TRACK-VET

DEVELOPING, ASSESSING AND VALIDATING TRANSVERSAL KEY COMPETENCES IN THE FORMAL INITIAL AND CONTINUING VET

TRACK-VET PROJECT:

METHODOLOGICAL COMPONENT

Descriptive categories for Transversal Key Competences

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TRACK-VET project

Technological changes and processes related to globalization affect societies and economies in ways never seen before. We face changes related to ageing and shrinking populations and increasing social and cultural diversity fuelled by political instability (OECD, 2019; Scipioni, 2018) as well as worrying tendencies in western democracies, slow demise of common social reality (information bubbles), misuse of social media and uncontrolled spreading fake news in society (see for example: Howard & Kollanyi, 2016; Lazer et al., 2018; Stevenson, 2018; Sunstein, 2018).

These megatrends, along with changes in consumer values and preferences, quantitatively and qualitatively affect changes in available work, including how we work and by whom the work is performed (OECD, 2017b). At the end of the 20th century, these changes were referred to as the transition to the era of the knowledge-based economy (Godin, 2006), implying a departure from Fordism (Gardawski, 2009, p. 2; Jessop, 2005), and in the last decade as the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016) or the second technological era (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2012).

The TRACK-VET project (2017-2020) focuses on development, assessment and validation of transversal key competences in the formal initial and continuing vocational education and training. The project emphasizes the subgroup of four of the eight key competences defined in the Reference Framework of 2006 and the superseding 2018.

The TRACK-VET project has produced detailed analyses of the systemic solutions, practices, and techniques in six countries (Austria, France, Slovakia, Norway, Latvia and Poland) – countries characterised by systems in which IVET and CVET qualifications are being awarded based on external state examinations. Based on analyses of a total number of over 150 interviews undertaken by country experts, the Synthesis report suggests model solutions including recommendations for:

1) Agencies responsible for developing and assessing TKC in the formal VET. These recommendations provide guidelines and practical information on how to design the process of implementation of TKC, how to structure VET qualifications and shape the process of assessment and validation.

2) National authorities and agencies: how national authorities may enhance the process of developing TKC in VET (ministerial decrees, legislation, guidelines, regulations), and which instruments they might use (qualification frameworks level descriptors, standards for quality assurance).

3) EU policymakers: how EU policymakers might support the process of introducing TKC in the formal IVET/CVET, which policy instruments might be used and how.

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Introducing the Transversal Key Competences

EU strategic documents related to Vocational Education and Training (VET) (Europe 2020, ET 2020, New Skills Agenda for Europe) indicate the importance of developing transversal key (TKC) competences within VET.

TRACK-VET project adopts the term Transversal Key Competences (TKC's) from the Council Recommendation from 2006[1], namely: learning to learn, social and civic competences, initiative-taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression. In that sense it is a subgroup of the 8 key competences.

On 22 May 2018 European Commission issued the *Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* in which the modifications to the key competences reference framework were introduced. The change was adopted in the project activities.

Table 1. The Reference Framework for eight key competences, with indication of transversal key comptences.

Council Recommendation on Key Competences for lifelong learning (2006)	*Council Recommendation (2018) on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*
Communication in the mother tongue;	Literacy competence
Communication in foreign languages	Languages competences
Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology	Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering
Digital competence	Digital competence
Learning to learn	**Personal, Social and learning competence**
Social and civic competences	**Civic competence**
Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship	**Entrepreneurship competence**
Cultural awareness and expression	**Cultural awareness and expression competence**

* Transversal key competences are indicated in **bold**

In Riga Conclusions (2015) Ministers in charge of VET stated that one of the key actions to be taken by the EU member states is to "further strengthen key competences in VET curricula and provide more effective opportunities to acquire or develop those skills through IVET and CVET (…) Concrete actions could, for example, include assessing the place of key competences in VET curricula (…)."

The importance of key competences is also strongly indicated in the recently adopted New Skills Agenda for Europe (2016). New Skills Agenda also mentions that further works on developing and assessing key competences and incorporating them in the curricula should be supported by the Erasmus+ projects.

[1] RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)

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At the same time EU policy documents and reports point out that it remains a challenge to modernize assessment (...) and that efforts should continue to develop tools for individual assessment of skills, particularly in the areas of problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and entrepreneurial initiative.

Assessing key competences might be especially a challenge within the countries in which VET qualifications are awarded to learners based on the external, state exams. In relation to external summative assessment, Eurydice (2009) found that, of the eight key competences: '…only three, namely communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, and mathematical competences and basic competences in science and technology, can be directly linked to individual subjects… these three competences are the ones most commonly assessed in national tests. By contrast, in many European countries the remaining key competences such as 'learning to learn' or social and civic competences, which usually relate to more than one subject, are not at present generally assessed in national tests'.

