practice

The examples below show three ways providers support workforce transitions. Routes into work, led by PES and employers, help jobseekers, recent graduates and returners find a job. Higher-level reskilling, led by HEIs, helps adults move into shortage fields, often while in work, and leads to credits or qualifications. Digital literacy programmes reach all workers, who choose and fund training through individual learning accounts. Guidance runs through all three, helping adults facing "multiple life transitions and demands to upskill, reskill or move within the labour market"[18].

2.1. Routes into work

Jobseekers, recent graduates and people returning after a career break need short routes that end in a job. These routes are built with employers. Employers help design the curriculum, education and training providers deliver it, and learners finish with a placement at their future employer. Public employment services (PES) fund the training and increasingly advise workers at risk of unemployment[19]. Employers can strengthen this guidance too, as involving them helps them "signal demand for labour"[20].

[17] European Commission, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the portability of skills and qualifications across the European Union, COM(2026) 992 final, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52026PC0992

[18] Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance (2025), *Investing in career guidance*, p. 6. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-10/ETF_CGC_Leaflet_2025_EN.pdf

[19] PES Network, *Prevention of unemployment via counselling and upskilling: the evolving role of PES*, 2025, https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/prevention-unemployment-counselling-and-upskilling-evolving-role-pes-2025-05-09_en

[20] Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance, *Investing in career guidance*, 2025, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-10/ETF_CGC_Leaflet_2025_EN.pdf

NETHERLANDS

Make IT Work

Universities of applied sciences retrain degree holders for IT roles in 11 months. Learners start after a match with an employer and work there from month six. With the Dutch PES, jobseekers pay no tuition and keep their benefits. Nearly 1,000 people had retrained[21].

CROATIA

Education vouchers

The Croatian PES funds adult education, often micro-credentials, from a catalogue of digital and green skills. Over 84% of unemployed participants found work within a year[22].

2.2. Reskilling led by higher education

In 2023, the EU produced 2.7 ICT graduates per 1,000 young people, compared with 3.7 in the United States and 4.6 in the United Kingdom[23]. To close this gap, higher education institutions (HEIs) open their provision to adults who need higher-level skills, many of them already in work. They offer graduate conversion programmes, modular courses and joint online programmes designed with industry, all leading to credits or qualifications.

IRELAND

Springboard+ and the Human Capital Initiative

The Higher Education Authority funds free places for jobseekers and returners, and 90% of fees for employed learners. HEIs bid competitively to deliver the courses. The 2024 call offered 11,471 places, mostly online or blended[24].

FINLAND

FITech Network University

Finnish universities of technology offer free courses to adults to meet demand for engineering skills and strengthen national innovation capacity. Their ICT project provided over 60,000 ECTS credits of free study before ending in summer 2026[25].

2.3. Digital literacy for all workers

Digital competence underpins almost every transition, and AI literacy now matters in all occupations. This approach serves every worker, whatever their job or employment status. Providers can embed both competences across programmes, use self-assessment to place learners and certify results against DigComp 3.0.

[21] Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and IT Academy Northern Netherlands, Make IT Work, https://it-omscholing.nl/

[22] EIPA, European Public Sector Award, *Voucher-based Adult Education Scheme in Croatia*, 2026, https://www.eipa.eu/epsa/voucher-based-adult-education-scheme-in-croatia/

[23] European Commission, *2026 State of the Digital Decade Report*, 2026, https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/latest/news/state-digital-decade-2026-without-urgent-action-eu-risks-missing-out-20-million-ict

[24] Higher Education Authority, *More than 11,400 free or subsidised places on college courses*, 21 May 2024. https://hea.ie/2024/05/21/ministers-odonovan-and-collins-announce-more-than-11400-free-or-subsidised-places-on-college-courses/

[25] FITech, About FITech Network University, https://fitech.io/en/about-fitech/

Individual learning accounts let learners choose and fund this training themselves, as Latvia shows.