For the above reasons we decided to focus the analysis of TRACK-VET project on:

- transversal key competences, i.e.: learning to learn, social and civic competences, initiative-taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression. Because these competences are the most difficult to develop and assess.
- countries that have state external system of examination. We aim to analyze solutions and develop recommendations for countries in which VET qualifications are being awarded based on the external state examinations.
- the formal VET sector only (mainly initial VET). We do not aim to analyze solutions adopted in the non-formal adult education, although these systems might benefit from the outcomes of TRACK-VET analysis.

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Descriptive categories for transversal key competences

The *transversal key competences* (TKC's) are wide and fuzzy concepts. To analyze their use, discuss and compare them, we analyzed the groups of meanings that these carry and developed a common framework of understanding – we called these the descriptive categories of TKC's.

This tool has proven useful in the project practice and communication with stakeholders of the projects. Hopefully it may also be useful for other purposes of research, policy and practice related to transversal key competences.

Based on discussion and desk research the project team developed a set of descriptive categories to provide common understanding. Table 2 summarizes the list of descriptive categories concerning transversal key competences from the 2018 Council Recommendation. Table 3 provides explanatory content, showing meanings associated with each descriptive category.

The key sources used to develop the descriptive categories for TKC's were:

- RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC);
- KEY COMPETENCES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING, European Reference Framework – annex of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning;
- Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong learning on 17 January 2018;
- COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Accompanying the document Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Key Competences for LifeLong Learning Brussels, 17.1.2018.
- Sylvest J., Kwaw E. (2017), Support of the stakeholder consultation in the context of the Key Competences Review, Report 1: Comparative Analysis;
- Facione, Peter A. 2006. "Critical Thinking: What it is and why it counts" Insight Publishing. and "Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction: Executive Summary" from the American Philosophical Association's Delphi Process;
- COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies, Council of Europe, March 2016;
- EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, European Union 2016
- Reeff, J. P. (ed.) (1999): New Assessment Tools for Cross-Curricular Competencies in the Domain of Problem Solving.

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Table 2. List of descriptive categories for transversal key competences.

DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES	TRANSVERSAL KEY COMPETENCE
Methods and strategies of learning	PERSONAL, SOCIAL COMPETENCES AND LEARNING COMPETENCE
Motivation and autonomy of learning	
Maintaining well-being	
Social and interpersonal relations	
Understanding of society	CIVIC COMPETENCES
Participation in public affairs	
Values and identity	
Taking action and making decisions	ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETENCE
Realization of initiatives	
Understanding and appreciation of culture	CULTURAL AWARENESS AND EXPRESSION COMPETENCE
Cultural expression	
Critical thinking	DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES RELATED TO MORE THAN ONE TRANSVERSAL KEY COMPETENCE
Problem-solving	
Media literacy	
Creativity and innovation	

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Table 3. Descriptive categories for transversal key competences - commentary and examples.

DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES	COMMENTARY and EXAMPLES
Methods and strategies of learning	The category 'Methods and strategies of learning' is linked with domains of knowledge and skills, it refers to specific 'tools' (i.e. strategies and methods) for enhancing one's learning. It could be observed as for example: - the ability to set learning objectives and plan learning, - the ability organize and manage learning activities, - the ability choose learning paths, sources, guidance.
Motivation and autonomy of learning	Motivation and autonomy of learning is closely linked to the domain of attitudes and values. It could be observed as for example: - pursuing and persisting in learning (autonomy and self-discipline); - presenting a positive attitude towards learning and willingness to learn; - awareness (identification) of one's learning process and needs; - reflecting on one's learning activities and outcomes, self-assessment;
Maintaining well-being	Maintaining well-being can be observed as for example: - understanding of the components of a healthy mind, body and lifestyle, with awareness of the environment and oneself; - coping with stress and uncertainty; - distinguishing between personal and professional spheres; - presenting assertiveness and integrity (with respect to others).
Social and interpersonal relations	Social and interpersonal relations could be observed as for example: - Understanding codes of conduct and manners accepted in different societies and environments; - awareness of basic concepts relating to individuals, groups, work organization, gender equality and non-discrimination, society and culture, national and European identities; - communicating in different environments, express and understand different viewpoints; - valuing diversity and showing tolerance; - respecting others and being prepared both to overcome prejudices and to compromise;
Understanding of society	Understanding society is linked to knowledge domain. It could be observed as for example: - understanding of basic concepts relating to individuals, groups, work organisations, society, economy and culture, including European common values; - knowledge of contemporary events and understanding of the main developments in national, European and world history (including European integration, awareness of diversity and cultural identities in Europe and the world); - awareness of the aims, values and policies of social and political movements, as well as of sustainable systems, in particular climate and demographic change at the global level and their underlying causes.
Participation in public affairs	Participation in public affairs is linked to skills domain. It could be observed as for example: - the ability to engage effectively with others in the public domain - to display solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community. - critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in community or neighbourhood activities, as well as decision-making at all levels, from local to national and European level, in particular through voting - critical understanding of and ability to interact with both traditional and new forms of media.
Values and identity	Values and identity for civic competences is closely linked to the domain of attitudes and values. It could be observed as for example: - respect for human rights and democracy;

DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES	COMMENTARY and EXAMPLES
	- responsible and constructive attitude to society and civic participation. - willingness to participate in civic activities and democratic decision-making at all levels, as well as supporting social and cultural diversity, gender equality and social cohesion, - readiness to respect the privacy of others - responsibility for the environment.
Taking action and making decisions	Taking action and making decisions could be observed as for example: - understanding the contexts and identifying opportunities for turning ideas into actions, including ethical aspect; - the ability to act upon opportunities and ideas and to transform them into values for others; - mobilising resources and preparing budgets; - the ability to take risks; - the ability to make financial decisions relating to cost and value.
Realization of initiatives	Realization of initiatives could be observed as for example: - understanding and using different approaches to planning and management of projects; - working individually and collaboratively; - mobilizing resources (people and things); - the ability to plan, organise, manage, lead and delegate, analyse, communicate, de-brief, evaluate and record; - sustain own involvement and activities of others; - presenting the attitude of innovativeness, pro-activity, courage, agency and forward-looking.
Understanding and appreciation of culture	Understanding and appreciation of culture is linked to knowledge domain. It could be observed as for example: - understanding of local, national, European and global cultures and expressions, including their languages, heritage and traditions, and cultural products, and an understanding of how these expressions can influence each other as well as the ideas of the individual. - understanding the different ways of communicating ideas between creator, participant and audience within written, printed and digital texts, theatre, film, dance, games, art and design, music, rituals, and architecture, as well as hybrid forms. - understanding of one's own developing identity within a world of cultural diversity and how arts and other cultural forms can be a way to both view and shape the world.
Cultural expression	Cultural expression is closely linked to the domains of skills, attitudes and values. It could be observed as for example: - the ability to express and interpret figurative and abstract ideas, experiences and emotions with empathy, and the ability to do so in a range of arts and other cultural forms. - the ability to identify and realise opportunities for personal, social or commercial value through the arts and other cultural forms and the ability to engage in creative processes, both as an individual and collectively. - creativity, and the willingness to cultivate aesthetic capacity through artistic self-expression and participation in cultural life; - open attitude towards, and respect for, diversity of cultural expression together with an ethical and responsible approach to intellectual and cultural ownership.
Critical thinking	Critical thinking can be observed as for example: - the ability to analyse, evaluate and make judgments about materials of any kind (e.g. texts, arguments, interpretations, issues, events, experiences, etc.) in a systematic and logical manner; - the ability to identify good and bad reasoning in a variety of fields with differing assumptions, contents and methods; - the ability to identify the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions or other forms of representation;

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DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES	COMMENTARY and EXAMPLES
	- the
Problem solving	Problem solving is (goal directed) thinking and action in situations for which no routine solution procedure is available. The incongruence of goals and admissible operators constitutes a problem. The understanding of the problem situation and its step-by-step transformation, based on planning and reasoning, constitute the process of problem solving. Problem solving can be observed as for example: - identification of the problem; - identification and evaluation of possible causes for a problem; - formulating meaningful and relevant questions to understand problems and potential causes; - breaking down complex problems into smaller parts; - evaluating potential solutions, which can include analysis of costs, benefits, risks, and chances for success; - using logical, systematic approaches to analyse and solve problems.
Media literacy	Media literacy can be observed as for example: - exchange of news and current affairs and evaluating the quality (accuracy, relevance, currency, reliability, and completeness) of information, - distinguishing facts from opinion, - assessing the timing of media content (new/obsolete). - understanding of underlining ideologies and values, and of how social, economic, political, professional, and technological forces can shape media content - both what is produced and how it reaches us; - media production – the creating of written, drawn, audio- or video-recorded and other content; - sharing and/or creating media content an ethical and responsible manner and with respect for the intellectual property of others.
Creativity and innovation	Creativity and innovation can be observed as for example: - creating something new, and reflecting upon and modifying what is being created; - striving towards a goal in a new way; - reflecting upon the impact that the new artefact or approach;

Source: (Dębowski et al., 2018, pp. 47–52)

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