LATVIA

STARS platform

The national skills platform gives every adult an individual learning account. Its pilot targeted medium and advanced digital skills at DigComp levels 4–6, with self-assessment before and after training. Users have opened over 64,000 accounts since December 2024. In a May 2026 survey, 88% of learners reported positive changes in employment[26].

WHAT THIS TRANSITION PROGRAMMES HAVE IN COMMON?

01 Start from skills intelligence[27]

Map employment offers with occupational shortages and establishes competence catalogues.

02 Connect learners with jobs early

Use hiring commitments, placements and PES cooperation.

03 Fit learning to adult lives

Offer modular, part-time, online and blended formats.

04 Pair funding with guidance

Combine budgets with career guidance, skills assessment and validation.

05 Make outcomes visible

Use micro-credentials and DigComp-referenced assessment.

06 Plan for continuity

Secure sustainable funding before education and training projects funding ends.

03. Challenges for education and training providers

Challenge	Evidence
Reaching those who need it the most	Uptake can be low. For example, in Cyprus, 605 people applied for an ILA in the first seven months, from a target group of 238,000[28].
Securing stable funding	Many schemes rely on time-limited EU funds. For example, Latvia's STARS Platform experience calls for a funding model shared by the State, employers and learners[29].

[26] European Commission, Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, *Skills Management Platform 'STARS' for Adult Lifelong Learning in Latvia*, 2026, https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/impact-shapers/good-practices/skills-management-platform-stars-adult-lifelong-learning-latvia

[27] Skills intelligence is an expert-driven, continuous process of identifying, collecting, analysing, synthesising, and presenting quantitative and qualitative information on skills and the labour market. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-glossary/glossary/kompetenzanalytik

[28] Mourouzides, Y., *Funding and governance: Cyprus*, Cedefop conference 'Financing adult learning', Thessaloniki, 20 October 2025. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/day_1_wg_financing_and_governance_mourouzides.pdf

[29] European Commission, Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (2026), *Skills Management Platform 'STARS' for Adult Lifelong Learning in Latvia* 2026, https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/impact-shapers/good-practices/skills-management-platform-stars-adult-lifelong-learning-latvia

Challenge	Evidence
Making time to learn	Latvian STARS learners study mostly in the evenings and at weekends, as the scheme funds training but not time off work[30]. The OECD found that limited time shapes what adults learn since employed adults mostly take short, compliance-driven courses, while longer reskilling is taken up mainly by unemployed adults.[31].
Protecting quality	France cut the providers on its ILA platform from over 20,000 in 2019 to around 13,500 after tightening registration, quality requirements, and controls[32].
Keeping pace with AI	Providers need fast course renewal, staff trained in AI competences and reskilling routes that attract more women into ICT[33].

04. Webinar 'Empowering Learners for Workforce Transitions'

DATE	TIME	FORMAT	REGISTER
2 December 2026	10:30 CET	Online: three presentations, Q&A and a debate	Register on Microsoft Teams

The webinar examines how education providers can help learners enter employment and adapt to changing workforce demands. The discussion will consider:

1. How can providers implement lifelong guidance into their offer, so graduates choose, complete and use upskilling and reskilling?
2. How can education providers, employers and PES co-design reskilling routes, backed by skills intelligence, that lead to quality jobs?
3. What would help HEIs expand flexible provision and sustain it after project funding ends?

This is the third webinar of 'Thematic Strand 4: Lifelong learning for an innovative workforce'. This strand also included the webinars Creating Flexible Pathways for Innovation (15 September 2026) and Partnerships for Skills – Building Bridges Across Sectors (14 October 2026).

[30] Cedefop, *Latvia: adult skill development in focus*, 2025, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/latvia-adult-skill-development-focus

[31] OECD, *Trends in Adult Learning: New Data from the 2023 Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/trends-in-adult-learning_ec0624a6-en.html

[32] Fouché, A. and Leoni, F., *The French Individual Learning Account*, Cedefop conference 'Financing adult learning', Thessaloniki, 20 October 2025, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/day_1_wg_quality_and_relevance_leoni_.pdf

[33] Council Recommendation of 23 November 2023 on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training (C/2024/1030), points 11(f) and 11(g), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1030/oj